

# Unauthorised Absence Among Looked After Young People: A Mentoring Perspective

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## Abstract

Looked after children and young people (LACYP) are identified by the Department of Health (DH) as one of the most disadvantaged groups in Northern Ireland (NI), who exhibit a regular pattern of non-attendance at school, and who are likely to experience poorer educational outcomes. Aim: To understand why there are higher rates of unauthorised absence from school among post-primary LACYP. Using a qualitative approach, the school and educational experiences of LACYP were explored using the perspective of a group of mentors from the Voices of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) Mentoring Project. Six participants took part in semi-structured one to one interviews which were then analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). The study revealed LACYP face a number of social challenges relating to their school attendance, including stigma and bullying as a direct result of their care status. They were described as having difficult relationships with peers and teachers that were not conducive to a positive school experience. Education authorities and schools were viewed as contributing to the problem due to disciplinary measures. Additionally features of the care system compounded the issue through placement instability and the parenting style of corporate parents. Education and care authorities must find ways of collaborative working to ensure the educational needs of these young people are met. While trauma associated with pre-care experiences can impede school attendance, authorities must recognise and address how they 'look after' those in their care, and how their actions can contribute to the problem.

## Keywords

Children in Care, Education, School

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## 1. Introduction

The education of LACYP has been of concern for many decades with a growing body of literature detailing consistently poor educational experiences and under achievement identifying the longer-term impact this can have [1- 4]. A range of factors has been proposed to explain the low educational attainment of these children and young people. Some authors have suggested that pre-care experiences of looked after children and young people may disadvantage them particularly when an unstable, chaotic home environment can impact on their access to school; for

example, higher numbers of looked after children are excluded from school, many are identified as having Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD) and other types of Special Educational Needs (SEN) [5, 6]. Other research suggests that the structural features of the care system, including placement type and placement instability, can greatly influence educational outcomes [1, 7]. Evidence also indicates that children placed in foster or kinship care are more likely to have favourable educational outcomes in comparison to children who live in residential settings, with some authors identifying the negative influence of peers as a deterrent to educational progress [8]. Placement changes, which are a common occurrence for many LACYP, have

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been identified as disruptive and unsettling; they can often lead to changing school, which further undermines the opportunity for a consistent educational experience [9]. In addition, the importance of safeguarding the physical and emotional needs of LACYP and maintaining family relationships can all lower the priority status given to education by social services [1, 10].

Children who are looked after are a very small proportion of school populations (usually less than 1%), they are recurrently identified as a vulnerable and marginalised group which requires Education Authorities (EA) to record and monitor their progress [11]. However, their educational needs can be easily overlooked and training and awareness on the particular circumstances of LACYP are an enduring under-developed aspect of teacher education [12, 13]. Research has indicated a crucial lack of communication and co-ordination between education and social services departments, with the result that educational needs are often overlooked due to poor or incomplete information management. For example, some social services departments do not hold central records of the schools attended by LACYP, while schools may be unaware that they have LACYP on their register or are unfamiliar with who to inform if they have concerns about performance or behaviour [5, 6, 14]. In an attempt to address these issues Personal Education Plans (PEP) were introduced to specifically focus on educational outcomes for LACYP in the UK [15]. A PEP is developed by a nominated teacher with input from other relevant professionals and also in consultation with the young person which identifies educational targets and attainment over time so that areas of difficulty can be identified as early as possible. Crucially the PEP can offer some continuity if a child moves to a different school and serves to clarify communication between the relevant professionals involved in their lives. A phased introduction of non-statutory PEPs began in Northern Ireland in 2011; by 2014 over three quarters (77%) had a PEP in place and one third of care leavers also had a PEP by 2016.

Data shows recurrently low trends in the educational attainment LACYP. For example, in 2015/16, a third (33%) of NI carer leavers left school with no qualifications; this was the highest figure recorded since 2010/11 [11]. By law, all children in NI must attend full time education from the age of 4 to 16 years. Pupil attendance rates are gathered from an annual school census and absence is recorded as either authorised or unauthorised. If non-attendance is without permission, it is recorded as unauthorised absence from school. Schools are required to record the reason for absence and have a responsibility to take action if regular attendance rates are reduced to 85% per school year.

