



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**  
Social Care **Wales**

# The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders

A report for Social Care Wales written by CASCADE, Cardiff University



Noddir gan  
**Lywodraeth Cymru**  
Sponsored by  
**Welsh Government**

A report for Social Care Wales by

Annie Williams, Hannah Bayfield, Martin Elliott, Jennifer Lyttleton-Smith, Rhiannon Evans, Honor Young, Sara Long



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## Contact

Social Care Wales  
South Gate House  
Wood Street  
Cardiff CF10 1EW  
Tel: 0300 30 33 444  
Minicom: 029 2078 0680  
Email: [info@socialcare.wales](mailto:info@socialcare.wales)  
[socialcare.wales](http://socialcare.wales)

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## Foreword

*The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders* is a ground-breaking piece of research. We think it's the first of its kind in the UK to directly ask children and young people about their experiences. The report gives a strong voice to the children and young people who were interviewed, and they had some clear messages for us to take on board.

The need to commission this research to gather independent evidence became clear after many organisations raised concerns with us about the outcomes for these children and the challenges in providing them with the right care at the right time. They have experienced extreme trauma and abuse, and are extremely vulnerable, leading to them being looked after in secure accommodation for their own safety and well-being.

We asked CASCADE to look at the experiences of all the children and young people in Wales who were the subject of a Secure Accommodation Order between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. This report is an extensive and thorough account of their experiences and includes children and young people's accounts of how being cared for in secure accommodation has impacted on their lives.

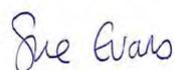
While a third of the young people that we have information about are achieving positive outcomes, the rest are not doing so well, and this report does not make for good reading, particularly the experiences of these young people in their own words. Sadly, the findings show things were worse than we anticipated, as we are talking about some of the most distressed young people in Wales, who account for one per cent of all those in care.

We worked with a range of health and social care partners to share their expertise and knowledge, resulting in a truly collaborative research project. The findings are not down to one agency getting it wrong, rather they highlight the need to make changes to the whole system and the approach we take to supporting children and young people with very complex needs.

We are grateful to the researchers and all our partners for their help in compiling this report, but most especially, to the children and young people,

the social workers and the foster carers who spoke to the researchers, without whom this important and essential report would not have been possible.

It's vital we do not ignore these findings, but that we all commit to making changes that will lead to better outcomes and safer, happier children and young people.



**Sue Evans**  
Chief Executive  
Social Care Wales

## Acknowledgements

We would like to offer a huge thank you to all the young people, family members, social workers and other professionals who took part in the study, answered our questions and queries, and generously shared experiences connected to secure accommodation with us. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the young people who gave their time to this report. We recognise that recalling lived experiences of time in a secure accommodation can be extremely emotional, and we are grateful for their honesty and bravery in sharing their stories.

Thanks are also due to the staff in Welsh local authorities who helped us access case files and put us in touch with the young people and social workers who had the experience and knowledge we sought.

We are also grateful to the steering group who gave up their time to attend meetings focused on the research design, analysis and dissemination.

## Executive summary

### Young people from Wales and secure accommodation

Secure accommodation refers to residential homes with approval to restrict the liberty of young people aged 10-17 years of age who are believed to be a serious risk to themselves or to others. Young people enter secure accommodation through two routes: via the criminal justice system or because they are subject to a court order for welfare reasons.

When considering the young people from Wales placed in secure accommodation for welfare reasons, records show no decrease in secure referrals over the last decade, with recent years seeing an increase. The concern this has generated has been heightened by the scarcity of secure placements in Wales, which sees many young people placed outside Wales or having no bed in secure care due to a lack of availability.

Welsh politicians, policy makers and practitioners are keen to understand what has contributed to this situation and what can be done to improve matters. As part of this, they want to understand the experiences of young people before secure accommodation, how well their needs and behaviours are recognised and met by the nature and therapeutic models of secure accommodation, how the decisions and plans are made for young people following their time in secure accommodation, how these are implemented, and the effect they have after young people leave.

### Overview of the project

Social Care Wales commissioned this project, which investigated the experiences of the cohort of young people from Wales receiving secure orders between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. To achieve this, young people's experiences before, during and after secure or alternative accommodation were explored by viewing administrative data and case files, and holding interviews with young people, social workers, other professionals who had been involved with the young people and some family members.

## Key findings

### Use of secure accommodation by young people from Wales

Over two years, all but one Welsh local authority applied for at least one Secure Accommodation Order. Although 56 Secure Accommodation Orders were granted, 13 instances of re-referral meant the orders involved 43 young people.

The lack of secure beds in Wales saw more than half the young people from Wales placed in secure accommodation in England or Scotland, and less than a quarter in units, which solely catered for young people placed on welfare grounds.

In contrast to findings elsewhere, girls and boys from Wales were equally likely to receive a Secure Accommodation Order on welfare grounds.

### Experiences before referral to a secure accommodation

Most of the young people had lived in chaotic family environments and been affected by abuse and/or neglect at some time during their childhood. Although many of the families were known to social services, few had received sustained and targeted interventions. All the young people were taken into care, but most at a comparatively late age.

When in care, the frequent moves, escalating problem behaviours (typically going missing, using substances, being groomed, experiencing child sexual exploitation, self-harm and suicide attempts) and rapid progression to secure accommodation suggested the foster and residential placements were unable to fully meet or address their needs.

Despite high levels of mental health problems, self-harm and suicide attempts, few young people qualified for or received mental health services or interventions before referral to secure accommodation.

## **Experiences of going into secure accommodation**

Not all young people knew of the process of applying and gaining a Secure Accommodation Order or had their views and opinions considered. Although the situation of some young people meant informing them of the order application would have increased risk, one was prevented from attending court despite wishing to do so.

The lack of secure accommodation beds caused uncertainty and anxiety for young people. It also increased the workload of social services who sometimes resorted to creating alternative secure accommodation in unregistered settings as no place in a secure accommodation, willing or able to take them, could be found.

The traumatic journeys to secure accommodation experienced by some young people showed that current policy and methods do not ensure safe acceptable journeys for young people.

## **Life in secure accommodation**

For most young people the experience of transition and reception into the unit was traumatic and difficult. In the longer term, the austere environment of some secure accommodation was seen as inappropriate, as was sharing accommodation with residents who entered through the criminal justice route.

Once settled, most young people found secure accommodation gave a consistent, regulated environment in which they felt safe and could engage in services they had previously been absent from, especially education.

Although some young people received helpful therapy when in secure accommodation, the overall focus was mainly on containment rather than providing the necessary specialised support. Identified barriers included the length of stays in the secure accommodation, which were often insufficient to allow effective therapeutic intervention or to lay the foundation for positive onwards trajectories. A need for wider therapeutic treatment options with a stronger focus on interventions capable of addressing behavioural and emotional problems, as well as mental illness, was also evident.

Being placed in secure accommodation far from home caused distress for some young people and impacted heavily on the resources of local authorities.

## **Leaving secure accommodation**

The importance of a carefully planned transition out of secure accommodation is recognised, but achieving one proved difficult. The task of finding suitable placements able to meet the ongoing needs of young people and keep them safe was complicated. First, by the fact that secure orders can be lengthened at short notice, and second, by the young people's histories, which made some potential residences unwilling to take them. The uncertainty this engendered caused anxiety among the young people, while the time taken to find placements again took up staff time. The need to take the wishes of young people into account when finding a placement had to be balanced against their best interests.

On leaving secure accommodation, just over a third of the young people had good first placements, whereas the rest had poor or mixed experiences. Good experiences were linked to meeting the specific needs of the young person concerned and careful transitions, including pre-placement meetings and visits. Poor experiences were linked to placements not meeting the needs of young people or being disliked by those placed there.

## **Longer-term experiences and outcomes**

Most young people continued to follow the positive, negative or mixed journeys begun when they left secure accommodation. These trajectories saw the majority of post-secure placements breaking down as they were unable to adequately meet the needs of the young people. During the time between leaving secure accommodation and the study (between a few months and two years), more than a quarter of young people received additional Secure Accommodation Orders, with others entering the criminal justice system or a secure psychiatric placement. Where positive outcomes were achieved, these appeared to be dependent on the quality of the placements, especially having consistent relationships with key adult(s) and for some receiving sufficient mental health support.

## Recommendations for policy makers and practice:

### Placements

- The difficulty finding placements that are able to meet and address the needs of the young people before, during and after secure accommodation calls for the development and provision of a national commissioning strategy that ensures local authorities can provide care that's able to meet the high, often escalating needs of these young people. Any such strategy must be underpinned by necessary regional development that allows its facilitation.
- To support the provision of sufficient care placements, a model of therapy most likely to meet the needs of these young people should be identified and employed across foster or residential care.
- Study findings demand further training for foster and residential carers. Specifically, the development of training that ensures a consistency in the care provided and allows such care to be adapted to meet the specific needs of each young person. They also call for the provision of accessible support for carers during placements.

### Mental health services

- The finding that many young people did not receive sufficient and/or appropriate mental health support before, during or after secure accommodation calls for the provision of an additional level of service that can overcome the barriers created by mental health service criteria and ensures young people have access to support and treatment for behavioural and emotional problems, as well as specific mental illnesses.
- Social workers' knowledge of the young person's history and needs suggests provision of a multi-agency, co-commissioning approach to mental health service provision. Such an approach would facilitate a more informed referral process and aid the development or promotion of service models that are better able to meet the trauma-based therapy needs of the young people.

### Secure accommodation

- We recommend a national drive to bring together best practice in applying for Secure Accommodation Orders to help young people and social workers be best supported during this process. In this, it is important to ensure that where possible and safe, young people are aware of applications, given opportunity to attend proceedings, and have their opinion sought and considered with the help of advocacy if desired or needed.
- It is recommended that the system is revised to ensure that the positive effects of education, health services and therapy accessed in secure accommodation are sustained by the provision of comparable support and therapy on leaving. To facilitate a seamless transition into the best possible care on leaving secure accommodation, this recommendation demands the development of a national integrated, multi-agency, co-commissioning approach to plan the transition out of secure care.
- We call for some revision of policy around journeys to secure accommodation to develop one that ensures the journeys include a trusted independent professional known to the young person.
- The austere environment of many secure accommodation is disliked and viewed as inappropriate by many young people. In light of additional findings that some secure accommodation offers more home-like environments, we call for collaborative work with young people to improve the look and feel of the secure accommodation they are placed in as far as possible.
- Being placed far from home has a negative impact on young people, their families and local authorities as it makes regular contact difficult and expensive. In knowledge of this, every effort should be made to place young people as close to home as possible.

# The experiences and outcomes of children and young people from Wales receiving Secure Accommodation Orders

## Section 1: Introduction

**1.1** Secure accommodation (SAs, also referred to as Secure Children's Homes or SCHs) refers to residential homes with approval to restrict the liberty of young people aged 10-17 years of age believed to be a serious risk to themselves or to others<sup>1,2</sup>. Young people from England and Wales enter secure accommodation via the justice system or on welfare grounds<sup>1,3</sup>.

**1.2** Although the numbers of English and Welsh young people in secure accommodation across the UK has decreased and stabilised since 2010<sup>1</sup>, the proportion of young people from Wales placed for welfare reasons has recently grown. This, together with a collective lack of knowledge about the background and experiences of young people referred for welfare reasons, has raised questions about whether the current system best meets the needs of the young people from Wales referred to and using secure accommodation.

**1.3** This report presents the results of a research project commissioned by Social Care Wales, which sought to answer these questions by exploring the life trajectories, experiences and outcomes of young people from Wales referred to secure accommodation in the two years between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. The report begins with a summary of knowledge about the experiences of young people using secure accommodation in the UK, continues to a description of project aims, methods and findings, and ends with a series of recommendations applicable to Welsh practice and policy concerned with secure accommodation.

## Section 2: Key messages from research about the contexts and experiences of young people referred to secure accommodation

**2.1** Young people aged 10-17 from England and Wales can be placed in a number of secure accommodation settings across the UK: one in Wales, 14 in England<sup>1,2</sup> and five in Scotland<sup>3</sup>. While young people can enter secure accommodation via the youth justice system or because of a court order for welfare reasons, this report is solely concerned with young people who are referred to secure accommodation for welfare reasons<sup>4</sup>.

**2.2** Applying for a welfare secure placement and the consequent deprivation of a young person's liberty has been described as 'draconian'<sup>5</sup>. In recognition of this, UK policy and legislation ensure that referrals to secure accommodation for welfare reasons are subject to a set of strict criteria, namely that:

- a young person has absconded previously and is likely to abscond from other accommodation
- and/or if the young person absconds, it is probable they will suffer significant harm
- and/or if the young person is kept in another accommodation, they are likely to injure themselves.

Primary legislation regarding secure accommodation can be found in Section 119 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and Section 25(1) of the Children Act 1989 in England. This legislation seeks to ensure that Secure Accommodation Orders for welfare placements are only given to extremely vulnerable young people living with high levels of risk.

1. Warner et al (2018)

2. Scottish Government (2017)

3. The Children Act 1989

4. While it is recognised that the histories of the young people placed in secure accommodation for welfare and youth justice reasons contain many commonalities, all references to Secure Accommodation Orders and time spent in secure accommodation in this report refer to those placed on welfare grounds.

5. As described by Hart and La Valle (2016)

**2.3** While the number of English and Welsh young people in secure accommodation has decreased over the last decade<sup>1</sup>, the percentage of welfare secure placements has risen from 37 per cent of the total in 2010 to 47 per cent in 2018<sup>1</sup> indicating little change in the absolute number of welfare placements across both countries. When considering the numbers of young people from England and Wales separately, records suggest that Welsh Secure Accommodation Orders have risen in recent years, with a slight increase in welfare referrals between 2014 and 2016 (AWHOCS, 2017) and a rise from 22 referrals in the year ending in March 2017 to 34 the subsequent year.

**2.4** Literature concerned with local authority use of secure accommodation recognises the lack of knowledge about the profile, experiences or outcomes of children and young people from UK who use secure accommodation for welfare reasons. The remainder of this section draws on that available.

**2.5** The early lives of many young people referred to secure accommodation are characterised by neglect, abuse, family dysfunction, insecure attachments, bereavement and relationship difficulties<sup>6</sup>. Some also have special educational needs, disabilities, or emotional and behavioural problems<sup>6</sup>.

**2.6** Most of the families of these young people have been known to or involved with social services for a long time, and although the young people are already in care when secure accommodation is considered, many had remained with families for many years and entered care at a relatively late stage<sup>5</sup>.

**2.7** When in local authority care, the young people tended to experience multiple difficulties, such as emotional problems, peer problems, conduct problems and hyperactivity<sup>7</sup>, and complications that disrupt placements, generate multiple moves and most commonly lead to the young people living in residential homes at the point of secure care referral.

**2.8** The time immediately preceding secure care is often characterised by a rise in high-risk or anti-social behaviours, including self-harm, violence to others and sexual exploitation, with little opportunity or attempt to address the underlying causes of such behaviours evidenced<sup>6</sup>.

**2.9** Once in secure accommodation, the average length of stay for young people placed for welfare reasons is between four and five months. During this time, the young people access a number of additional services, with education and mental health support particularly important. In relation to the psychological therapy provided, some secure accommodation has no underlying theoretical approach or model, while others offer approaches based on social theories. Details of the approaches offered are unclear, although the use of philosophical and innovative approaches takes place in some Scottish secure accommodation<sup>8</sup>.

**2.10** Relationships between staff and young people are an important aspect of the support offered to young people when in secure accommodation. The matching of young people and staff, the consistency in their relationship, and the quality of the time spent together are crucial for a positive effect<sup>9</sup>.

**2.11** Although there is limited evidence of the effects of secure accommodation on young people's outcomes, it appears some do well, while others do not. In the short term, secure accommodation keeps young people safe, engages them, provides them with stability, and identifies some causes of high-risk behaviour. Longer-term outcomes are more mixed with progress not always sustained and an initial short settled period, followed by some deterioration, a common but not universal outcome. Hart & La Valle (2016) have identified factors linked to better outcomes:

- the location, duration and quality of the secure placement
- how well the secure placement matched the needs of young people
- the planning made for post-secure accommodation, both before and after the order is lifted
- social work input and how well the arrangements made meet the young people's needs.

