

Feeling Good

Supporting resilience in young people
in Foyers in England

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About the author

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Acknowledgments

I agreed that I would maintain the confidentiality of the Foyer staff and young people who have participated in this project. Nonetheless, I would like them and others to know how grateful I am that they have been so generous and trusting in expressing their views and telling their stories. The meetings with young people were incredibly educational and fun. I hope I have represented their views accurately and in such a way that others can learn from and be inspired by their insights.

Eric Carlin
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1. Introduction

The Foyer Federation develops and encourages new approaches to supporting young people who have faced barriers in their lives as they make the transition to adulthood. For nearly two decades, the Foyer Federation have worked mainly through a network of over 100 accredited, integrated learning and accommodation providers, known as Foyers, who re-connect up to 10,000 young people a year between the ages of 16 – 25 with personal development, education, training and employment opportunities.

Young people living in Foyers come from a range of backgrounds including those who have had experiences of care and those with a history of offending. Many young people living in Foyers have also experienced significant barriers to health and well-being, ranging from poor levels of nutrition, lack of physical activity and emotional and mental health issues.

The Foyer Health Programme is a three year £2.3 million programme focused on Foyers across England and funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Well-Being Programme. It has increased the skills, resources and opportunities that young need to make a healthy transition to adulthood.

This report was commissioned by the Foyer Federation to conduct research on resilience, in particular the factors that build resilience in young people, and the impact that this would have on the Foyer as a physical environment.

Feeling Good: Supporting resilience in young people in Foyers in England summarises the findings from a qualitative research project conducted in five Foyers across England between January and May 2010.

The focus of the research was to find out from Foyer residents what they believe would contribute to helping them develop and maintain resilience¹ in the face of adversity and to make recommendations so that Foyers can reference their practice against the evidence base from academic literature and the views and perceptions of residents.

Although a considerable amount of information was gathered from Foyer staff, this has been treated as secondary information, to help guide the researcher so as to have the most effective interactions with young people, so that their views dominate.

At the end of this report is a summary of recommendations which will help Foyers and the Foyer Federation reference their service provision and practice to the literature and young people's assessments of important resilience-encouraging components.

2. Methodology

First of all, a literature review was conducted to understand what resilience is and what researchers have concluded are key components in helping to support and maintain resilient behaviours in young people.

Having completed the literature review, field research was carried out in five Foyers across England, in very diverse locations. The intention was to:

- ▶ get a sense of the environment
- ▶ meet key staff
- ▶ meet young people either in focus groups or in other circumstances which would fit with their normal day to day activities.

It was agreed with the participants in the research that in this report neither the five individual Foyers nor the people who took part would be identified. The Foyers were all around the same size, with 50 – 70 residents. The table at the bottom of this page summarises other background information.

▶ In advance, advice was sought from Foyer managers about the best times to visit, how to advertise for residents' involvement, how to ensure attendance and how to help get young people to engage most effectively. Where appropriate, posters were produced and advertised in prominent positions. Focus groups were held in four of the locations. In the fifth Foyer one-to-one meetings took place in a common area with young people and there was also a group discussion with young people who were gathered there.

▶ In two Foyers both night and day staff took part in the research; in the others, only day staff.

▶ In advance, managers were asked to advise on what they thought were the top five² positive things that they and their staff believe Foyers give their young people.

▶ In focus groups, small groups and individually, according to appropriateness in each context, ground rules were set and agreed, stressing the intention to hear about positive things, about supporting motivation, success and achievement.

▶ Picking up on some of the key themes in the literature, discussions with the young people were facilitated to discuss:

- what they have in common with each other
- what makes them feel good about themselves
- what makes them feel that they are managing or in control of their lives
- what makes them feel hopeful about the future.

Where necessary young people were prompted so as to explore how they obtain and share information – an important factor in building and maintaining resilience.

▶ The five positive things that staff believe they give young people to support resilience were shared and the young people were asked to rate these and to discuss their reasons.

▶ Finally, the young people discussed what they thought Foyers could do to be more effective in supporting resilient behaviours.

Foyer Number	Number of staff surveyed	Number of young people surveyed	Observations
1	7	8 (3 female, 5 male)	Midlands, inner-city location. Security seemed top priority. Modern, well-maintained facility.
2	6	8 (1 female, 7 male)	South coast, small town location. Well-maintained facility.
3	6	3 (1 female, 2 male)	London suburban location. Modern, well-maintained facility.
4	6	7 (5 female, 2 male)	Outskirts of Southern market town location. Modern, well-maintained facility.
5	2	8 (3 female, 5 male)	Outskirts of Northern, post-industrial town location. Modern, well-maintained facility.