Attendance at school amongst post-primary LACYP has been identified as a significant concern with these pupils typically

missing higher than average amounts of time in school in comparison to non-looked after pupils. Non-attendance rates recorded from 2009 to 2017 indicated that days missed and recorded as unauthorised absence were almost three times higher for LACYP than the general pupil population (6.9% in comparison to 2.5%) [16]. Due to the consistently low attendance rates of LACYP, the Department of Education Northern Ireland commissioned a research project to investigate how the education system could make improvements at post primary school level [17]. This was a significant research project aimed at helping the Department consider how they could best support looked after pupils to reach better attendance rates overall. The report identified a number of key factors impacting attendance; these factors demonstrated the complexity of LACYP's circumstances, and included influences such as peer pressure to stay away from school, persistent disruptive behaviour leading to exclusion, underlying social and personal issues, difficulties affecting access to learning due to SEN, socioeconomic background, and placement type and placement stability. Interestingly, the findings established that higher attendance rates were associated with stable placements and foster care [17].

The Department for Education in Northern Ireland and the Health and Social Care Trusts have a legal obligation to ensure that the educational needs of a looked after child or young person are met, however their poor school attendance rates and consistently lowered educational attainment continue to be problematic [17, 11]. Additionally, higher levels of unauthorised absence among LACYP are of concern due to the association with at-risk behaviours. Their care status means that these children and young people are already vulnerable, so where they are and what they are doing when not at school merits attention. Without suitable age appropriate adult supervision or support during school hours, the associated overall risks escalate and compound each other. It is therefore important that these authorities explore and seek to understand why school attendance is more difficult for LACYP and how appropriate policies and strategies that address the educational needs of these children and young people can be improved.

The aims of the current research were to explore post-primary looked after young people's reasons for higher rates of unauthorised absence from school, their educational experiences, what might be helpful, and what might not be helpful in addressing this problem.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Design

An exploratory, qualitative design using semi-structured, one

to one interviews.

## 2.2. Participants

Participant inclusion criteria were limited to those currently

mentoring a looked after young person who had a history of unauthorised absence from school. Six mentors volunteered to take part in the study. Details were recorded of the gender, age and placement type of young people (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Participant demographic profile.

Participant	Gender of Mentor	Gender of Mentee (s)	Age of mentee (s)	Mentee placement type
a	Male	Male	14	Foster care
b	Female	Female	14	Children's Home
c	Male	Male	14	Children's Home
d	Male	Male	12	Children's Home
e	Female	Female	14	Foster care
f	Male	2 Males	14/14	Children's Home x 2

## 2.3. Ethical Implications

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the University of Ulster Research and Ethics Filter Committee.

## 2.4. Procedural Details

Recruitment was facilitated by VOYPIC Development Workers who circulated an information sheet detailing the research project among mentors currently engaged in the Mentoring Project. Mentors who volunteered to take part were then contacted and arrangements made for them to attend an interview.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

Each interview recording was transcribed verbatim.

Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) was then conducted on each of the interview transcripts based on the recommendations of Braun and Clarke (2006). This began with familiarisation of the data by reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews, noting down initial ideas, grouping interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating groups into potential themes, and then finally generating clear definitions and names for each theme.

## 3. Results

Thematic analysis identified five broad themes and ten sub-themes as outlined and described in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Description of themes and sub-themes generated.

Themes	Sub -themes	Description
<i>School refusal</i>	Resistance Control	Young people were described as refusing to attend school, which was demonstrated in their unauthorised absence. Participants' described the resistance young people expressed as emotionally charged, and that not attending school was the one area of their lives over which they could exert control. This was in response to feeling that other areas of their lives were beyond their control.
<i>Difficult inter-personal relationships at school</i>	Peers Teachers	Participants identified young people as having difficult relationships with both peers and teachers at school. School peers were known to bully young people because they were in care, and relationships with teachers were challenging due to a lack of understanding and emotional difficulties.
<i>Moving placement</i>	Placement type Frequency	Moving care placement had a major impact on young people attending school, in terms of frequency and placement type. Some young people had several placement changes in a short space of time, with residential care having a negative impact due to the influence of other looked after young people's non-attendance, while foster carers could not enforce school attendance.
<i>Parenting style</i>	Motivation Consequences	Participants expressed frustration at their perception that care givers were permissive in their approach to managing unauthorised absence. They interpreted this response as a lack of interest in young people's educational needs. They felt no one was trying to motivate their mentee educationally and no consequence for non-attendance.
<i>Mentoring can help</i>	Relationships Goals	The mentoring relationship was described by all participants as having a beneficial effect for mentees, even if it wasn't always apparent at the time. The goal setting methods used to address school attendance were helpful, while having an emotional relationship helped to build their young person's confidence and aspirations.