6. See, for example, descriptions in Barron and Mitchell (2017); Rose (2002)

7. As discussed in Hiller and St Claire (2018)

8. Examples of such approaches are discussed by Heron and Cassidy (2018) and Barron and Tracey (2017)

9. As explored by McKellar & Kendrick (2013); Roesch-Marsh (2018)

## Section 3: Methods and ethical considerations

**3.1** This section outlines the project’s aims and objectives. During the project, we sought to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of young people from Wales before, during and after a period in a secure or alternative accommodation. Specifically, we were interested in:

- the life histories and journeys of young people before Secure Accommodation Orders
- young people’s experiences before, during and after time in secure accommodation
- whether, and to what extent, young people’s needs and behaviours were supported and influenced by the nature and therapeutic model of the settings currently available
- when and how decisions and plans were made for a young person’s future following their time in secure accommodation
- the outcomes and stability of young people’s placements after secure accommodation
- the emotional and physical well-being of young people after leaving secure accommodation
- what happened when Secure Accommodation Orders were made, but young people received alternative accommodation because no bed in a secure placement was available.

**3.2** Ethical approval for the project was given by the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

**3.3** Between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018, 21 of the 22 Welsh local authorities successfully applied for Secure Accommodation Orders. All these were contacted by email and telephone. Nineteen were able to take part in the project, the other two were prevented by staff and resource issues.

**3.4** To gain information about young people from Wales referred for a Secure Accommodation Order, we looked at routinely collected local authority data, and interviewed young people, as well as a range of key stakeholders involved in their support and care.

To facilitate this, each participant local authority nominated a member of staff to work with the research team. First, the staff facilitated case file and administrative data access. As part of this, the staff asked the young people’s permission for their case files to be viewed by the research team. In all, we were able to look at 10 case files from eight local authorities.

Staff also contacted young people and key stakeholders to arrange project interviews. As seen in Table 3.1, interviews were conducted with 11 young people (not all those for whom case file access was gained) and a range of stakeholders, mostly social workers and social services team managers.

Participants	Interview numbers	Number of local authorities involved
Social workers	30	17
Young people	11	10
Team leaders/ service managers	5	5
Residential home staff	3	2
Mental health professionals	2	1
Carers (family and foster)	2	2
YOS workers	1	1
CSE advocates	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>

*Table 3.1: Interview sample*

We were aware that interviews with young people were likely to explore very sensitive issues and that this could be upsetting. We therefore first contacted carers and social workers to talk about whether the young people could or should be approached and, if so, how best to do so. Together we identified 23 young people as possible participants, and social workers then made attempts to contact them. For 12 of these young people, changes in circumstances (for example, health deterioration or placement

moves) made participation impossible. Eleven interviews with young people took place: nine face-to-face, one a telephone interview and another by proxy. Of the nine face-to-face interviews, seven had a social worker or other professional present due to concerns that the interview might upset the young person.

We also wanted to interview past and present social workers as they held important information about the young people’s chronologies, life histories and lived experiences. In total, we spoke to 30 social workers from 17 different local authorities who, between them, had worked with 32 of the young people the study was concerned with.

During meetings, social workers and young people identified further people who had been important to the young person before, during or after secure accommodation. Unfortunately, this involved fewer than expected family members and carers, as complex family histories and ongoing tensions tended to make contact with family members inappropriate.

### 3.5 Data analysis

Interviews and case files gave rich detail of the experiences of many of the young people the project was interested in.

Figure 3.1 represents these experiences before, during and after secure or alternative accommodation. The figure was used to analyse data and structure findings.

The following sections present the project’s key findings. While interest was in the shared experiences of the young people, it was soon apparent that each young person had lived through unique experiences. To recognise this and give a full picture of young people’s experiences, the sections include commonalities and significant outliers.

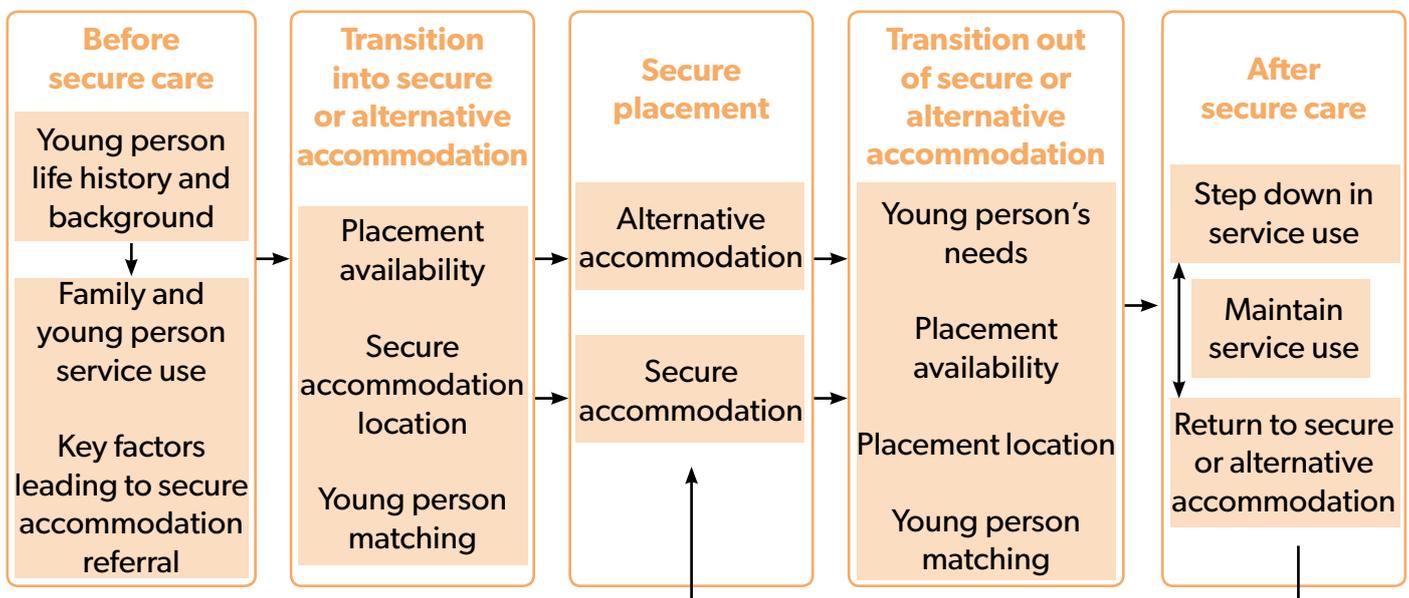


Figure 3.1: Young people’s experiences before, during and after time in secure accommodation

## Section 4: Young people's use of secure accommodation

This section gives an overview of the young people referred to secure accommodation between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018, and detail of the secure accommodation they went to.

### Key findings

- All but one Welsh local authority applied for a Secure Accommodation Order between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018
- Overall 56 Secure Accommodation Orders were granted but re-referrals meant these orders only involved 43 different young people
- More than half the Secure Accommodation Orders resulted in young people being placed in secure accommodation outside Wales
- Less than quarter of the young people were placed in secure accommodation that only cater for young people placed on welfare grounds
- Girls and boys were equally likely to receive a Secure Accommodation Order on welfare grounds

**4.1** Figure 4.1 shows that 21 of the 22 local authorities in Wales applied for at least one Secure Accommodation Order between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. It also shows that 15 authorities applied for multiple orders. We found no link between the size or population of local authorities and the number of orders made, or between the number of orders and the level of deprivation of the local authorities<sup>10</sup>.

**4.2** As seen in Figure 4.2, nine of the 22 Welsh local authorities only placed one young person in secure accommodation between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. Of the rest, five local authorities placed two young people in secure accommodation during this time, four placed three young people and three placed four young people.

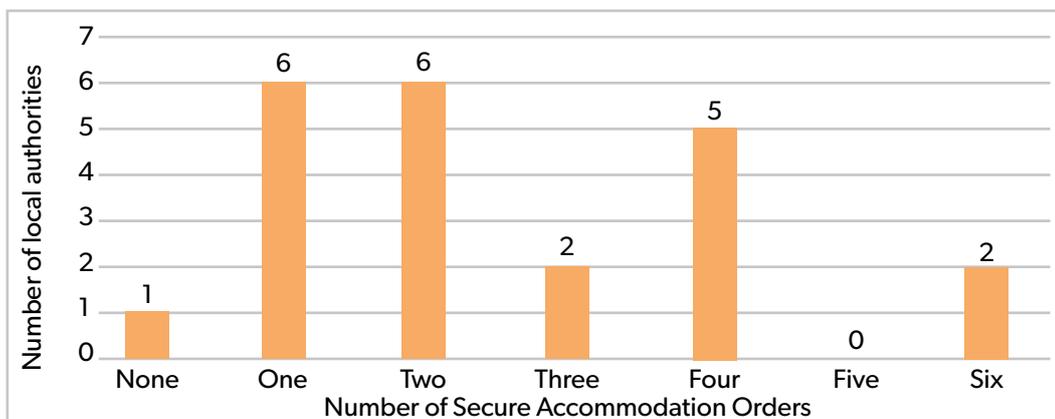


Figure 4.1: Number of Secure Accommodation Orders applied for per local authority

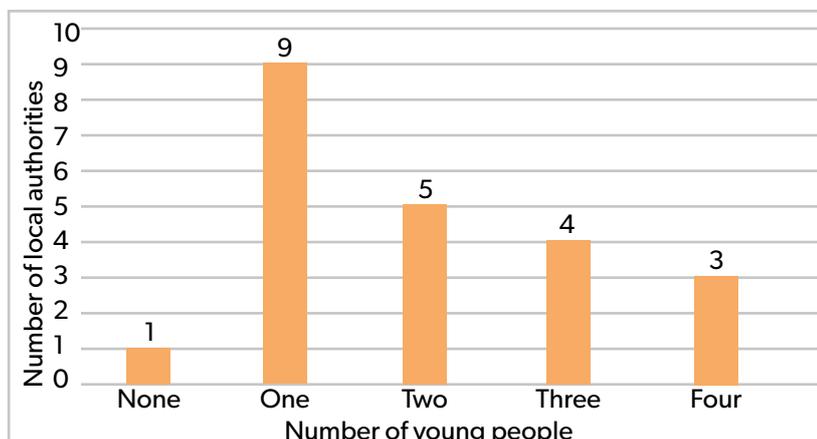


Figure 4.2: Number of young people Secure Accommodation Orders apply to, per local authority

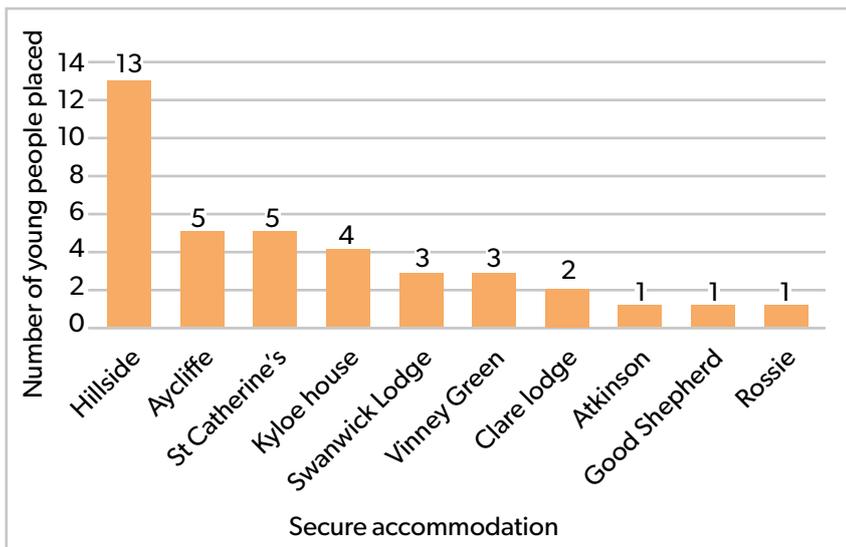
10. Information regarding local authority size and deprivation levels was sourced from publicly available Welsh Government data

**4.3** Although 56 Secure Accommodation Orders were granted across Wales between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018, instances of re-referral meant the orders only involved 43 different young people. During the study, we were able to collect further information about 40 (93 per cent) of these.

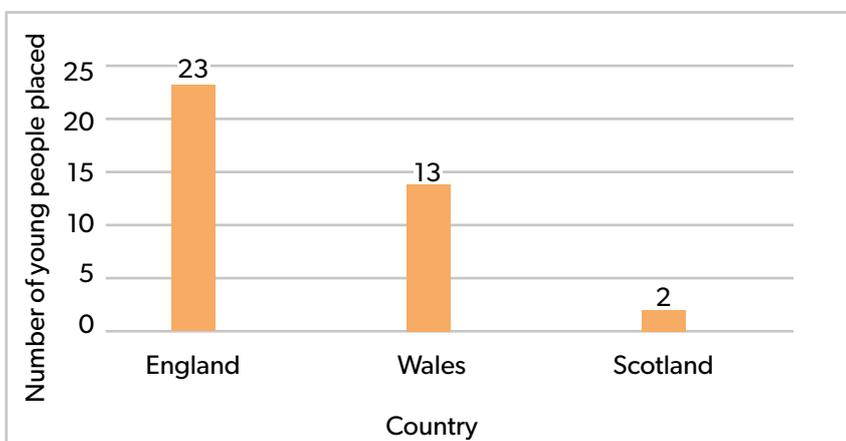
**4.4** Of the 40 young people:

- 38 were found a place in secure accommodation
- one had a place in secure accommodation on one occasion, but was provided with alternative accommodation the second time a Secure Accommodation Order was made
- one was provided with alternative accommodation both times they received a Secure Accommodation Order.

**4.5** Figures 4.3 and 4.4 give information about the secure accommodation, which accommodated the young people from Wales between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018 (information available for 31 young people and covering 38 placements). Thirteen placements were in Hillside (the only secure accommodation in Wales), 23 in England (Swanwick Lodge in Southampton, St Catherine’s in Merseyside, Aycliffe in Durham, Kyoeloe House in Northumberland, Vinney Green in Gloucestershire, Clare Lodge in Peterborough and Atkinson in Devon), and two in Scotland, Rossie and Good Shepherd.



*Figure 4.3: Secure accommodation used by young people from Wales between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018<sup>11</sup>*



*Figure 4.4: Number of young people in Wales placed in secure accommodation by country, 1 April 2016 to 31 March 2018*

11. It should be noted that the 38 young people represented in figures 4.3 and 4.4 are not 38 separate individuals as some young people attended multiple secure accommodation within the timeframe of the study. Additionally, information regarding some young people was not available.

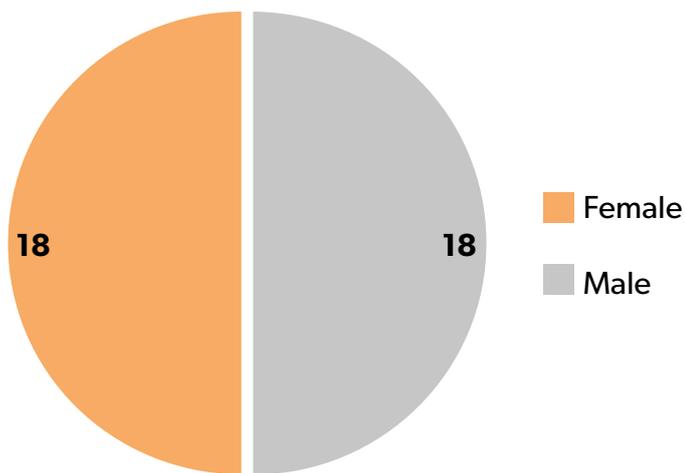
**4.6** More detail about the secure accommodation can be seen in Table 4.1. Of those used by young people from Wales, Atkinson, Clare Lodge and St Catherine's only cater for young people placed on welfare grounds. Swanwick Lodge primarily works with welfare placements, but accepts those referred on criminal grounds in specific circumstances. Vinney Green caters primarily for those placed on criminal grounds but can make exceptions for welfare cases. The remaining homes (Aycliffe, Hillside, Kyoel House, Good Shepherd and Rossie) cater for young people placed on welfare and criminal grounds.

**4.7** Aside from Clare Lodge (a female only unit), all homes accept referrals of young people of any gender. As indicated in Table 4.1, six of these 10 homes say they cater for certain specialisms, primarily behavioural and mental health. Few homes have a stated exclusion policy: Aycliffe excludes those with a high risk of violence; Clare Lodge specifies that they cannot accommodate those with severe physical disabilities; and St Catherine's limits the circumstances under which they will accommodate older boys.

Unit	Welfare	Criminal	Gender	Specialisms	Exclusions
<b>Atkinson</b>	Yes	No	All	Trauma	None stated
<b>Aycliffe</b>	Yes	Yes	All	CSE, sexually harmful behaviours, substance misuse, self-harm, mental health	High risk of violence
<b>Clare Lodge</b>	Yes	No	Female	CSE, attachment, substance misuse, self-harm, mental health, aggression, suicide risk	Severe physical disability
<b>Hillside</b>	Yes	Yes	All	None stated	None stated
<b>Kyoel House</b>	Yes	Yes	All	None stated	None stated
<b>Good Shepherd</b>	Yes	Yes	All	Learning disability	None stated
<b>St Catherine's</b>	Yes	No	All	CSE, self-harm, pregnancy, trauma, substance misuse	Older boys only taken in specific circumstances
<b>Swanwick Lodge</b>	Yes	Overnight transfer or spot purchase	All	None stated	None stated
<b>Vinney Green</b>	Only on case by case basis	Yes	All	Pregnancy, aggression, self-harm	None stated
<b>Rossie Secure</b>	Yes	Yes	All	None stated	None stated

*Table 4.1: Details of secure accommodation used by young people from Wales between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018*

**4.8** There was no suggestion of a young person's gender affecting the granting of Secure Accommodation Orders on welfare grounds in Wales. Of the young people we had this information for, 18 (50 per cent) were female and 18 (50 per cent) male (see Figure 4.4). This differs from other evidence, which indicates that more girls are referred to secure accommodation on welfare grounds, while boys are more likely to enter through the criminal justice route<sup>12</sup>.



*Figure 4.4: Gender of young people within the study*

**4.9** The age at which young people in the project were referred ranged from 11 to 17, although it was most common to enter secure accommodation between the ages of 14 and 15. There were two examples of young people receiving a Secure Accommodation Order before their 13th birthday, a situation that requires approval from Welsh Ministers<sup>13</sup> before a court hearing.

**4.10** Among the young people involved in the study (either directly or indirectly), there was little evidence of young people with different ethnicities: all but one of the young people interviewed was white British, with no mention of ethnicity in interviews with social workers. The same was true of sexual orientation: only two young people we had contact with explicitly expressed a non-heterosexual identity.

**4.11** In the sections that follow, all names have been changed to protect the identity of the young people concerned. On occasion, names are removed entirely to help prevent identification.

12. See Roesch-Marsh (2014b) for further discussion of gender and secure accommodation  
13. Regulation 13 of the Children (Secure Accommodation) (Wales) Regulations

## Section 5: Experiences before referral to secure accommodation

### Key findings

- Most young people had experience of living in chaotic families affected by abuse and/or neglect
- Although many such families had been known to social services at some point, few had received sustained targeted interventions
- All young people had been in care, many entering comparatively late with some progressing to secure accommodation within months of care entry
- The frequent care moves and rapid progression to secure accommodation suggests the foster and residential placements available for this vulnerable group of young people were not able to meet or address their needs
- Frequent care moves and difficulties finding new placements caused anxiety for young people and impacted heavily on social services resources
- Key risk factors preceding Secure Accommodation Orders include a mix of absconding, substance misuse, grooming, CSE and self-harm
- While mental health problems, self-harm and suicide attempts were common before referral to secure accommodation, few young people qualified for or received mental health services.

**5.1** This section is concerned with young people's experiences and life histories before the application for a Secure Accommodation Order. Primary interest was in the environments and circumstances affecting young people, and the support services and placements accessed at, and before, this stage.

**5.2** Most young people had lived in homes affected by some or all:

- domestic violence
- physical, emotional and/or sexual abuse

- neglect
- parental mental health problems
- substance use.

Many had experienced inconsistent education, with at least 12 young people experiencing school exclusions and a further six attending irregularly. A number of interlinked factors often existed:

'it was alleged that the mother was quite often drunk when in charge of the children etcetera. She was also said to be using illicit drugs and going out on binges for some days and nights at a time, leaving the children in the supervision of people who were deemed to be inappropriate. It was also said that the children were unkempt at times and they were missing school. And also that some youths were looking after them overnight etcetera and there was the smell of cannabis in the home environment'

#### *Molly's social worker*

**5.3** The families of more than half the young people had been known to social services for a long time, some from early in life:

'[...] when he was born he was treated for methadone withdrawal. So mum was obviously a drug user. So he remained with mum on the Child Protection register in that area.'

#### *George's social worker*

Despite this, most young people experienced little sustained service intervention during childhood, with only two removed from home at a very young age. In general, service interventions began when the young people were in or near teenage years. Of these, one young person became of concern to services when they re-contacted their birth family after years of living with an adopted family, another when they re-contacted their mother after 10 years' living with their father and step-family. There were also two young people who contacted social services themselves:

**'this young person, actually brought herself to the attention of children services because she had a little brother, and she phoned children's services to report that her little brother wasn't being looked after properly and she didn't want him to have the life that she'd had.'**

#### *Charlotte's social worker*

**5.4** Four young people, two of whom had suffered a significant bereavement, had different experiences. They had not experienced neglect or abuse, but their parents (usually the mother) had become unable to cope with escalating and difficult behaviours as the young people became older. One social worker linked the rise in problematic behaviours to a consistent lack of boundaries at home:

**'The early years parenting of [name] led to no boundaries being instilled. She was more of a friend [...] instead of being that parent. She had no control over him. He wouldn't listen to her. He'd be abusive to her and she just had to report him missing all the time, he wouldn't come home. So he was found sleeping in doorways by police officers'**

#### *Social worker*

**5.5** All the young people spent some time in care before the Secure Accommodation Order. The placements included respite, kinship, foster and residential care. Some were voluntary, but many were interim or full care orders. Some young people were frequently moved between home, other family and care, rather than given a consistent placement. Others were placed with wider family and retained regular contact with birth parents.

**5.6** Once in care, young people experienced between one and 20 placements (mean = 6; median = 4) before the Secure Accommodation Order application was made. While records show separate instances of 13, 18, and 20 moves, most young people went through fewer than 10 placements. The lower number of placements was attributed to rapid escalation of, or new patterns of, high-risk behaviours, which quickly led to secure order applications.

**5.7** When in care, consistent and increasing levels of problematic "out of control" behaviours occurred. These behaviours led to placement breakdown and increasing difficulties in finding placements willing or able to take the young people. Some young people and social workers described the behaviours as ways of managing or coping with the traumas experienced.

**5.8** The problem behaviours described consisted of substance misuse:

**'And then one morning staff woke up, went downstairs, and he was there off his face on spice. He managed to smuggle it. We think he was plugging it into his hole, because they check his pockets, obviously can't check anything else. He was climbing up the walls. Getting on the settee, climbing the walls. Then he sort of collapsed. Ambulance was called and when they went into the kitchen they could smell burning. He probably tried to put a cooker on to light a fag. Forgotten about it, and the tea towel had gone off on the top. So he could, the whole place could have gone up in flames.'**

#### *Harry's social worker*

High levels of violence and destruction of property:

'a lot of offences over a short space of time. You know, 50 plus offences really, all of a similar nature. [...] He must be approaching double figures really of different court orders and intervention, because he starts one [intervention], he reoffends, starts another, reoffends, starts another. He's a bit of a revolving circle, bless him. [...] The majority of it is assault and damage, [...] generally assaults on staff and damage to the care home or to the care home car or whatever it might be.'

*Alfie's youth offending service worker*

Grooming and/or being subjected to child sexual exploitation (CSE):

'there was a transit van that was picking her up outside the foster placement. An older man who she wouldn't tell us who he was. She was always very secretive, and telling us to mind our own business. [...] As soon as you tried to say: "Who are you with? What's going on?" [...] As soon as you brought that up she'd just, she'd clam up and the barrier would go up. And "Oh stop pecking me head" and she'd just walk, and it was really difficult.'

*Charlotte's social worker*

'She got in contact with her mam when she was about 15 years old, and her mam was still misusing substances, and we believe that she was procured out. Offered for sex. By her mother, to older males, to acquire alcohol and substances.'

*Ellie's social worker*

'And I just had this worry that she thought: 'Oh, they like me. I'm well in with this,' and getting the attention. And I just thought: these older men are probably passing her around and one of them's fed up with her and passing her on to the next, and she was just being exploited in that way. And then the drug dealing on top of that.'

*Charlotte's social worker*

Going missing or absconding was a behaviour affecting nearly all the young people. Some began to go missing when still at home:

'serial absconding was the initial issue, and mum's inability to be able to safeguard her from that. So the decision was made to bring her into the care system'

*Emily's social worker*

Others when in placement:

'there was an awful lot of missings. I think there were about 30 missings. A couple a day, when she would just disappear from the house out the window, or out the door, or she wouldn't come back from the gym, or she wouldn't come back from college. There was a couple a day.'

*Lucy's social worker*

The stories given by social workers and young people suggested that reasons for going missing while in care varied. Some felt they had been pushed into running away because they didn't like the placement or it wasn't meeting their needs:

'I was in a residential, and obviously I kept running off from there because I didn't like it. [...] It was in the middle of nowhere, there was nothing to do. So, obviously because I went missing from there so much then they kept me in the residential but with a police escort, two police escorts all around the clock for about two weeks'

*Mia*

'they weren't protecting them, they couldn't work with them, the staff I felt were winding her up..., it was on a main road, she'd been playing chicken on the road, playing on the railway tracks, assaulting staff and there was just no containing her.'

*Holly's social worker*

While others were pulled by outside factors, such as wanting to go home or reconnect with peers:

**'[he] had phoned me to say that he was staying with a friend. He'd been sleeping rough. [...] He'd been staying with this young girl and her mum. Her mum had phoned the police to say [he] was staying with them. [...] And then it must have been probably an hour or so later after that call when alarm bells rang and they had a riot van, riot police to put a child in. And they literally took [him] as he was, and that's when [he] went to [secure accommodation].'**

#### *Lewis's family member*

Or because they wanted to re-establish relationships made when being groomed, during CSE, using substances and, in a few cases, when drug dealing:

**'if they're out they're missing, they're risk taking behaviours, they're taking drugs, they're at risk of child sexual exploitation, ... foster placements have broken down because they can't manage their behaviours'**

#### *Children's services team leader*

It also became evident from the stories shared that going missing inevitably involved wider services, leading to multidisciplinary involvement from the likes of the police, youth justice and mental health, as well as social services<sup>14</sup>.

**5.9** As elsewhere<sup>14</sup>, the behaviours of the vast majority (26 of 30 for whom this level of detail was available) of the young people in the study suggested mental health problems existed before referral to secure accommodation. Of these, 14 young people had a history of self-harm and nine had attempted suicide, with increases in the frequency and/or severity of these behaviours evident shortly before applications for secure orders:

**'She was inserting objects into her, into every possible place she could. Umm, and you know that's phones, calculators, fitbits, she's still got a staple in her hand from where she inserted it, pens, anything, anything she could find. Self-harming... every part of her arm is scarred. Headbanging, there's scars all on her head. [...] She was running out in front of road. Umm, yeah. She's putting herself at risk. Try and take overdoses, and it wasn't a cry for help, she wanted to die. No question about it, she wanted to die'**

#### *Katie's social worker*

**'you were coming in daily and she's been admitted to A&E the night before and assessment with the mental health because she was saying that she was swallowing glass, batteries, anything basically, ceramic tile you know, broken into small pieces, and you know hiding things like that in her underwear, bras you know, wherever she thought she could.'**

#### *Grace's social worker*

**'the thing that got him to secure was whilst he was at that project living there, he attempted to hang himself so the concern was that [...] he's obviously not in a good place, he's attempted his own life so risk of harming himself and also [...] he was lashing out at people so also a risk to others as well'**

#### *Matthew's social worker*

14. For example, in Fargas-Malet and McSherry (2018) and McAuley and Young (2006)

Many of these young people encountered recognised barriers when trying to access mental health support<sup>15</sup>. One became too old for CAMHS while on the waiting list, one was refused treatment after missing one appointment:

**'My staff discharged me and I was fuming about it because I didn't want them to. I cancelled one meeting and they thought that I just didn't want to go. But I just couldn't go that day. So I'm a bit fuming about that.'**

*Mia*

While another failed to reach the top of a waiting list because placement moves involved the crossing of local health board boundaries, which saw her repeatedly placed at the bottom of the new waiting list:

**'I've got to be careful now not to digress and get on my soapbox about CAMHS, ok, because that's the biggest failure for me, always. Because you have to understand, when a young person moves, they're moving county, they're moving from one CAMHS area to another. So rather than CAMHS being across Wales, for example, when you're moving from Newport to Caerphilly, when you're moving from Wrexham to Pembroke, you've got to go through the referral process in each area.'**

*Emily's social worker*

Other young people were refused treatment because the CAMHS services only offered treatment to those who quickly engaged:

**'at the looked after child reviews I was advocating for maybe CAMHS to be involved with her but CAMHS never did get involved with her, and they certainly didn't get involved with her from this area because she underwent an assessment but she wouldn't engage with it. And what they actually are quite clear is unless she is willing and wanting to engage with the service there is no point in them forcing it on her because it is going to be non-productive.'**

*Molly's social worker*

Or had no specific mental health diagnosis, an issue which prevented four other young people qualifying for services. The instances described included one young person who was deemed not to have a mental illness when assessed after a suicide attempt, and another whose mental health needs were not recognised by CAMHS despite the concerns of experienced social workers:

**'We were all concerned about him. We all requested mental health assessments. He was clearly psychotic. And I have to say that, you know. I worked in mental health, I've been an approved social worker under the Mental Health Act, he was clearly psychotic, and that wasn't recognised, and we had to put him in a secure, and then he goes into psychiatric.'**

*Children's services team leader, speaking about Lewis*

Finally, CAMHS policy, which requires patients to be in a safe, secure environment before they can access services, caused problems. The chaotic backgrounds and life styles of the young people made attending specific locations at specific times and engaging in the service immediately difficult.

**5.10** However, the experience of using CAMHS services did vary. Positive accounts included one instance where the CAMHS worker provided an outreach service and went to meet the young person in placement. Elsewhere, a CAMHS service helped diagnose a young person's PTSD and an ongoing need for a substance misuse service, remained in contact with the young person during their time in secure accommodation, and facilitated access to further help afterwards. Unfortunately, positive examples were few when compared to the number of young people who either did not receive a service or used one which, according to other professionals, was unable to meet their mental health needs.

15. For example, in York and Jones (2017)

**5.11** The high levels of placement breakdown caused by the behaviours described meant many social workers repeatedly had to find new placements. Their experiences supported wider knowledge that this process is often difficult, requires numerous calls and can take hours of time<sup>16</sup>:

**‘within the space of two days myself and our duty worker phoned 140-something placements in the local area, even saying that, you know even to the point of residential, not just secure now because obviously secure was our last option.’**

*Grace’s social worker*

**‘we did around 72 searches for residential placements, but because of his behaviour they wouldn’t, they wouldn’t, umm, take him, so the only option we had then was to go to court for a Secure Accommodation Order’**

*Oliver’s social worker*

**‘probation brought her on our doorstep, on a Friday afternoon, and we had nowhere to put her, we had to ask mum to have her over the weekend so we could put a package of support in. But, um, yeah, she assaulted a police officer that night. So we didn’t have a place for her, as I said, so we had to manage and then regulate a placement [...] with our staff just volunteering [...] searching for a placement. In excess of 140 placements, you know. So. Yeah. Just horrendous. That went on for a couple of weeks’**

*Senior practitioner, previous social worker to Hannah*

**5.12** As previously found, the lack of placements meant some social workers had to take the best or only option available<sup>17,18</sup>. This included young people being placed far from home; in inappropriate settings, such as holiday houses; spending nights in places, such as police stations or homeless hostels; being returned to family; remaining in hospital beds:

**‘There was no placement, you know, we don’t have emergency placements, there was no fostering, there was nothing. It was nothing, there was nowhere we could have her. So we had no choice but to ask mum and dad to have her for the weekend until we can sort something out for Monday. [On another occasion she was] in and out of the hospital for about nearly two weeks because we had nowhere to put her and she kept putting herself in danger, the hospital kept wanting to discharge because she was, you know. We just didn’t know what to do, we couldn’t find a better placement and because the risks were just building and building and building ...it just ended up with the decision that ‘oh we’re going to go for a welfare Secure Accommodation Order.’’**

*Hannah’s social worker*

16. See for example: Norgate et al (2012)

17. See for example: Harkin and Houston (2016)

18. These issues have previously been discussed by Willems (2018)

## Section 6: Young people's experiences of going into secure accommodation

### Key findings

- While the challenges of keeping all young people informed and involved in the process of gaining secure orders are acknowledged, not all young people had their views and opinions considered
- The lack of secure accommodation beds causes uncertainty and anxiety for young people and increases the workload of social services
- The lack of secure accommodation sometimes leads to local authorities creating alternative accommodation in unregistered settings
- Not all current methods of secure transport ensure a safe acceptable journey for young people.