Theme 1. School Refusal: Mentors described their young person's unauthorised absence from school as a form of school refusal. When young people were expected to go to school, they presented with a strong emotional reaction leading to emotionally charged conversations, with anger and resistance frequently expressed:

Participant 3b: *...it was just a complete arguing session to get her out to school...*

Participant 3c: *...he just refused to go...*

Participant 3g: *...the young person would've said you know I don't need to go...*

One mentor explained how he felt his mentee refused to go to school as a form of resistance because often for care experienced young people, their lives can feel beyond their control:

Participant 3d: *...it's just what he can control if he can go I'm not going to school and someone goes right okay and he gets his way cause he's no like decision making...*

Theme 2. Difficult inter-personal relationships at school: The relationships young people had with others they came into contact with at school were described as difficult, which contributed to recurrent non-attendance. Four participants described how their mentee was bullied by their peers at school:

Participant 3e: *...she was getting called names you know "you're a whore you're a slut ", and I think that put her off going to school she was getting bullied...*

Participant 3a: *...he was getting abuse from other people in the school they were bullying him and calling him stupid...he would've lost his temper and then got into fights...*

Participant 3g: *...my young person it worked out that the fact was he was being bullied...*

While bullying is a common experience for many children in NI schools, being in care was classified as being different and was often used by the bullies to target young people:

Participant 3a: *...he had told someone he knew in school a friend someone he confided in them and told them he was in care apparently they did not know beforehand so that wasn't an issue but then it transpired that he was getting difficulty....*

Participant 3g: *...he was being bullied because he was in care so sometimes that stigma is attached of being in care...*

Mentors also reported that poor relationships with teachers did little to encourage young people to attend school and young people believed their teachers did not view them in a positive way:

Participant 3b: *...she felt she was in a class were she felt they weren't really given enough attention...*

Participant 3e: *...I think that she always felt that she was the victim from the teachers the teachers didn't like her and singled her out and that was her idea anyway and she didn't like any of her teachers...*

Theme 3. Moving care placement: Some mentors stated that movement between care placements had influenced their young person's non-attendance at school. For example, one participant explained how their mentee had frequent placement changes that were not only generally disruptive but also meant the current placement was quite a distance from school:

Participant 3d: *...he was in a foster placement and then he was in a children's home and then he was in the mental health unit he was in there and then moved to a different children's home and like they've moved him again so he's kinda been moved all over the show...his school is quite far away from his placement and they didn't want him to move school but it's quite difficult...it's just his school is in A and he lives in B and that's a fair jaunt...you'd have to be up at 6...so I can't imagine getting him out of his bed at 6 in the morning...*

In contrast, another mentor described how moving placement meant that his mentee had to change schools which had a negative impact on him:

Participant 3c: *...he'd just moved into a home at the start...he was living with a foster family...he seemed to like school and then completely refused to go I don't know if it was the fear of starting a new school...he would talk about his old school that he went to sometimes and he would talk about his interactions with teachers particularly the teachers who he enjoyed being in their class and he'd talk about the teachers who were a laugh and good craic...*

In a further observation, a mentor explained how he saw a change in his mentee's behaviour which he attributed this to the influence of his peers when he was placed in a children's home:

Participant 3a: *...he was then moved from his foster care home...he went to a children's home and he met with a young girl there who was 14 a similar age to him and she was quite disruptive to say the least running away from the home drinking getting in trouble with the police and then he started doing the same things...*

Theme 4. Parenting style: Half of the mentors considered that there was no-one in the young person's life who really cared about their education and that this lack of significant adults who could motivate them to go to school or engage in education fuelled their non-attendance:

Participant 3e: *...the lack of interest in school was because there was no-one there to push her...*

Participant 3c: *...he wasn't going to school and what I found really hard to sort of comprehend was that there was no-one trying to make him go...*