When applying for a Secure Accommodation Order, a local authority should identify an available bed and then obtain an order from the courts. Orders are given after a court hearing, provided conditions as laid out in Section 114 of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 are met. The young person concerned should be aware of the ongoing procedures.

**6.1** Social workers and team managers described how applications for Secure Accommodation Orders are often made quickly and in response to incidents and placement breakdowns.

**6.2** The process of going to court, finding a secure place and moving the young person to secure accommodation or equivalent generally takes place rapidly, and can be fraught with difficulties and anxieties for social services staff and often the young people.

**6.3** According to young people and their social workers, the amount young people knew about the Secure Accommodation Order application in advance varied. Some of the young people in the study knew nothing about the procedure, others did and some of these attended court, two young people requested the application themselves. The main reasons young people were not told of

the application were either because they were missing at the time or due to fears that knowing of the application would cause the young person to run away or attempt suicide. Some young people confirmed they would have absconded if they had known about the application:

*Interviewer: If you'd known that was going to happen, what would you have done?*

*'I would not have gone. I would still be on the run now.'*

*Jack*

There was one instance of a young person being prevented from taking part in the process, despite his expressed wish to attend court:

*'they stopped me from going to court for the first order. Which the people from the secure said they'd never seen before. Usually it's your right to go to court. But they just told me I couldn't go, and they tried to tell me I couldn't go to the second court hearing as well but then I got like an independent person and a PA involved and they kinda told them it was my right to go and if I wanted to be there then I could be there. [They said] just like that it was too far and that, but it wasn't down to them to get me travel down there. The secure had their own people to get me to court and that. I weren't the only person there going to court, most people there were going to court for like their orders to get it reviewed or extended, so it was just like, I felt like they were trying to stop me from being there, from putting my point across because I was saying valid points in interviews and stuff and they didn't like it.'*

*William*

It was also notable that this young person felt the lack of consultation and inclusion was typical of his wider experience, where "everyone was having meetings and decisions about where I was and my life and it just felt like I wasn't being involved in any of it" (William), suggesting that at this stage the power essentially lies with authorities regardless of legislation and policy regarding a young person's rights as advised by the United Nations Convention (1989) and the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

**6.4** Many participating social workers described finding a secure accommodation place as a challenging procedure. On occasion and contrary to guidance, this led to a secure order being granted without a bed having been identified:

**'we actually identified [them] as being at risk of, umm, of requiring a secure accommodation, but it took us about 3 weeks for us to find a bed. Umm, and that's daily, daily contact that was, ringing the secure accommodation network.'**

#### *Social worker*

As well as the lack of sufficient welfare beds, there were instances of secure accommodation refusing to accommodate a young person because of the high level of risk they represented: *'I have been told at times she's too risky for this placement and it's a secure accommodation!'* (Grace's social worker). These experiences reinforce existent questions about the options currently available in this situation<sup>18</sup> and return attention to the hard tasks confronting social workers.

**6.5** While the uncertainty of placement was unsettling for the young people, it was also difficult for those looking after them as they could not answer the questions about where they were going, or help them make concrete plans for the short or long-term future:

**'afterwards he said my manager had said he was going for a haircut and then he ended up in secure. But actually what had happened was the foster carers, because we didn't know when he was going, they were making plans and he had said that he wanted a haircut, so they had said yeah that morning like we'll go to the hairdressers and that was the day as planned but then obviously things changed....and he, so he's just kind of and their understanding of timeline, so he was obviously very confused at that time and obviously it was only afterwards when he said that, that it was like 'oh you don't fully understand kind of what had happened to get to this point'. So we talked it through and I explained it'**

#### *Matthew's social worker*

**6.6** Although the transport into secure accommodation is facilitated by social workers, police or secure escort agencies, some young people found the transfer into secure accommodation incredibly traumatic. Especially when the journey was unexpected, forcible and/or undertaken by individuals the young people had never met before:

**'I was in the police station, and they said, "Oh, you're going to [the SA]." And, obviously, I [had previously] heard stuff like, "Oh, you don't wanna go there because this, that, this, that," and they just took me there. Police. There were three police officers and two of my carers from my old placement took me.'**

#### *Chloe*

**'So she [the social worker's manager] come in and she said, "There's someone here to see you," and this is when the three blokes walked in, on my 16th birthday like. And I think I lost my head, though, because when she said- she come in with a big smile on her face, "Someone here to see," you and I thought it was my mother and the kids. And then no, just three fat bastards walked in behind. I was fuming. And then they were like, "You're moving to [English region]." And I was like, "I'm fucking not." So I tried to make like obviously... well, just wrestled with them, made my way to the door, and then one of them just sat on me like, he just come from nowhere. Because they were proper like fucking rhinos... And they wrestled me into the back of the car<sup>19</sup> and [ ] hours driving up to the [secure accommodation ] Didn't have a clue what was going on.'**

#### *Jack*

19. The authors would like to confirm that the interview with Jack took place with her social worker present, and that the social worker had previously been aware of this incident and acted accordingly

'No-one gave me a warning that I was going into secure. I was at my [relatives] house. I got thrown in a van. I, actually, I was covered in marks, and the geezer before he shut the door, he actually punched my [relative]..... I didn't know anything about it, I just had social worker turn up and she was talking me through it, and then next minute these men came up behind me and picked me up and threw me in the van, and I always just like, I didn't know what was going on. I thought I'd got kidnapped, like it was so scary. And it was horrible.'

*Megan*<sup>20</sup>

**6.7** Social workers also reported occasions when a secure placement couldn't be found and local authorities had to find or create 'bespoke' or 'alternative accommodation'. One of these young people was refused a place in secure accommodation because they had previously caused extensive physical damage in a unit. They were given 2:1 support in a 'bespoke' house that wasn't registered as a children's home. In another case, a Secure Accommodation Order was obtained, but no placement could be found. In response, the local authority created a placement in an old, now unused, children's home staffed by the social worker and colleagues who worked as residential staff. Both cases demand reflection on whether such 'bespoke' placements can meet the needs of a young person, or requirements for a residential children's home and its staffing.

20. The authors would like to confirm that the interview with Megan took place with her social worker present, and that the social worker had previously been aware of this incident and acted accordingly.

## Section 7: Life in secure accommodation

### Key findings

- Poor experiences on arrival at secure accommodation can negatively affect young people's attitude to the rest of the stay
- Secure accommodation can provide a consistent, regulated environment in which young people feel safe
- Secure accommodation can give young people an opportunity to engage with services they have previously been absent from, particularly education
- The custodial nature of some secure accommodation is disliked and seen as inappropriate by some young people
- Some young people accommodated for welfare reasons object to sharing residences with others serving sentences or facing criminal charges
- Secure accommodation tends to focus on containing young people, rather than providing the necessary specialised help
- Secure Accommodation Orders often give insufficient time for therapeutic intervention or to lay the foundation for positive trajectories
- More wide ranging therapeutic treatment options, which focus on behavioural and emotional problems are needed in secure accommodation
- Overall, the time spent in secure accommodation seldom recognised and addressed the underlying causal factors of the young people's behaviours, but rather provided containment and immediate, often temporary, de-escalation of risk.

This section is concerned with the experiences of young people during their time in secure or alternative accommodation.

**7.1** On arrival one young person liked secure accommodation immediately. Another had a mixed reaction as they had been upset and confused at being strip-searched in their underwear before a member of staff came in to 'mess around' and bring them something to eat. Most young people found the transition hard, one describing it as '*horrible*' (young person).

**7.2** When reflecting on why they had disliked the home initially, young people mentioned the atmosphere, not knowing anyone, being nervous of staff, not liking the other residents, being continually watched, not being allowed outside, not able to do what they liked, and feeling caged. Three young people had spent time in different secure accommodation settings and could make comparisons, all preferred the more relaxed, homely secure accommodation from the outset:

**'That secure I went to, I loved it.... Because it was all not criminal, what's the other one? [...]** Welfare. It was all welfare so like they were all really nice and it was more understanding. There were about 11 of us, it was a really small secure. And it was nice. But obviously when it's mixed as well it's not bad, it's just a bit more mouthy, a bit more energetic like, a bit more rumbled up.'

*Mia*

**7.3** Experiences on arriving at secure accommodation had a significant effect on young people. One young man was alienated by a difficult and arguably basic substance detoxification on arrival:

‘you go straight into, down in the integration room, and then it’s a unit with six on, a side unit with six on its side. But because I was so bad, like up off the drugs, I had to like- it took me a long time to come down off them. Because apparently- I don’t know, apparently, I punched myself and I split my head open or something and then...’ Interviewer: Do you not remember that at all? ‘I can’t remember then. No. But apparently, they put me in that room, and I just went mental and just kicked off, so my head started pissing out with blood or something.’ Interviewer: Was there like a plan for trying to come down off whatever you’d been on? ‘No. Just chuck me, just chuck me in the room, give me food three times a day. That’s all it was. I don’t think they were used to stuff like that<sup>21</sup>,’

*Jack*

**7.4** When talking about everyday life in secure accommodation most young people described how they had settled into a routine of set times for waking up, meals, education, activities and bed. Once they had become used to this, many had liked or appeared to have benefited from this routine. A number found it made them feel safe:

‘getting to know the staff was quite nerve-wracking but I think after time there you get into a routine, you go to school, you have helpers with whatever issues you’ve got, you can talk to staff there, have time out in your room. So it’s a safer place than what it was out here for me’

*Amy*

Social workers supported this, commenting on the positive effect of regular food, sleep and education, especially if a young person had been heavily using before the Secure Accommodation Order:

‘they were giving her liver and kidneys and heart a break from all the alcohol. So you know, in a way, it did, the complex substance misuse worker who she spoke to prior to her 18th birthday a couple of months ago said that actually the time in secure has probably helped her.’

*Ellie’s social worker*

**7.5** Other things young people liked in secure accommodation were the food, the staff, having a key worker to talk to, football, sport, and activities such as cooking:

‘Football, gym, cooking. They have like a music suite in there with apple mac computers and instruments and that. Stuff like that. Football quite a lot. Did a lot of stuff like that. They had play-stations and Xboxes, and a film room. It was alright, it was actually quite good’

*William*

21. The authors would like to confirm that the interview with Jack took place with his social worker present, and that the social worker had previously been aware of this incident and acted accordingly

**7.6** When talking about things they had disliked, young people mentioned the environment: the noise, the locks, not associating freely with other residents, needing permission to use the toilets. Some associating this with a feeling of being punished or in prison, and others linking it to being accommodated with young people on criminal grounds. It was concerning that there were also six instances when young people spoke about staff being too forceful in their use of restraint, seeing it as a clear assertion of power over a young person<sup>22</sup>:

**'And then they restrained me, dragged me down, they won't take you into your room because you've got all your belongings in your room. They'll put you in a completely empty room, with nothing in. Like take the mattress out, everything and the bathroom would always be locked, the door would always be locked until you need a wee. But obviously in my own room it would be open. But I got dragged down the corridor... he had these massive hands as well, both his fingers were in my eyes when I was being dragged down the corridor, I couldn't see nothing. Like literally, it was horrible. I don't think he should have done that. Like putting fingers in kids' eyes so they can't see, being dragged down a corridor<sup>23</sup>.'**

### *Mia*

**7.7** The stories given indicated that contact with families helped when in secure accommodation 'His family visited regularly, and even went there on Christmas Day... mum says it's the best family Christmas they've had' (Luke's social worker), while other accounts supported evidence that being placed far from home, caused distress to young people<sup>24</sup>:

**'She's gone back into secure. What's happened now is that she's said she wants to go home. She's desperate to go home. Obviously mum's illness is progressing. She hasn't seen her twin for some considerable amount of time.'**

### *Lauren's social worker*

**7.8** Use of secure accommodation a distance from the home local authority also impacted negatively on social workers. Some had to spend days away from their offices and families to maintain the relationship with the young person, review progress, consider exit plans, and meet statutory requirements where the local authority is the young person's corporate parent. Travelling across the UK also impacted on local authorities who had to meet the costs of travel and accommodation for their employees and for visiting families.

**7.9** When young people and social workers were asked about use of the wider services used when in secure accommodation they talked of education, health services and mental health support.

**7.10** Although some young people didn't engage with the education services provided ('*she just ruled the roost, just absolutely. She hadn't done any education, she didn't engage with anything.*' Ellie's social worker), most took an active part once they had settled. Some young people reported liking the classes, others had engaged in education for the first time in a long while. One positive example showed that the education could be adaptable, here allowing the young person to study in her room rather than a group setting:

**'She refused to go to school but then she did participate in some education but it was on her terms. Quite often she would take her own work to the privacy of her own room and then she would work hard on it. Make progress and achieve. And then she would ask for more work. But within the school setting she would easily influence others to get involved in behaviours that were unwanted and she would perhaps disrupt the education of some of the others that were there.'**

### *Molly's social worker*

22. This has also been noted by Rose (2002)

23. The authors would like to confirm that the interview with Mia took place with her social worker present, and that the social worker had previously been aware of this incident and acted accordingly

24. See for example: Ronzoni and Dogra (2011)

Others had disliked the service, some felt that they had been given no choice but to take part in classes and others found the education too basic:

**'when she wanted to do her education when she was in [Secure accommodation] she was attending education but they were doing very basic life skills stuff like how to put a washing machine on, how dryers work... that's not education. And her ability is very good, she's very capable of doing her GCSEs so she's missed out on so much schoolwork because of being moved around. She's missed so much education and she'll find it really hard to catch up now which is a shame because she's perfectly capable of having a bright future'**

#### *Hannah's social worker*

**7.11** Young people are offered health assessments in secure accommodation, but little information was offered about this: one young person had a hitherto unknown heart condition diagnosed and there were four examples of substance misuse treatment. Of the substance misuse cases, two young people saw a substance misuse worker and the others underwent a detoxification, this included the young man who described his experience above.

**7.12** As detailed in Section 5, many young people had been displaying behaviours such as self-harm, suicide attempts, aggression and substance misuse on entry to secure or alternative accommodation, and many had already been in touch with or referred to mental health services. The descriptions given by the young people in the study suggests that the mental health therapy available to them while in secure accommodation was highly variable despite nine of the 10 secure accommodation used claiming adequate mental health and other therapeutic services, whether these be in-house or brought in from external partners.