Participant 3a: *...there was no-one there saying you have to do this do that you have to be here at a certain time there was no-one doing that...*

These mentors also stated that since there was no obvious consequence for non-attendance, going to school reduced even further in importance

Participant 3d: *...he's getting away with not going...*

One mentor attributed this to their mentee's placement in residential care, suggesting carers were not able or not permitted to put a consequence in place, while another felt the temporary nature of the foster placement for their young person meant that consequences could not be consistently enforced:

Participant 3g: *...a young person who is in residential care who decides to not get up and go to school in the morning there's no consequences for them you know they don't get grounded they can't be told off because residential staff's hands are tied...there's no consequences the young person still gets to go on activities their pocket money so there's no reason for them to go basically...*

Participant 3e: *...she was in foster care and foster care is so temporary it's not permanent for her she didn't know how long she was going to be there it is different like if you were in a more permanent set up then there would be more consequences but no not really not that I could see...*

Theme 5. Mentoring can help: All mentors described their relationship with their mentee as having had a positive impact. They agreed that the nature of these one to one relationships, where the mentor took an interest in their young persons' life showed that they genuinely cared; this helped young people realise they were valued and could achieve their goals:

Participant 3a: *...for once he was being given one on one attention and he was being complimented on everything he did he was told how good he was at things because he wasn't being told and he told me that he said no-one ever tells me I'm good at this I'm good at that and I said well I'm telling you you're good at it it's absolutely amazing you could see it taking a real impact on him and it also made me feel good it gave me a lot of satisfaction seeing him change to the point where he was starting to go to school on a regular basis....*

Mentors found the significance of the one to one relationship, allowed young people to have experiences that were just for them, and provide something that had often been missing from their lives:

Participant 3b: *...she needed someone to show her to give her some of her own attention without her carer being divided between everybody and I think just the fact that someone was shown her attendance someone just giving her her own attention seemed to have mattered a lot to her...I think she just needed that one person where she could say oh I have this mentor who is really who's just there for me so I think that there was a really big thing for her as well and to know that I wanted her to do well very much and that she'd see the benefits of it you know...*

The time spent together with each mentee created genuine

opportunities for young people to talk about their circumstances and feelings at length, and for the mentor to visually and verbally demonstrate that what they said was important and that they were being heard:

Participant 3g: *...the young person I worked with felt that everyone was always on his case and no one was listening to him you know that kind of way I was seeing it from his point of view and asking him how he felt and what it is he wanted...*

Mentors believed the goal setting strategies focusing on attendance at school were helpful particularly when a series of small goals were identified. This incremental approach allowed young people to establish a series of gradual steps that were more realistic and achievable.

Participant 3b: *...one of the goals we talked about was her attendance and we put that as our number one goal and we put it to see if she could go from that meeting til our next meeting until her summer exams in June and she succeeded you know went right through and didn't miss it and each week it was constant praise and then she was coming to the meetings and she's still coming to the meetings and the first thing she'll say is "I haven't missed any days"...*

Interestingly, it was agreed the mentoring relationship could have a positive impact on the young people even when the goal setting in terms of school attendance had failed:

Participant 3c: *...he bought into it really well and I mean obviously there's always going to be a couple of issues when he didn't turn up but most of the time he did turn up and engaged well when he was out with me...*

Participant 3e: *...the girl I mentor does come to me with all her problems...but she's informed now and that's all you can do at the end of the day she has the information...*

## 4. Discussion

The participants in this study revealed a wealth of insight into the lives of their mentee and, through their experiences working with a looked after young person, they have added further depth of understanding to the emotional and practical components of their lives that contributed to non-attendance at school. Mentors spent regular amounts of time with these young people, developing an emotional relationship based on respect and trust and it was through this that they were able to use strategies to focus on improving attendance.

Young people were described as *refusing* to attend school and their non-attendance without permission was one manifestation of this refusal. This is a unique insight and an important finding. School refusal differs from unauthorised absence in that it can suggest high levels of anxiety in a



young person in terms of their attendance. While it is not classified within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual DSM-5, school refusal is nonetheless identified as a symptom of anxiety-based disorders such as separation anxiety, generalised anxiety, panic disorder and social anxiety among children and young people [18]. Why looked after young people present with school refusal is a complex behaviour, based on a broad range of factors that could contribute to anxiety including pre-care and current care experiences. Mentors associated the bullying their mentee encountered in the school environment as a major reason for their refusal to attend. The victimization that occurs as a result of bullying behaviours is known to contribute to feelings of low self-esteem and fear which both highly correlate with anxiety disorders [19]. Studies exploring the effects of bullying in schools report the intense fear victims experience in the presence of the perpetrator both of the threat or action of physical and psychological attack [20]. The response of many individuals exposed to these types of experiences and the associated anxiety, is to seek ways of avoiding them, so in cases of school refusal in this sample, young people may be refusing to attend in order to avoid the bullies which is an understandable reaction to this situation. Avoidance behaviours are a common response among those identified as having an anxiety disorder as a way of managing emotional distress and it makes sense that in order to protect or maintain wellbeing a situation or person would be avoided. However, avoidance behaviours are problematic as a long-term strategy, particularly when they result in reinforcement of the source of the anxiety and if it means missing something important such as education [21]. Sustained avoidance through non-attendance means that young people also miss out on opportunities to learn and develop socially and emotionally, which is of such fundamental importance to their development and psychological wellbeing, that it is enshrined in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29.

It was interesting that one mentor described their mentee's school refusal as a response to feelings other aspects of their life are beyond their control. Many studies involving looked after children and young people have identified their desire for more influence, choice and control as they navigate their care pathway. The findings of this study also suggest difficult relationships with teachers may have contributed to anxiety particularly as mentees believed teachers were either too authoritarian in their approach, or they did not like them. Both of these scenarios are unproductive because they reinforced the young person's decision to not attend. The quality of the teacher / pupil relationship is an important predictor in educational outcomes. When viewed through the lens of Attachment Theory in the absence of a secure

attachment to a teacher, a young person can feel anxiety if they are suspicious of others, are unable to find comfort in relationships or generally feel unsafe in their environment. Pupils need to feel safe and secure to be best placed to learn and without these factors young people may struggle to focus or achieve educationally. This relationship is especially important for young people who are being bullied at school and its absence is likely to exacerbate fear and anxiety of the school environment.

Further compounding the issue of nonattendance was the impact of moving care placement. Frequent placement changes have been an enduring criticism of the care system for many decades and are sufficiently disruptive and distressing for young people they are recognised as an indicator for emotional harm [22]. Even if circumstances in a current placement have broken down and moving is the best option, young people may still experience the effects of separation from carers, parents, siblings, peers, school and their wider community. Despite the recognition that placement instability is a key problem for looked after children and young people, it continues to be the experience of many young people.

Mentors also viewed placement type as having a potentially detrimental impact on a young person's school attendance. Group residential settings where young people lived with other looked after peers seemed to be a significant influence on school attendance, particularly if they noticed others engaging in unauthorised absences. Residential care home placement is known to be the least preferred option by local authorities because those placed in these settings tend to have poorer educational and health outcomes. However, in the absence of suitable foster care arrangements, sometimes this is the only option to ensure that at least some of the needs of young people are met. A significant issue that residential settings present is that young people coming from diverse difficult backgrounds and pre-care experiences are grouped together; often, this can serve to escalate existing problems and lead to the development of further challenges. When a young person first moves to a residential unit - either upon entry to the care system or as the result of a move from a previous placement - they have usually experienced a period of difficulty or trauma for a variety of reasons which has resulted in separation from their family or carers. Many formerly looked after children report feeling fearful when moving into a residential setting; there are lots of people to get to know, navigation of new rules and new relationships, alongside peers experiencing similar difficulties and having to come to terms with their own individual circumstances. For young people this can be a chaotic and distressing experience. The mentors in this study highlighted the impact of peers living in residential units as negatively influencing

their mentees' behaviour towards school attendance which they believed exacerbated existing difficulties. Research evidence of the effect of a child's peer group on their social and academic development indicates it is influential factor in school attendance [23, 24]. It would also be conceivable that young people living in group residential settings would experience the same peer influence that can happen at school along with the desire to fit in and be accepted socially, even if the outcome is negative behaviour.