**7.13** Six of the young people appeared to have received services that largely recognised and met their mental health needs. Some social workers attributed this to the amount of available therapy and the safe, contained nature of the secure accommodation. One young person spoke of the importance of having a key worker to talk to, while their social worker described the varied therapies the same young person had received:

**'You had [name] didn't you, she was your care coordinator and case manager, and you worked with [name], he's the substance worker. Did a lot of work with him. You did a little bit with [name], from resettlement. You did a lot with [name], he did a lot of talking therapy type stuff with you. And [name] who was overseeing your medication, the psychiatrist'**

#### *Amy's social worker, conversing with Amy*

Another young person felt therapy had been successful because it was only when in secure accommodation they felt old enough to engage, as is often the case when teenagers begin to form a clearer sense of their own identity<sup>24</sup>:

**'[I had involvement with] CAMHS when I was younger, but I was a bit young and it was just hard to deal with really. Obviously I wasn't ready to deal with it so it just didn't work and then I never really had any help with it after. And I went to school and got the help and that. I think it was a good thing going there. I feel better in myself and that since I been there. Don't take drugs, don't hang around with the same people since I've been there.'**

#### *William*

Another young person's social worker felt that while appropriate therapy or support had not been offered in two earlier stays in secure accommodation, the last had a positive effect by providing drama therapy, after identifying this as potentially helpful for the young person:

**'[Secure accommodation] was wonderful, they really stuck with the boundaries, they supplied drama therapy which the local authority paid for and she engaged in because she was in a contained unit. This led to her also engaging in the psychological assessments, the IQ assessments'**

*Ellie's social worker*

**7.14** One young person received good support for mental health issues in alternative accommodation. Although no detail of the mental health support was given, social and support workers described this placement as a 'blessing in disguise', accrediting much of the success to the control they had in ensuring that the young person received support for their mental health including when transitioning into adult services. While there are evidently issues regarding the lack of secure placements, it is important to acknowledge this example of such a placement having beneficial mental health outcomes, in particular helping to ease the often complex transition from child to adult services.

**7.15** Other social workers had reservations about the therapy provided in secure accommodation. Of these, two were concerned about the nature and quality of the service:

**'I think people perceive therapeutic intervention in very different forms. I guess her being involved in arts and crafts would be perceived as some therapeutic intervention by some. For me when people are saying to me therapeutic intervention my expectation is that its either psychotherapy, cognitive behaviour therapy because that's the only way that these people are going to have some understanding of their negative lived experiences to be able to overcome them and make better informed choices for the future to promote their better outcomes really. Without that I think I think basically some negative behaviours are being reinforced. So there was certainly no therapeutic intervention at the [secure accommodation] in that form.'**

*Molly's social worker*

**7.16** While elsewhere there was evidence that the lack of a mental health diagnosis continued to prevent therapy for emotional or behavioural problems:

**'emotional harm, neglect, self-harm, swallowing instruments and objects. Wanted to see psychiatrist, her behaviours were getting worse and worse. But mental health kept saying that she hadn't got a mental health problem. That was what we kept getting, it's not mental health, it's behaviour. And she's got ASD and displaying traits of, right fine, it's behaviour but those behaviours are leading to something quite dangerous'**

*Grace's social worker*

And while it was acknowledged that the time needed for effective therapy is usually more than that allowed by the Secure Accommodation Orders, there was still disquiet that the underlying reasons and triggers for the high-risk behaviours remained unknown:

**'It's a sticking plaster approach, isn't it? Let's just put out the fire, not work out why it started in the first place. But I suppose the other side of that is if you wanted to look at what the causes were you could be looking at quite a long period of work. So you wouldn't necessarily be wanting to be starting that somewhere where she's not going to stay. So I can see the pragmatic quality of it. But it's very frustrating, when you just want your young person to be able to move on. You know? Have some positive outcomes.'**

#### *Lucy's social worker*

**7.17** There were also accounts of young people's mental health needs not being recognised or addressed. These included an instance of mental health therapy not being finished because of the short time of the Secure Accommodation Order; a judge's direction for mental health support and CAMHS involvement in secure accommodation not being fully implemented; no support being offered despite the opinion of the social worker who had recognised and identified the young person's mental health needs:

**'[There is] a lot of bereavement there that she needs to work through. [...] I've said: "You need to take that a bit further and talk it out," and she's like "Yeah, yeah I will. When I come out this time, I will." She said "put a referral in", but I don't know.' Interviewer: Is there not support like that for her in [Secure accommodation]? 'There is. They do have CAMHS there, so she can access counselling. But they don't do any assessment'**

#### *Social worker*

With still more professionals supporting the opinion that secure accommodation often focuses on containing young people, rather than providing the specialist help they needed<sup>25</sup>:

**'and to be honest, my opinion is because it took so long, she was in there 18 months because it took so long, the more she was in there the further damage was caused. Didn't have the treatment she needed in that time, really. If she'd had that treatment earlier on, we wouldn't be in the situation where we are today, really.'**

#### *Charlotte's social worker*

**7.18** The young people for whom we had detail of their experiences in secure accommodation could be divided into those who had seen their stay as a positive experience and those who felt it had been inappropriate and had endured it. Overall and regardless of positive aspects, the study findings suggest the time spent in secure accommodation seldom addressed the underlying causal factors of the young people's behaviours, but rather had provided containment and immediate (if temporary) de-escalation of risk.

25. As also described by Hart and La Valle, 2016

## Section 8: Leaving secure accommodation

### Key findings

- Social workers recognised the importance of a carefully planned transition out of secure accommodation
- When the length of a Secure Accommodation Order is unknown planning an exit out of secure accommodation can be especially challenging
- The histories and ongoing needs of young people leaving secure accommodation can make finding placements post-secure difficult, which can delay exit from secure accommodation or lead to application for a deprivation of liberty order in the new placement
- Careful transition out of secure accommodation with regular contact between the young person and the new placement makes moving to the new placement easier for the young people
- 38 per cent (nine) of the young people (for whom sufficient information was obtained) had positive experiences in their first placement after secure accommodation, a similar number had poor experiences and 25 per cent (six) a mix
- Those with good experiences tended to have experienced carefully planned transitions into consistent placements that recognised their needs.

This section is concerned with the experiences of young people when they first left secure or alternative accommodation.

**8.1** Social workers recognised the importance of planning transition out of secure accommodation carefully and finding placements that suit the young person, meet their needs, keep them safe and thus reduce the likelihood of a return to secure accommodation:

*'it needs to be well planned. So we can't just bring them out, we acknowledge, and I think we are pretty good at not just bringing them out and putting them back home or, you know. And then it's back to square one [...] because as I say, you can't just put them back into a scenario where they're still going to be at risk. Potentially.'*

*Children's services team leader*

**8.2** As the Secure Accommodation Orders given to the young people in the study tended to be three months long, social workers and secure accommodation staff began to plan transitions out of the home well before the three-month point. However, social workers described how this exercise was complicated when applications to extend Secure Accommodation Orders were made as court outcomes were unknown until the hearing. Such occasions significantly impacted on the time social workers had to develop exit plans as nobody knew whether or not the young person would remain in a secure setting.

*'after three months you've got to go to court for it to be extended. And basically they fought me all the way and said: he's done all well. He said 'I want to come out, I've done well.' It's like: How?! You know what I mean? It's not long enough, it's not long enough. So in all fairness the court gave me, so that was the May, June, July, August, they gave me then until I think it was beginning of September to find somewhere. And they said we're not going to be extending it so you find somewhere. I was like: F\*\*\*\*g hell where am I meant to put this kid? No foster care would have him, because of the risk. [...] Residential? Absolutely not. They said we can't risk it, there's other children in residential, we can't manage the risk [...] And we showed the chronology of searches we done. There was 60 odd residential homes, 100 odd foster placements.'*

*Harry's social worker*

As seen in previous studies<sup>26</sup>, this level of uncertainty was also unsettling for young people:

**'I remember him calling, you know "what's the plan? Where am I moving to?" He wanted his own flat. But he wasn't ready really. We'd need to provide housing with insurances that they're ready for complete independence, and yeah, we couldn't do that for him at the time.'**

*Joseph's social worker*

**8.3** As suggested in the quote above, the search for suitable placements after secure accommodation was affected by the difficult histories of the young people and the perception of them as high risk by potential carers:

**'the residential units are cherry picking, so they look and they've got how many local authorities bidding against each other, and they've got Joe Bloggs, who's quite easy to manage but he's had some difficult times and he isn't too bad. And then if you've got the other extreme of the spectrum, really challenging young person who we've had to securely accommodate, although we can demonstrate, and what we try and do is demonstrate that they've moved on, they've changed, stuff has progressed, they're still going to go for Joe Bloggs who is slightly easier. So that's what they do, they tend to play local authorities off against each other. Umm, and then we get into a situation where we're absolutely struggling. The order is starting to expire and we're like "where are we putting this young person? How are we supposed to meet this young person's needs?" And again we're almost looking at bespoke packages of care for some of them, just to facilitate that need really.'**

*Social worker*

**8.4** Such difficulties had a significant effect on some young people. Three had their exit from secure accommodation delayed by as much as three months because there was nowhere for them to go, despite the questions over the extended deprivation of liberty this posed. To address this situation, two local authorities put together their own 'bespoke' placement and another young person was returned to family although this was not the preferred action.

**8.5** Transition planning was further affected by the specific needs of the young people, including addressing and protecting them from child sexual exploitation, being kept away from drug networks or other negative home influences, as well as finding a place where suitable mental health support is available and provided:

**'When she was [in secure accommodation] she was still making allegations, and she was still self-harming, but she did appear to calm down a lot. [...] she went into a step-down provision, so it was a children's home but we were very, umm, the doors were locked, the windows were locked.'**

*Ella's social worker*

**8.6** The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act (2014) calls for the wishes of the young people to be included in decisions. Some social workers spoke of consulting their young person in regards to post-secure placement. One describing how this led to them not being placed in a certain foster placement, and three more how placement searches had been directed by the young people's wishes to be as near as possible to their home.

**8.7** At least three of the young people in the project were subject to a Deprivation of Liberties (DOLs) Order after secure accommodation. Social services staff explained that DOLs applications were sought because no appropriate step-down accommodation could be found and the need to ensure safety outweighed the young people's wishes.

**'we're doing an awful lot of applications following that secure process for Deprivation of Liberty, [...] because we're sort of restricting them to step down and then incrementally increasing their freedom and free time, and staffing ratios so they're coming out on 2-1 staffing ratios, 24 hour support surveillance, and no free time, and then that's reviewed and that's built up, built up, built up, until we get to the end of the DOLs. So we're doing that a lot, we're doing a lot of DOLs applications.'**

*Children's services team leader*

26. See for example: Ward (2009) and Unrau et al (2008)

'she turned back up, and went back up to her placement for a little while, but because she'd breached the safety of that placement [...] they didn't want to put her back there. So, we had to place her in a, the residential place rented out a log cabin, which is even more remote, rural area. And she was staffed 2 to 1, just to try and stabilise her for a while, and work with her, and find out: "what are you doing? Who are you involved with again? What's going on?" We had to get a Deprivation of Liberty Order for that because of the nature of that, it was restrictive, a log cabin just her, two members of staff. And that was granted. [...] While she was there she went missing again [in] the middle of the night. Obviously someone picked her up and she was missing for a number of weeks after that and that's when we applied for a second secure order.'

#### *Charlotte's social worker*

One social worker specifically acknowledged that DOLs were both expensive for local authorities and contentious:

'[The secure accommodation] were saying no, you know, we're not having her back, she's unmanageable, even in secure, we can't manage her, and it turned out then we found a placement, [...] for 16 grand a week. But we placed a DOLs order, a Deprivation of Liberty order on her ... 'the DOLs order is a very contentious thing. [...Her barrister is] appealing and saying because she could give consent to the deprivation of liberty, [...] then the deprivation of liberty shouldn't be on.'

#### *Chloe's social worker*

**8.8** Transition back to the family home was inappropriate for most young people. Foster care, residential care and semi-independent living were the placements considered post-secure. Where detail of the transition process was given, experiences ranged from a single visit to or from the new carers, to a careful process carried out over a period of time.

**8.9** There were three accounts of careful transitions, which included multiple visits of the new carers to the young person and visits to the new residence. As one residential manager explained, this period of acclimatisation seemed to make the move easier:

'because he knew the staff as well there was that release of he came in and he knew everybody here so it wasn't like 'oh who's that, who's that' [...] and we made sure the people who were on shift were the people who had been up [to visit them in the secure accommodation] a lot more'

#### *Residential manager working with Mohammed*

**8.10** Positive experiences, such as that above, contrasted with that of one young person who was difficult to place and so temporarily placed with an emergency foster carer while waiting for the only available placement. When taking this young person, the emergency foster carers strictly stipulated what the local authority would need to do for them to agree to take him:

'staff who he will be going with can support him in the placement from 9 in the morning, they'll pick him up, take him out of that placement, that foster placement until 6, 7 o'clock in the night. And be on call 24 hours a day, and that's how we done it for 6 weeks. It was horrendous. Absolutely horrendous. But that was the only way we could do it'

#### *Social worker*

**8.11** Further difficult decisions facing social workers when seeking post-secure placements were evident, especially when a young person's wishes had to be balanced against their best interests. This dilemma was found in a few accounts of young people being taken to new placements before the move, objecting to the place, and being sent there regardless.

'I went there, I had a look round and I was just [...] looked around and I was just like oh no, it's going to be a nightmare.'

#### *Megan*

**8.12** Information of young people's experiences in the placement immediately after leaving secure accommodation was gained for 24 young people. Few descriptions were all good or all bad, but there was sufficient information to place these young people into one of three groups:

- those with mainly positive experiences (nine young people)
- those with a mix of positive and negative experiences (six young people)
- those with mostly negative experiences (a further nine young people).

**8.13** The simplest stories among the nine positive accounts were of three young people transferred to mental health settings after secure accommodation due to the recognition of ongoing mental health needs when in secure accommodation. The remaining six young people went to residential placements. In general, these transitions were carefully planned.

For example, one young person had numerous meetings with the placement staff beforehand, while another was taken to the new home a few times before the move. The specific needs of the young people were recognised as illustrated by one sole placement supported by 24-hour multiple staff supervision in a house near enough to allow regular family visits and with a bedroom decorated in the colours of the young person's favourite sports team.

Elsewhere a young person was placed close to home and health, CAMHS, police and offending services were consulted to put holistic support for the young person in place. The exit of a third young person was closely supervised by the courts who requested a clear plan and with effort the social workers found a suitable placement, which employed a relationship building approach.

All young people in this group settled well initially with no problems reported. Professional reports attributed the success to the thought and time that went into transition planning and the ability of residential staff to provide consistent support that could change and adapt to a young person's changing behaviours and needs:

**'with one of the staff, he pushed and pushed and pushed and pushed, and he said to [him] one day, "so what are you going to do? Are you going to leave me as well?" And he said "no, I'm going to go home at the end of my shift, and I'm going to have a couple of well-deserved days off, and I'll see you at the weekend." And he went 'you won't be back'. And obviously on the Saturday when [the member of staff] came in on his duties he was like you're back?! And that was kind of the beginning of the turning point. When he realised that, I told him this from the start, I said the kind of people who are with you won't be the ones to walk off and let you down. They will stay there.'**

#### *Residential manager working with Samuel*

**8.14** Six young people experienced a mix of positive and negative experiences after secure accommodation. A couple of these accounts mirrored the stories of careful planning recounted above, with one social worker noting and reacting to the knowledge the young person wanted to be placed near home and another describing a prolonged careful transition:

**'I did request for [residential staff] to at least go in pairs but for one person to at least be the main familiar one so it wasn't two strangers going at all times. So ultimately they did that over a three week period as part of the introductory process to get her to know some of the staff. And other young people at [the new] house wrote letters to her, welcoming her and saying that they were looking forward to meeting her'**

#### *Molly's social worker*

For others, the new placement caused problems: one young person described not being placed near home as requested, and the social worker of another young person expressed concern about

the distance of the new placement from home. There was also some reinforcement of concerns voiced in other research about the continued lack of therapeutic work<sup>27</sup> and disquiet about the lack of boundaries set in a new placement:

**'they were saying they knew it would take perhaps a three month period of that introductory process for her to feel quite settled there, for her to feel a level of trust with the staff members and that was something that I accepted. [...] So of course they were working through the different processes of taking her out shopping and all this was seen as part of the therapy for her to develop a relationship. You know, taking her out to activities, fun activities horse-riding, movies, you know monitored and supervised by the staff at all times [...] but you know there were some behaviours that were pretty concerning and then of course when I would phone up the next day and say well where is she and they would say 'oh she's gone shopping' and I felt to some extent they were actually just reinforcing the negative behaviours. There seemed to be no negative consequence for her.'**

#### *Molly's social worker*

In these first placements post-secure, three other young people in this group began to revert to previous behaviours. One social worker suspected this may be due to the distance from the young person's home, one because the young person had fallen out with residents and staff, and another that low levels of supervision had allowed the young person to believe they could do as they wished.

**8.15** The remaining nine accounts were of poor experiences and outcomes immediately on leaving secure accommodation. Common factors were objections having been made to the placement and reports of not settling.

Two young people didn't spend a single night in the placement. In one case, the social worker had arranged a placement close to home with the young person supported by multiple agencies. The young person disappeared from the placement within hours to return home. The social worker believes family members influenced this action when visiting the young person in the secure accommodation.

Another young person apparently behaved badly during the journey to the placement, as well as on arrival. In response, the placement provider served immediate notice of placement termination and the social worker had to resort to creating a 'bespoke' placement.

Another young person in this cohort had visited and disliked the proposed placement, but been placed there anyway due to lack of placement options. Subsequent experiences were traumatic from the start:

**'[the manager] was there who was running it, I just couldn't get along with him at all. It wasn't like I was blocking it out or anything, it was like I was trying to, but he was too, I don't know, I just couldn't get along with him ... The manager, he was just... I felt really uncomfortable around him, and I kept telling, and I kept explaining it to staff, I kept explaining it, and I said "Look, don't take it personally, but you really do make me uncomfortable." I tried to explain it to him god knows how many times. And he purposefully won't knock on my door, I could have been getting changed or anything, and he'd walk into my room and sit anywhere he likes, and he would just watch TV in my room.'**

#### *Megan*

This young person became very distressed, developed signs of psychosis and successfully campaigned for a change in placement. The placements of other young people in this group were affected by rapid, sustained returns of problematic behaviours:

**'absconding, being found with blades. She attacked one of the members of staff. There was an alleged overdose. She spent three days of that time in the family home, because she absconded; she was found by dad and taken back to the home. And a recovery order had to be sought to get her out of the home. And there was then quite a significant incident so we went back to court and had to get a further Secure Accommodation Order.'**

#### *Lauren's social worker*

27. See for example: Parker (2018)

## Section 9: Young people's longer-term experiences and outcomes

### Key findings

- Most young people continued to follow the positive, negative mixed trajectory begun on first leaving secure accommodation
- In the longer term, the majority of post-secure placements were unable to adequately meet the needs of young people leaving secure accommodation
- More than a quarter of young people were subject to additional Secure Accommodation Orders, with further young people entering the criminal justice system or a secure psychiatric placement
- Those experiencing positive outcomes appear to be due to the quality of the placements, especially having consistent relationships with key adult(s) and for some receiving sufficient mental health support.

This section focuses on the experiences of young people in the period of time between the initial placement after leaving secure accommodation and the study (this time period ranged from two years to a matter of weeks). During this time the experiences of most young people continued to follow the trajectory established on leaving secure accommodation, although some found their pathways changing.

**9.1** Downward trajectories: Two-thirds (six) of the young people who had experienced problems after leaving secure accommodation continued on this downward trajectory. Their stories included accounts of successive placement breakdowns with many social workers attributing these to the escalation of behaviours, such as assault, substance use and mental breakdown:

'she hooked up with a known offender... and he procures girls, he gets girls basically off their heads on any drugs whatsoever and then Facebooks his mates to say come around ... So, she hooked up with him. Oh my god, I never seen her so bad. She started on crack cocaine. Well, she's been on it since then.'

#### *Ellie's social worker*

'she'll settle in a placement for like two months then we'll see a deterioration with her it's like a honeymoon period and then she just... she finds it hard to form relationships, she's got attachment issues. She finds it hard to trust people, [...] she has been assessed by CAMHS and because she's got this chronic emptiness feeling she won't go and seek attention from the right places. Which then she'll put herself in danger in terms of say Child Sexual Exploitation which then will have another added impact on her and then she'll feel guilty about that and it's just you know, instead of working on these issues and building on and having accepting therapy and working through what's happened to her in the past, she'll dive straight into these behaviours to try and cope with what she's been through.'

#### *Hannah's social worker*

'She was reported to be in another relationship with another male associate. She was seen at a property where there was a stabbing. She fled the scene. She was then involved in an incident where two of the gang members had taxed a rival gang member. So took the drugs without payment. And she was there. So, and because she was there, she had like a bounty on her head [...] 500 quid to anybody who could put her in hospital.'

#### *Charlotte's social worker*

As suggested by these quotes, the mental health of the young people remained an issue and there was little report of attempts to address this. Many (66 per cent) of the young people in this cohort went on to receive further Secure Accommodation Orders. Five were back in secure accommodation at the time of the study (four on welfare grounds, one as a criminal sentence) and one young person was awaiting a criminal sentence.

**9.2** Of the nine young people who did well immediately after secure accommodation, five experienced a downward turn later. Among the stories we heard was one of a successful placement, which fell apart when the residential agency withdrew their 16+ service, and although a new placement was found, it did not go well and a new Secure Accommodation Order sought and granted. Two young people were negatively affected by poor matching: in one case this was seen when contact with a new resident promoted the re-emergence of violence and assault, and the placement was eventually withdrawn. In the other case, behaviours with a co-resident led to a criminal investigation which was ongoing at the time of this study.

**9.3** Up and down trajectories: A pattern of up and down experiences continued for four young people. Their narratives describing a pattern of stability preceding a deterioration of behaviours evidenced.

Among this group, one young person described how they were evicted from a placement and then endured a period of homelessness. Although the current situation appears better in that the individual is now moving between family and friends, and achieving episodic employment, rising stress levels linked by the young person to the demands of employment mean he is currently on sick leave and using cannabis to deal with his anxiety and depression.

Another young person had been living with a parent for nine months while waiting for a flat. While the forthcoming move was eagerly anticipated, the young person feels progress has been complicated because it has been hard to contact the social worker or other support worker. Despite this, the young person has been applying for jobs and hopes to enter the army in the future.

Elsewhere, one young person whose post-secure experiences started poorly with placements

breaking down, moved to a placement, which suited them better. A period of more settled behaviours ensued, with indications that the work at the placement gave this young person better insight into behaviours:

**'she's kind of able to go I'm gonna go off, she's able to figure out, but I think she's got a story we don't even know about yet. You know what I mean? She's kind of not ready to deal with that yet.'**

*Previous social worker to Hannah*

However, the placement broke down and the young person returned to secure accommodation.

The final young person is making slow progress and still self-harming, but their social worker notes that the young person seems settled for most of the time and describes them as funny, articulate and consistently engaged in education. The school has offered consistent support despite misbehaviours, this was evident during a period of six months when the young person was educated on her own as during this time the school made sure of regular interaction between her and her peers. Overall, the social worker feels this young person is doing better now but, depending on whether therapy is engaged in, may still remain vulnerable to child sexual exploitation.

**9.4** Upward trajectories Four young people who started well continued on an upward trajectory, seemingly happy and settled in placement and/or about to make positive moves. Their environments appeared to be constructive, with one social worker describing a young person as now communicating better and less aggressively, and another saying their young person was responding well to the boundaries set around their behaviours in the current setting. All four young people have been looked after by carers able to repeatedly deal with poor behaviours and help the young person change them. Three of these young people seem to be getting psychological support in current placements with some suggestion this is giving these young people better insight into their behaviours although mental health problems are still an issue (*'she says her head is full and she can't cope, and runs.'* Social worker).

**9.5** The experiences of two young people who were making mixed progress immediately after secure accommodation have improved. Again, reports suggest that consistency in care has been key in this as both remain in the placements begun immediately after leaving secure accommodation. Of these, one was placed in a mental health setting, where treatment has helped them stabilise and a longer plan for progression to a placement tailored to their specific needs has been put in place. The other individual continues in a single placement. Family continue to visit and their education (including alternative education, such as forest school) is slowly expanding. It is hoped that this young person will remain in their current placement until they turn 18.

**9.6** Three young people whose initial experiences were poor saw things improve, with the upturn beginning when the young were moved from initial disliked placements.

Two of these young people quickly returned home to live with family: one insisting on staying at home after a visit. This young person has been living with extended family since and was doing well, but this situation is now threatened as other family members need the accommodation. Although social services have suggested a flat, the young person has reservations about living in the area the accommodation is placed in as they feel they may be vulnerable:

**'the place where it is, it's got druggies around there. [...]there's a lot of people, like there's one who tried it on with me one time, and he lives round there and I don't feel very comfortable going there.'**

*Megan*

The other young person absconded back home soon after placement and things began badly with the early experiences leading to a serious suicide attempt. However, this event promoted a change in family dynamics and the young person's attitude. This individual is now estranged from family and living with their partner and their partner's parents. Last reports were positive with the young person now making plans for a job, as well as their own accommodation.

In both these cases, longer-term close relationships between the young person and social services or voluntary sector staff is evident and appears to have had a positive and instrumental effect on the young person's experiences.

The story of the third young person in this sub-category returns attention to the importance of the consistency and quality of placement. This young person has been in their present placement for nine months, feels the staff are very understanding and is engaging in the psychological support offered. Regardless of this, progress has varied with events, such as Christmas seeing escalations of behaviours. However, the placement and support has been maintained, new activities have been taken up and this young person is now displaying interest in career planning.

**9.7** Overall, just over a third (nine) of the 24 young people for whom detail of life trajectories beyond secure accommodation could be obtained were progressing well at the time of this study, with influential factors being consistent care capable of recognising and meeting young people's needs and wishes, and being maintained despite negative behaviour episodes. The rest were doing poorly: four were still experiencing an unpredictable life of ups and downs, while just under half (11) who failed to experience consistent care before or after secure accommodation were showing signs of escalating behaviours or had re-entered secure accommodation for criminal or welfare reasons.

## Section 10: Discussion: What are the problems?

This section considers the project findings and their implications for current policy and practice. Central to this are the histories, stories and experiences of the young people before, through and after secure or alternative accommodation.

**10.1** The poor home experiences of many of the young people in the study echoed those of others who have entered secure accommodation<sup>28</sup>. Although most of the study's young people were known to social services at some point before entering care, their stories suggest that the services received were neither consistent nor sufficient enough to protect them from the negative environments they had lived in, address emerging behaviours of concern, or recognise and treat the mental distress often underlying them. These instances, together with those of the young people who referred themselves to services after years of being 'under the radar' or asked to go into care despite social services involvement, ask questions about current policy and appropriate interventions. As noted by Jones (2016), an important part of this is the role of wider agencies, such as education, health and third sector, have in promoting the emotional health and well-being of young people and their families, and identifying the need for extra support as needed to prevent matters deteriorating.

**10.2** Being subjected to traumatic childhood experiences can severely impact on functioning, with resultant symptoms including depression, physical illness and a range of impulsive, self-destructive behaviours<sup>29</sup>. Collectively, the histories of our young people reflected this knowledge, and their experiences before care entry. Findings suggest that most of the placements accessed were unable to provide the environment needed: carers were unable to cope with problem behaviours and even those young people who had experienced stable placements at some point had multiple placement moves before secure accommodation. Professionals tended to attribute placement problems to the escalating high-risk behaviours of the young people. Although this association exists in wider research, some follow this link with a call for more accountability to be taken by systems unable to meet the high levels of need of such young people<sup>30</sup>. The experiences of our young people

reinforce the opinion that the skills and support possessed by those who cared for them before secure care were insufficient to meet their needs<sup>31</sup>.

**10.3** Equally concerning was the finding that the care received after secure accommodation was only sufficient to enable a few young people to progress and make positive changes, while others made little progress and a high proportion returned to previous problematic behaviours and/or referral to secure accommodation or custody. While this report was not asked to consider or compare different models of care, a review of associated literature suggests that central to recovery are trusting one-to-one relationships and use of holistic pedagogic, strengths-based approaches which include systemic, supervisory support for those providing it<sup>32</sup>. Recent literature concerned with trauma-focused care<sup>33,34</sup> suggests this approach is promising but the lack of evidence surrounding it to date calls for further exploration of its efficacy.

**10.4** Knowledge of the high levels of emotional and behavioural difficulties in the care population<sup>35</sup>, and that these problems can be increased by adverse experiences in care<sup>36</sup> makes the level of difficulties found among our young people unsurprising. The very nature of this research meant the young people we came across were always going to be highly troubled. This, together with existing knowledge that a high proportion of children and young people in care require intensive support to address their mental health needs<sup>37</sup>, increases concern about the psychological and behavioural needs of the study's young people, and the finding that they were largely unmet.

Central to this issue is the seeming inability of current mental health services to address the needs of children and young people in care despite recognition of this problem<sup>38</sup>. Illustrations of the persistence of this problem were found in descriptions of how service criteria prevented access to or use of CAMHS. Such experiences indicate that

28. Described by Hart and La Valle (2016)

29. Explained by Bessel and Van der Kolk (2005)

30. Noted by Quinton and Murray (2002)

31. Recognised by Vostanis et al (2008)

32. See Christie (2018)

33. See Johnson (2017a)

34. See Johnson (2017b)

35. Echoed in Bazalgette et al (2015); Narey (2016); Vostanis (2008)

36. Noted by Quinton and Murray (2002)

37. See for example Sempik et al (2008)

38. Recognised by Vostanis (2008)

a gap in mental health services exists, namely there is a need for a system of mental health provision capable of meeting the emotional, behavioural and psychological needs of these young people, one that can persist in attempts to engage young people with histories of chaotic lives and often, as commented elsewhere, a lack of trust in supportive relationships with adults. The need for this additional level of mental health service has been brought to the attention of those concerned by a recent study conducted in Wales<sup>39</sup>, which refers to evidence based interventions for adolescents, and the multi-agency Together for Children and Young People programme developed to better meet the needs of young people in the field of emotional and mental health<sup>41</sup>.

**10.5** As shown by this study, although many social workers possess deep understanding of a child or young person's emotional, behavioural and psychological state, they have little say in whether or not mental health services are provided. This situation suggests a revised system, which brings together social services and mental health staff in the exercise of ensuring appropriate mental health support and therapy is likely to have a positive effect on our young people receiving the needed help.

**10.6** All young people in the study experienced placement breakdowns, which saw social workers confronted with increasing difficulties finding new placements. Findings link the behavioural and mental health problems of our young people to these difficulties before and after the time spent in secure accommodation. In the context of the outcomes of the young people, this is an important area to be addressed as it is long recognised that placement instability is linked to less opportunity to develop secure attachments, to an increase in emotional and behavioural problems, to further placement breakdown and to feelings of rejection<sup>40</sup>. Collectively these findings return attention to two issues: the mental health support and the quality of residential care currently available.

**10.7** Residential care in England (and Wales) is provided by a mix of local authority private and voluntary sector agencies<sup>41</sup> (67 per cent provided privately in England in 2016<sup>42</sup>). This situation allows market forces to play a part in placement difficulties. As found in the study, potential residences are being asked to take young people with very poor

histories and many are able to, and do, refuse admission. The need to ensure that young people were not placed with others likely to exacerbate unwanted behaviours complicated this issue further and led to the instances reported when some local authorities had to resort to using 'bespoke' unregulated placements. While these situations saw legalities surrounding residential care breached, situations where the constructed placements met the young person's needs with positive associated outcomes demands reflection on the possibility that these placements are effective as they can be built around a young person's specific needs in a way not possible elsewhere.

**10.8** The difficult stories of high-risk behaviours, intermittent crises, placement moves and secure accommodation are interspersed with accounts of professional involvement. The role of social workers is pivotal in this, and the time and effort demanded to protect and care for the young people was evident. The lack of suitable placements meant social workers across Wales had to spend large amounts of time finding placements. Further, when placements, including those in secure accommodation could only be found at a distance from host authorities, the organisational costs, financially in staff time and traveling, and emotionally in concern for the young person and loss of personal time with their own family and/or support networks, were clear. The experiences of the young people also impact on other services, and the time and resources spent by health services, the police and the courts in caring for and regulating the young people must be recognised.