Mentors identified the ways in which they perceived the management of nonattendance by care givers in both foster and residential placements, as unhelpful. They viewed these strategies as doing little to promote school attendance or motivate engagement in education. What mentors described was the parenting style of caregivers who look after young people on a day to day basis, and their perceptions that responses to nonattendance were permissive and uninvolved. It is not clear from these findings if these responses were due to a lack of disposition towards education or if these were a result of the level of pressure experienced by carers that mean education has a lower priority status. Research on the effect of parenting styles on children has made associations with a variety of child outcomes. In particular, parenting style has been found to predict child well-being in the domains of social competence, academic performance, psychosocial development, and problem behaviour.

For LACYP it is important to remember the impact of those acting in a parental capacity and how this influences their educational progression. Managing unauthorised absence from school is complex for carers because of the range of challenges that young people are experiencing in other areas of their lives. If non-attendance is due to an underlying anxiety disorder then therapeutic intervention is often required. However based on the findings of this study it is worth considering if caregivers are in fact limited in their parenting style with children in care and how this can impact the quality of care they can provide. As corporate parents all those involved in a looked after young person's life should share the same principles they would want the same for their own biological children yet this was not the perception of mentors in this study who perceived a disregard for education among carers. Some authors suggest this may be due to structural features of the care system and placement instability that contribute to the lower priority status given to education by social services [1]. In 2012, a report produced by the Northern Ireland Association of Social Workers (NIASW) highlighted that social workers spent less than a third of their working week with young people in their care, due to the extreme pressure on social workers as a result of increased demands on services and an overall reduction in administrative staff. This meant that time previously spent

providing preventative and therapeutic support was outweighed by the growing number of referrals, cuts to services and increased bureaucracy associated with the social work profession. In 2014 UNISON publically appealed to the government to provide urgent funding to child protection services as social workers struggled to keep up with the demand. Budget cuts have led to social work shortages, and existing resources focusing on crisis management rather than early intervention. Additionally welfare cuts, and rising child poverty has meant social workers are under constant pressure to close cases and look for the cheapest placement options, rather than focus on what would be in the best interests of a child or young person. For looked after children and young people, this can have serious and long lasting consequences if authorities are experiencing difficulties providing high-quality services that can consistently meet all development needs including education.

Mentors voiced frustration at the way in which not going to school was managed by caregivers and how this made their efforts to promote education more difficult. The frustration many participants expressed was due to the emotional connection they had developed with their mentee. All reported the benefits for young people, even if the goal setting techniques used didn't succeed. Mentors described how they sought to engage with their young person over time and to demonstrate that they cared about their mentee's wellbeing. Mentors believed it was quality of the relationship that had a positive impact on young people, and research has shown this relationship can build much needed resilience among young people. There is growing evidence that mentoring is of particular benefit for looked after young people not only in core areas such as education, but that the positive effects of the relationship can have a 'spill over' effect into other areas of their lives including, family, care setting, peers, school, workplace and leisure activities. This effect is thought to occur due to improved feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy and ability which the mentor validates through close contact with their mentee to provide positive, constructive and personal attention. The mentoring relationship between a non-parental carer and young person has the potential to be life changing, suggesting this occurs through a range of mediating processes including changes to personal and social development, cognitive development and identity development. The findings from this study in relation to mentoring lends support to the growing evidence base that mentoring can make a positive contribution to the lives and outcomes of young people in care within and beyond education, this demonstrates the potential level of trust and openness that can develop, that allows healthy developmental processes to occur. It is helpful to remember the circumstances of the young people in this study as

individual's experiencing or recently experiencing significant change, distress or chaotic circumstances. Through the opportunity to have a positive experience with an adult that helps them to learn and grow as individuals, this has the potential to a compensatory effect for past adversity that has led to or caused by events prompting admission to the care system.

## 5. Conclusion

The time span of the mentoring project in this study was limited to one year and some authors suggest the time span of a mentoring relationship is correlated with increased positive outcomes. This has been seen in naturally occurring mentoring relationships not limited to a particular project, but stem from either existing relationships i.e. an older sibling or family member, social worker or education practitioner. It is evident that these relationships strengthen over time but with a limit of one year is this long enough to have a positive, sustained impact. It can take time for change to occur within the mentoring relationship but this means that young people are better positioned to develop the resilience to overcome the challenges of their pre-care and care experiences, so that by the time they exit the care system they have the practical and emotional skills to make their own way in the world.

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