**10.9** Findings directly linked to the experience of secure accommodation made it clear that obtaining and implementing a Secure Accommodation Order is a stressful process. As described, some young people went to court, although one was denied this right in contravention of one of the core principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. When Secure Accommodation Orders were unexpected, the accounts of young people showed they were unprepared psychologically and practically. While this is concerning, the impact on the young person

39. See Jones (2016)

40. See for example Munro and Hardy (2006); Schofield and Beek (2005)

41. Detailed by Hart and La Valle (2016)

42. Noted by Narey (2016)

must be acknowledged and it calls for consideration of ways this can be addressed, the need of the social worker to protect the young person must be part of any discussions.

**10.10** Such cases demand further reflection on the difficult situation of social workers responsible for young people being placed in secure accommodation. This position is made even more complex by the fact that a secure placement should be agreed before a Secure Accommodation Order application is made, and the legal requirement to return to court for order extensions<sup>43</sup>. Both these conditions leave the outcome and associated needs of the young person unknown until the day of the hearing and this further complicates the process.

**10.11** When exploring experiences of the transition to secure accommodation, interest extended to the journey to the secure accommodation. The traumatic experiences of some young people must be viewed as wholly unacceptable and strongly suggests that the current policy around secure transportation needs amending to ensure such instances cannot happen again. Indeed, this and the wider experiences of the project's young people as a whole raise questions around a young person's human rights.

**10.11** These experiences and the severe reactions of young people influenced their attitude to, and understanding of, secure accommodation. Their perceptions of Secure Accommodation Orders as a 'punishment' and objections to prison like environments, restraints, locks and a lack of privacy reinforced arguments that secure accommodation is an institution in which every aspect of daily life is controlled and surveyed, and contentions that young people are effected by the total experience of secure accommodation and not just by the more formalised aspects of the care provided<sup>44</sup>.

**10.12** Young people also voiced an awareness that they had shared accommodation with others placed on criminal charges, an issue that has long been seen as problematic due to constructions of why 'secure' accommodation is needed and who it is needed for<sup>45</sup>. The contrast with experiences in other less authoritarian secure accommodation solely populated with welfare cases is also worth noting, and asks for exploration of ways to provide the necessary safety and security, while minimising

authoritarian atmospheres and providing a more pleasant, home-like environment.

**10.13** Findings also support evidence that secure accommodation can have a positive effect<sup>46</sup>. The routine, safety and consistency provided led to many of the young people settling and a subsequent reduction in the unwanted behaviours. Exploration of the services received during secure accommodation showed some young people engaged well in education and made significant progress, especially those who had not attended school for some time.

**10.14** Many of the problems faced on leaving secure accommodation, particularly finding suitable consistent placements, and managing and meeting all the needs of the young people, mirror those already known and reported in existing studies<sup>47</sup>. First, although guidance recommends that young people in care are involved in choosing where they live<sup>48</sup>, the extent to which our young people influenced these decisions was small, although this finding should be considered in the knowledge of the high level of specific complex needs existing.

When reflecting on the experiences of the young people who did best after secure accommodation, findings strengthen calls for careful transitions to suitable placements and furthermore suggest the placements should be known to a young person before transfer. During successful placements the relationship between young people and residential staff is crucial, as is delivering interactions and activities that can be consistently adapted to meet the young person's changing needs.

In contrast, those young people who saw little progress or a deterioration since leaving secure accommodation tended to re-experience a series of broken placements, associations with people who promoted problem behaviours and, despite the re-emergence of worrying behaviours, little or no use of mental health support services. Overall, the study supports wider findings that indicate good outcomes for young people who entered secure

43. As per the Children (Secure Accommodation) Regulations (1991)

44. See for example Rose (2002)

45. See for example: Harris and Timms (1993)

46. Further evidence can be found in Sovereign et al (2013)

47. Such as Kendrick et al (2008)

48. See for example Jarret and Harker (2016)

accommodation were attributed to appropriate consistent placements and education on leaving secure accommodation, rather than what happened while in secure accommodation. However, the findings also call for the sufficient and appropriate support for mental health needs in, and after transitions out of, secure accommodation.

**10.15** The study findings also raised questions about the ability of the current system to recognise and meet a young person's wider needs, primarily in the following areas:

- the social and emotional needs, including relationships with family and peers
- the ability to use opportunities for consistent education and/or employment when multiple placement moves occur
- wider support services, including not just mental health, but also more consistent support in areas, such as substance misuse and bereavement
- more consistent support around child sexual exploitation and helping young people to keep themselves safe.

As one social worker summarised, while secure accommodation may continue to be necessary in certain cases, it is not an ideal method of tackling the issues raised above:

**'There's got to be a better way of locking young people up, I don't even agree with young people being in custody for criminal offences personally. I don't think that you are criminally responsible until you're an adult, I don't think locking them up helps them personally; the provision is not great, it's miles away from your family. You know we know all of those things that support people to makes changes are family, feeling wanted, feeling part of something, belonging and then we place them in [a faraway town], it just doesn't match what we try to do. The service that we have doesn't match.'**

*Holly's social worker*

## Section 11: Recommendations: What can be done?

Based on the findings and discussion above a number of recommendations are suggested:

### 11.1 Placement availability

**11.1.1** The difficulty finding placements able to meet and address the health and social needs of the young people before, during and after secure accommodation calls for the development and provision of a national commissioning strategy that ensures local authorities can provide care that's able to meet the high, often escalating needs of these young people at any point of residential or secure care. Further, any strategy should be underpinned by necessary regional development to allow facilitation.

**11.1.2** To support the above call for the provision of sufficient care placements, a model of therapy most likely to meet the needs of these young people should be identified and employed across foster or residential care.

**11.1.3** Study findings demand further training for foster and residential carers looking after young people with high levels of need before and after secure accommodation. Specifically, the development of training that ensures a consistency in the care provided and allows such care to be adapted to meet the specific needs of each young person. Findings also call for the provision of accessible support for carers during placements.

### 11.2 Mental health services

**11.2.1** The finding that many young people did not receive sufficient and/or appropriate mental health support before, during or after secure accommodation calls for the provision of an additional level of service that can overcome barriers created by mental health service criteria (for example, diagnosis of mental illness, immediate service engagement, living in secure environment), and ensures young people have access to support and treatment for behavioural and emotional problems, as well as specific mental illnesses.

**11.2.2** Social workers' knowledge of the young person's history and needs suggests use of a multi-agency, co-commissioning approach to mental health service provision. Such an approach would facilitate a more informed referral process and aid the development of a service model better able to meet the trauma-based therapy needs of the young people

### 11.3 Secure accommodation

**11.3.1** We recommend a national drive to bring together best practice in applying for Secure Accommodation Orders to help young people and social workers be best supported during this process. Within this, it is important to ensure that where possible and safe, young people are aware of applications, given opportunity to attend proceedings, and have their opinion sought and considered with the help of advocacy if desired or needed.

**11.3.2** It is recommended that the system is revised to ensure that positive effects of education, health services and therapy accessed in secure accommodation are sustained by the provision of comparable support and therapy on leaving. To facilitate a seamless transition into the best possible care on leaving secure accommodation this recommendation demands the development of a national integrated multi-agency, co-commissioning approach that will plan the transition out of secure accommodation.

**11.3.3** The austere environment of many secure accommodation are disliked and viewed as inappropriate by many young people placed on welfare grounds who have used them. In light of additional findings that some secure accommodation offer more home-like environments, we call for collaborative work with young people to improve the look and feel of the secure accommodation they are placed in as far as possible.

**11.3.4** Being placed far from home has a negative impact on young people, their families and local authorities as it makes regular contact difficult and expensive. In knowledge of this, every effort should be made to place young people as close to home as possible.

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### 13.1 Methods and ethical considerations

#### Project aims and objectives

The aim of this project was to gain a better understanding of the lived experiences of young people from Wales before, during and after a period in secure or alternative accommodation. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to consider:

- the life histories and journeys of young people that led to a Secure Accommodation Order
- young people's experiences before, during and after time in secure accommodation
- whether and to what extent young people's needs and behaviours are supported and influenced by the nature and therapeutic model of the settings currently available
- when and how decisions and plans are made for a young person's future following their time in secure accommodation
- placement outcomes and stability for young people after leaving secure accommodation
- the emotional and physical well-being of young people after leaving secure accommodation
- what happens when Secure Accommodation Orders are made, but young people receive alternative accommodation because no bed in a secure placement is available.

Ethical approval for the project was granted by the Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

#### Project design

This project was conducted through consultation and analysis of children's case files and routinely collected administrative data (for example, SSDA903) held by local authorities, and semi-structured interviews with young people and a range of key stakeholders involved in their support and care.

#### Project recruitment

The project sought to involve all relevant young people and key stakeholders. As seen in Figure 13.1, of the 22 local authorities in Wales, 21 successfully applied for a Secure Accommodation Order between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. All such authorities were contacted and asked to participate and 19 became involved with two prevented by staff and resource issues.



Figure 13.1: Direct participation of local authorities

#### Data collection

The 19 participant local authorities were asked to nominate a member of staff who then worked with the research team to facilitate the project.

Staff were contacted via email and telephone, and asked to help access the case files and administrative data for young people referred to secure accommodation within the study time frame. As part of this and in order to conduct this research ethically, the staff were also asked to arrange contact with the young people in question to gain their permission for their files to be viewed by the research team. The staff members also facilitated contact with the young people and stakeholders to arrange project interviews.

#### Case files

In total, contact with local authorities led to the consultation of the case files of 10 young people from eight local authorities. Guided by the project's aims and objectives a list of topics of interest was drawn up in advance and shaped the case file

consultation (see Appendix 13.2) with interest in:

- child and family details
- the history of the child and family use of social services and partner agencies before secure accommodation
- details of the secure accommodation or alternative accommodation if used
- the support and care offered since leaving secure accommodation.

This process focused data collection on key points in a young person’s life and helped build a picture of the experiences and circumstances of the young people concerned. While case files proved not to be directly comparable and tended to be structured and stored differently according to local authority practice, the case files contributed to the overviews of the situation of each young person they referred to.

### Project interviews

As listed in Table 13.1 below (see Appendix 13.3 for interview schedules), interviews took place with young people and a range of key stakeholders – predominantly social workers and social services team managers.

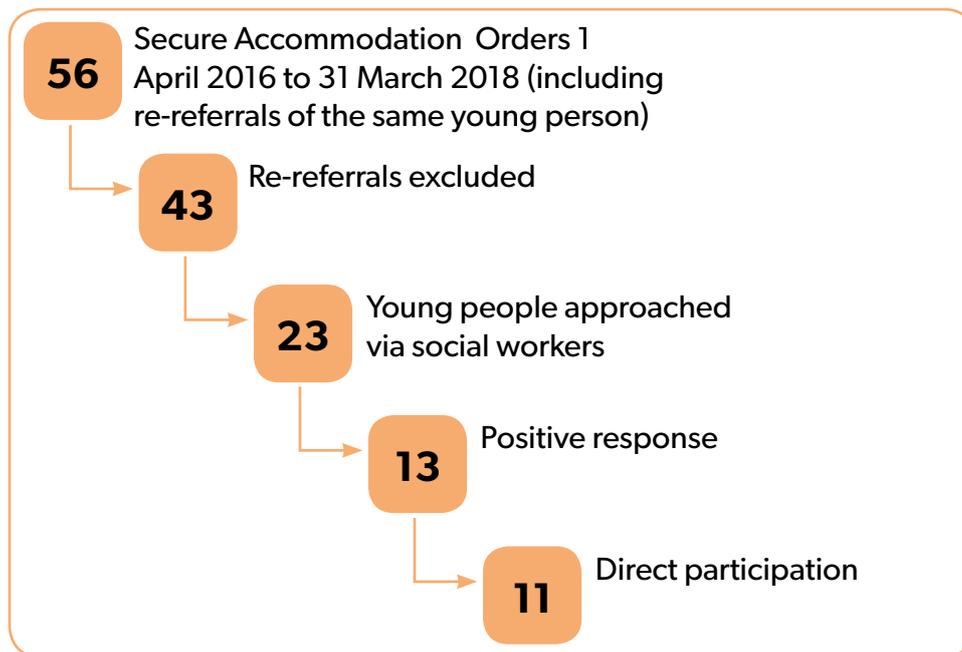
Participants	Interview numbers	Number of local authorities involved
Social workers	30	17
Young people	11	10
Team leaders/ service managers	5	5
Residential home staff	3	2
Mental health professionals	2	1
Carers (family and foster)	2	2
YOS workers	1	1
CSE advocates	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>39</b>

Table 13.1: Interview sample

Interviews took place in varied locations, from local authority offices, to court rooms, coffee shops and colleges. All interviewees were made aware that they could choose not to answer questions, and that they could terminate the interview at any time without the need to explain this decision.

## Interviews with young people

Figure 13.2 shows the process of recruiting young people for project participation.



**Figure 13.2: Direct participation of young people**

Overall, a total of 56 Secure Accommodation Orders were obtained by Welsh local authorities between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2018. Once re-referrals for individuals who received multiple orders were excluded, a total of 43 Welsh young people who had received a Secure Accommodation Order in the study timeframe were identified. Of these, 23 were approached to take part in the project, with 13 consenting to this. Eleven were interviewed.

This phase of the research explored in detail extremely sensitive issues that could be upsetting for the children and young people. Throughout the study, researchers remained sensitive to the integral ethical considerations and risks. In practice and in line with these concerns, the process of contacting young people began by seeking advice from the carers and social workers of each young person regarding whether the young people could or should be approached and, if this was seen as feasible, how best to do so in an appropriate way.

In many cases (20) it was deemed inappropriate to invite young people to participate. The reasons given by professionals varied, but included escalating concerns around mental health or drug use (including young people currently sectioned under the Mental Health Act), concerns around the potential re-traumatisation of the young person,

and, in the case of some young people who are now post-18, current non-engagement with social services, which meant staff were unsure of their whereabouts.

In total, 23 young people were identified as possible participants and attempts to approach them were made by social workers. Where participation was thought possible, key workers or social workers gave young people information about the study. The information sheet explained the areas the project was interested in, and stated that participants could choose which of these areas to address and which they would prefer not to include.

The drop-off in numbers after social worker involvement occurred because although contact had been deemed possible, changes in circumstance (for example, health deterioration or placement moves) made it impossible. In all, 11 young people took part. While various participatory methods had been identified and were ready to be employed, in practice these young people were more comfortable with talking than other methods, such as drawing or writing to convey their experiences.

A total of 11 interviews took place: nine face-to-face in the locations where the young people were resident or in a place organised by the local authority contact, one a telephone interview and

another an interview by proxy facilitated by a foster carer who sent an account of the interview by email. Of the nine face-to-face interviews, five took place with a social worker or other professional present due to concerns about possible negative impact on the young person's well-being.

### Interviews with social workers and other key stakeholders

From the outset of this phase of research, it was apparent that social workers held important information about the young people's chronologies, life histories and lived experiences. We therefore sought to interview past and present social workers of the young people wherever possible, speaking to a total of 30 social workers from 17 different local authorities (between them, these social workers had worked with 32 of the young people). The information gained was invaluable, especially when the young person could not participate in the study.

Meetings with social workers and young people identified key stakeholders who had been important to the young people at some point during their experiences. As seen in Table 3.1, this strategy led to a range of interviews with varied stakeholders. However, this approach resulted in lower than expected engagement with family members and carers as often a complex family history and ongoing tensions made contact with family members

inappropriate. Two young people were notable exceptions to this, and their family members or carers are part of the interview sample described above.

The majority of stakeholder interviews were one-to-one interviews, which took place primarily but not exclusively in local authority offices. Overall, three interviews with social workers and other professionals were conducted with multiple individuals as this was more time efficient for the individuals involved.

### Data analysis

Collectively, information gained from both interviews and case files gave rich detail of the experiences of many of the young people of interest to the project. Figure 13.3 gives a visual representation of these journeys before, during and after secure or alternative accommodation, and this model was used in order to analyse the data and form the structure of the following sections.

While much interest lies in the shared experiences of young people, each young person who is or has been under a Secure Accommodation Order has lived through unique experiences. Throughout the following sections, both commonalities and significant outliers will be discussed to develop a full picture of these young people's experiences.

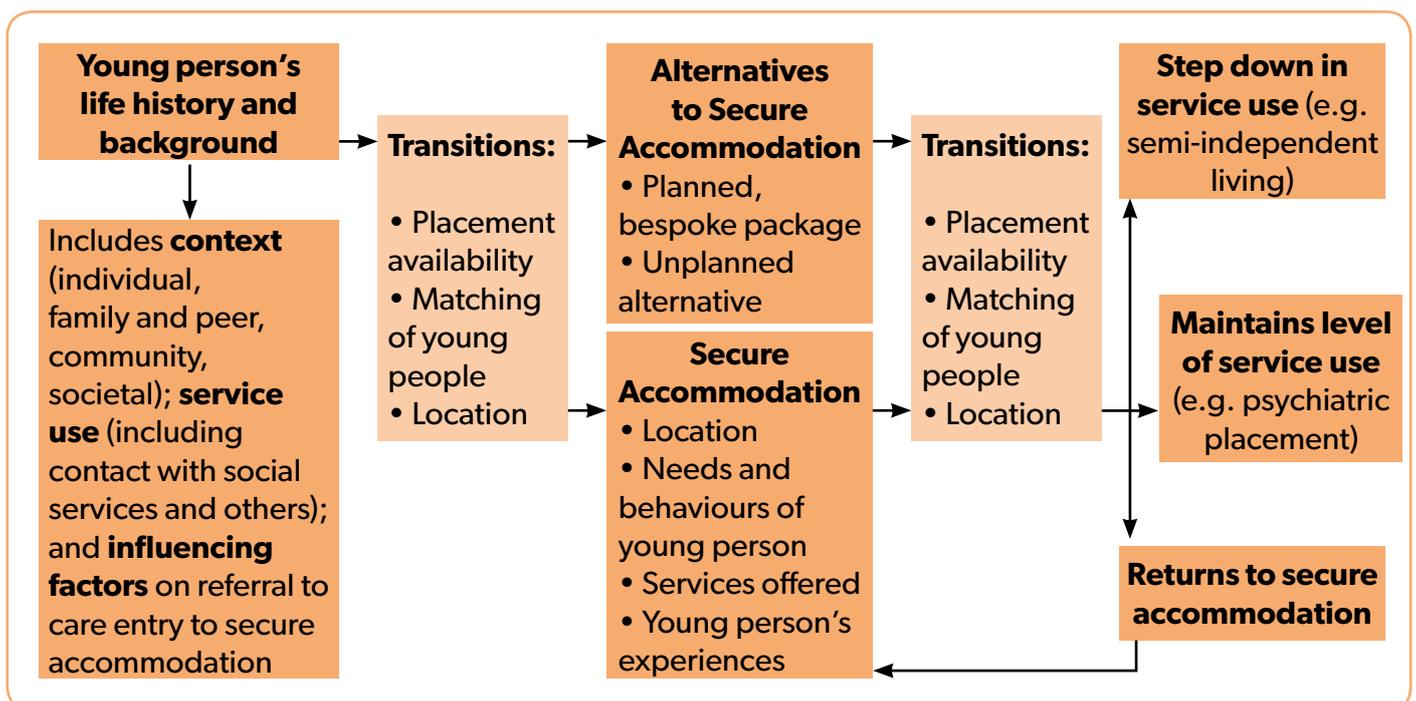


Figure 13.3: Young people's experiences before, during and after time in secure accommodation

## 13.2 File audit guide

<p>Background (each time if case closed)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Local authority</li> <li>• Age when first known to children’s services</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Family composition (siblings/adults in the household, etc.)</li> <li>• Reason for referral(s)?</li> <li>• Child in need (of care and support)?</li> <li>• Child Protection Register? Category?</li> <li>• What services were provided/accessed: when and for how long?</li> </ul>
<p>History of being ‘looked after’ Obtain this information for each episode of care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age when first entered care</li> <li>• Legal basis became ‘looked after’</li> <li>• Type of placement</li> <li>• Category of need</li> <li>• Length of time in care – until exit or placement in secure accommodation</li> <li>• Changes to legal status/placement/both during period in care (what? How many?)</li> <li>• In local authority of out of county?</li> </ul>
<p>Pre-cursors to entering secure accommodation (for each entry)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What event(s) led to an application for a Secure Accommodation Order?</li> <li>• What was done to manage these risks prior to application for an order?</li> <li>• Placement prior to admission to secure accommodation?</li> <li>• If the application was declined by the courts, why?</li> <li>• If placed in alternative provision to secure, what? And why?</li> </ul>
<p>Secure accommodation (for each instance)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age when placed in secure accommodation</li> <li>• What were young person and parent/carer views on secure accommodation placement – LAC review?</li> <li>• Where was the young person placed (in Wales/outside of Wales)?</li> <li>• How long was secure accommodation placement?</li> <li>• What were the intended identified outcomes for the secure accommodation placement?</li> </ul>
<p>Post secure accommodation (each exit from secure accommodation)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why was the decision made to end the secure accommodation placement?</li> <li>• Where was the young person placed on leaving secure accommodation?</li> <li>• What support needs were identified in plans?</li> <li>• What support was put in place following exit from secure accommodation?</li> <li>• What has happened between the end of secure accommodation placement and the end of the observation window?</li> </ul>
<p>People / Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAMHS – referrals/services accessed</li> <li>• YOT – known to youth offending?</li> <li>• Social workers</li> <li>• School</li> <li>• Health</li> </ul>

### 13.3 Interview schedules

#### 13.3.1 Research questions and prompts: Local authorities/other professionals

Question	Prompts
Can you tell us about your experience/knowledge of secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personally, in this local authority</li> <li>• What are the positives?</li> <li>• What are the problems with the current system?</li> </ul>
Can you tell me about the case of this young person?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When were they first known to social services?</li> <li>• Were there multiple occasions of intervention?</li> <li>• Did you have links with the young person's family or wider network?</li> </ul>
Can you tell me what support (to your knowledge) was offered to/used by the young person and their family before referral to secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care etc)</li> <li>• Mandatory/Statutory services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care, etc)</li> <li>• What kind of support were they given as a result?</li> <li>• What was the uptake of/engagement with this support like?</li> <li>• Were there any recognised needs that were not met?</li> <li>• Were there any key relationships that affected the young person's/family's journey at this time?</li> </ul>
Can you tell me about the transition of the young person into secure accommodation? What happened/how did it come about	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was the key trigger that led to young person's placing in secure accommodation?</li> <li>• How was that transition handled?</li> <li>• Who was involved? (Social services, wider agencies. family, the young person)</li> <li>• Was secure accommodation the preferred solution?</li> </ul>
Can you tell me what happened to the young person while in secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Actual experience in secure accommodation (where was it, how long were they there for)</li> <li>• What kind of support and therapy did the young person get in secure accommodation? (cross sector)</li> <li>• What was the young person's opinion of the time spent in secure accommodation? (Did it have positive/negative effects?)</li> <li>• Were there any key relationships formed during that time that have affected the young person's journey?</li> </ul>
(If the young person has left secure): How was the transition out of secure accommodation managed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where has the young person been since, and has/have this/these placements been suitable?</li> <li>• What support have they been given?</li> <li>• How far did the young person have agency in their own transition?</li> <li>• Has there been any improvement in the factors that led the YP to secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Are there any unmet needs for the young person?</li> <li>• Have there been any key relationships formed during this time that have affected/are affecting the young person's journey?</li> </ul>
Has what you've learnt through this young person's case affected your practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing what you know now, what could have been done differently for that young person?</li> <li>• Would that affect how you work with secure accommodation cases in the future?</li> </ul>
How would you change the current system? What would you like to see in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an ideal world...</li> <li>• Changes that can realistically be made</li> </ul>

### 13.3.2 Research questions and prompts: Young people

Question	Prompts
Can you tell us about yourself and your background?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell us about yourself</li> <li>• What three things are important to your identity/personality?</li> <li>• [Remember to refer back to this throughout interview]</li> </ul>
Can you tell me what support (to your knowledge) you and your family were offered before referral to secure accommodation? Did you use this support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care etc)</li> <li>• Mandatory/Statutory services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care, etc)</li> <li>• What kind of support was this?</li> <li>• Did you/your family engage with this support?</li> <li>• Did the support meet your needs? If not, what was missing?</li> <li>• Did you form any strong connections with those offering support?</li> </ul>
How did you come to be in secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think brought you to secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Do you understand/agree with the reasons you were given for being referred to secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Were you kept informed/listened to? By whom?</li> <li>• How did this make you feel?</li> </ul>
What was your experience of being in secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of support and therapy did you get in secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Has this support met your needs? What might have been missing?</li> <li>• Do you feel being in secure accommodation has had any particular positive/negative effects?</li> <li>• Were there any key relationships formed during that time that have affected your progression during/since?</li> <li>• What do you think could have been done differently?</li> </ul>
(If appropriate) How have things been for you since leaving secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What was your experience of leaving secure accommodation?</li> <li>• Did you feel prepared for leaving? Has anything in particular been easy/difficult?</li> <li>• Where have you been placed since, and how have you found it?</li> <li>• Have you had any input into the decisions made about where you are placed?</li> <li>• Do you think your time in secure accommodation has made a difference to these placements?</li> <li>• Have your needs been met (in terms of therapy, health education etc) since leaving?</li> </ul>
How would you change the current system? What would you like to see in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an ideal world...</li> <li>• Changes that can realistically be made</li> <li>• What advice would you give to a young person in your situation (before they entered secure accommodation)?</li> </ul>

### 13.3.3 Research questions and prompts: Parents/Guardians

Question	Prompts
Can you tell us about your family, and your relationship with the young person prior to their referral to secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the young person have siblings, and what is/was the overall family dynamic?</li> <li>• If there have been any tension points, what are these?</li> </ul>
Can you tell me what support you and your family were offered before referral to secure accommodation? Did you use this support?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voluntary services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care etc)</li> <li>• Mandatory/Statutory services used? (Across sectors, not just SW. So health, education, justice, social care etc)</li> <li>• What kind of support was this?</li> <li>• Did you/your family engage with this support?</li> <li>• Did the support meet your needs/the needs of the young person? If not, what was missing?</li> </ul>
Tell us more about the time leading up to the young person's move to secure accommodation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your view, what happened for young person to be in secure accommodation?</li> <li>• How was that transition handled?</li> <li>• Whose decision was it? Did you agree with the decision?</li> <li>• Do you think anything could have been done differently?</li> </ul>
How has your relationship been with the young person since their referral to secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has experience of young person in secure accommodation affected your relationship with them? (+ or -)</li> <li>• If so, what has changed?</li> </ul>
How do you now feel about the young person's time in secure accommodation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing what you know now, what could have been done differently for that young person?</li> <li>• Who may have been able to help with this?</li> <li>• Do you feel the young person's time in secure accommodation might affect your relationship with them in the future?</li> </ul>
How would you change the current system? What would you like to see in the future?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In an ideal world...</li> <li>• Changes that can realistically be made</li> </ul>

## 13.4 Information sheets

### 13.4.1 Information sheet: Local authorities

## Secure futures?

### Local Authority Information

We are inviting you to help Cardiff University in a research project exploring Welsh children & young people's use of Secure Children's Homes.

### Who is organizing and funding the research?

Social Care Wales are funding the project. The project is exploring the experiences of Welsh children and young people considered for or placed in Secure Children's Homes for welfare reasons. Within this, there is especial interest in understanding the experience and outcomes of children and young people from their own perspective.

### Why is this research needed?

The number of Welsh children and young people in Secure Children's Homes is increasing. The project seeks to understand:

- What brought these children into Secure Children's Homes,
- Whether their needs are supported and met by the interventions they receive,
- When and how decisions and plans are made for the future, following their time in Secure Children's Homes,
- The experiences of children and young people when they leave,
- The experiences of those with specific unique needs,
- What happened to children where orders have been made but no bed in a secure placement was available.

## Why has my LA been asked to take part?

Local Authorities are being asked to identify and contact children and young people in their care who have been considered for or used Secure Children's Homes (or an alternative) between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2018; tell them about the study and ask for permission for researchers to look at their case files and routine Local Authority data. If possible or appropriate Local Authorities will also be asked to contact birth parents and ask for permission for researchers to look at their children's case files and routine Local Authority data.

Further, it would be very helpful if Local Authorities could ask whether the child/young person would share their thoughts about Secure Children's Homes and experiences before and since with a researcher. Please let them know that this contact could be made in various ways: a meeting, documenting experiences or using media such as art: whatever they prefer.

Once permission has been obtained, a researcher will visit local authorities and obtain data from children's case files and the routinely collected administrative data (e.g. SSSDA903). In addition 25-50% of the children/young people will be selected to take part in the interviews etc. and will be contacted by the research team directly or through carers and residential staff.

### What are the possible risks?

There are no anticipated risks to Local Authorities or their staff.

If any of the information is not clear, or if you would like us to provide further information, please contact the lead researcher:

Dr Annie Williams

029 2087 4983

[williamsa55@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:williamsa55@cardiff.ac.uk)

Thanks for considering taking part in this research.

## 13.4.2 Information Sheet: Young People

### Secure Futures?

#### Information sheet

We would like you to help Cardiff University explore the experiences of Welsh children & young people referred to or using secure accommodation. To help you decide whether you will take part, you need to understand what the research is and what you taking part involves. This information sheet will tell you.

Each year more children and young people in Wales are using Secure accommodation . We want to understand why this is happening and how we can help prevent it. We also want to find out about what happens in Secure accommodation : whether the help you get is what you need; how plans are made for when you leave; if you have left, what happens then. Importantly we want to know are things good enough and if not how should they we changed?

The research has two parts. Firstly we would like to look at your Social Work files so we know what help you were offered before Secure accommodation and, if you are no longer there, the help afterwards. We would like to find out more about Secure accommodation – or if you didn't go there, about the home you were sent to – we can do this in a few ways: a one to one talk, in person or by phone; using computers, or using art, or if you have a different idea of how you could tell us about your experiences – tell us!

Everything we find out will be confidential, unless it is something we think puts you or anyone else in danger. You can decide to take part in our research or say no and that's OK. You can also decide to take part in both parts of the study or just say it's alright for us to look at your files. If you want to find out more about the study or ask questions you can contact Dr Annie Williams at [WilliamsA55@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:WilliamsA55@cardiff.ac.uk) or on 02920 688721, or if this is difficult ask a carer, keyworker or staff to contact her.

**Thanks for taking the time to read this!**

## Secure Futures?

### Understanding children and young people's experience of Secure Children's Homes in Wales

We are asking you to help Cardiff University explore Welsh children & young people's use of Secure Children's Homes. Before you decide whether you would like to take part or not, it is essential that you understand the research and what your involvement would be. Please read through the following carefully

#### Who is organizing and funding the research?

Social Care Wales are funding the project. The project is exploring the experiences of Welsh children and young people considered for or placed in Secure Children's Homes for welfare reasons. Within this, there is especial interest in understanding the experience and outcomes of children and young people from their own perspective.

#### Why is this research needed?

The number of Welsh children and young people in Secure Children's Homes is increasing. The project seeks to understand:

- What brought these children into Secure Children's Homes
- Whether their needs are supported and met by the interventions they receive,
- When and how decisions and plans are made for the future, following their time in Secure Children's Homes,
- The experiences of children and young people when they leave
- The experiences of those with specific unique needs
- What happened to children where orders have been made but no bed in a secure placement was available

#### What are the possible benefits?

The aim is to use this knowledge to shape practice and services in ways more likely to meet the needs of children and young people who use or are likely to use Secure Children's Homes.

#### Why have I been asked to take part?

Your child was considered for or has experience of using Secure Children's Homes. We would like your consent to look at your child's authority files as these hold information about the care and support you and your child received outside of Secure Children's Homes. It is also possible that we would like to talk to you about this, to hear what your experience was, the problems and how you think things could be changed or bettered.

#### Is taking part confidential?

All information you give is treated as completely confidential. Any records held in the university will not be able to be traced back to you

#### What happens if I decide to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw any anytime with no negative consequences to you or your child.

#### What are the possible risks?

We understand that talking about these family events and experiences may upset you, and we will be happy to give you a leaflet containing contact details for support agencies.

If any of the information is not clear, or if you would like us to provide further information, please contact the lead researcher:

Dr Annie Williams

029 2087 4983

[williamsa55@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:williamsa55@cardiff.ac.uk)

**Thanks for considering taking part in this research**