3. Literature review

As follows, three key areas are explored in the literature on resilience.

What constitutes 'resilience' needs to be defined more precisely and consistently.

Both in the literature and in public discourse, definitions of 'resilience' are often imprecise. For example, the Young Foundation has used the term interchangeably with 'well-being' and with 'happiness' (Bacon N. et al. 2010, P. 50). As a dynamic and multifaceted phenomenon, the term 'resilience' derives from Latin roots meaning, "to jump (or bounce) back". Thus, it is not a synonym for 'well-being' or 'happiness' as, for example, for its existence to be confirmed, the person or persons (or communities) being described would have to have shown a 'rebounding' response, strengthened and more resourceful to significant adversity, misfortune, trauma, or other crises, risk or other negative experiences (Secombe K. 2002, P. 385), (Orthner D.K. et al 2002, P. 159). 'Resilience' has been characterised as 'coping', maintaining internal or external equilibrium using activities or thought, and as signifying 'recovery' in the face of trauma such as abuse or injury. It has been defined as the presence of protective factors or processes that moderate the relationship between stress and risk, on the one hand, and coping or competence on the other (Smith C. & Carlson B.E. 1997, P. 236). As well as being loosely used as a general term it has been argued that there has been an unhelpful lack of precision about what kind of resilience is being described in different contexts. For example, resilience to overcome adversity in education is not the same as emotional resilience which is not the same as behavioural resilience (Luthar S.S. et al 2000, P. 548).

Keeping it simple and precise, perhaps the most useful definitions are those which describe a *dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity*. Within this context, *positive adaptation* might be evidenced, for example, in terms of manifested competence, or success, in achieving the appropriate developmental task at different stages in life. Measures of young people's general competence might include, for instance, assessments of academic attainment and behavioural adjustment, which have been established as the most consistent childhood predictors of adult adjustment in the world of work, family life and health. *Adversity* might

be typically identified with risk, encompassing genetic, biological, psychological, or socioeconomic factors that are associated with increased risk of maladjustment (Schoon I. & Bynner J. 2003, P. 22).

Resilience is also developmental and what makes someone resilient in one context and at one time and in relation to a specific factor may not support the same outcome in another context. Just as most life crises involve a complex set of changing conditions with a past history and a future course, the ability to be resilient requires development and adaptation over time (Walsh F. 1998, P. 137). Resilience entails more than merely surviving, getting through, or escaping a harrowing ordeal. Survivors are not necessarily resilient; some become trapped in a position as victims, nursing their wounds and blocked from growth by anger and blame whereas, in contrast, "the qualities of resilience enable people to heal from painful wounds, take charge of their lives, and go on to live fully and love well" (Walsh F. 1998, P. 4). Within this framework a resilient person is deemed neither to be totally self-sufficient nor invulnerable. Rather he or she is able to develop openness and relations with others which can support successful outcomes.

There is an overwhelming (and imbalanced) emphasis on individual agency to act rather than on social and structural factors which can influence the development of resilience in young people.

It has been argued that some models of resilience are more social than others; where governments have operated within a welfarist framework more priority has been given to initiatives to eradicate child poverty and to improve access to education and employment, but those governments which have focused more on attempting to reduce state welfare spending, the emphasis has been on encouraging the development of skills that might enable the individual to thrive in a competitive world (Robb M. 2007, P. 204).

However, most of the literature on resilience comes from the field of psychiatry and developmental psychology in the USA and is influenced by socio-cultural and political beliefs prevalent there, including a tradition of emphasising the individual's ability both to take responsibility for the situation one finds oneself in and to overcome obstacles to success. Individual-level factors which have been cited as possibly being able to support resilience in the face of poverty, have

included personality traits and dispositions, family protective and recovery factors and community strengths. However, these may place the likelihood of a person's resilience on unique, situational or random experience and downplay structural and societal factors (Secombe K. 2002, P. 388). Moreover, it has been argued that the literature is often strongly inflected with normative, middle-class values in its precise specification of developmental factors (Howard S. et al 1999, P. 317). Secombe has railed against the individualist tendency in the analysis of resilience:

"the widely held view of resilience as an individual disposition, family trait, or community phenomenon is insufficient...resiliency cannot be understood or improved in significant ways by merely focusing on...individual-led factors. Instead, careful attention must be paid to the structural deficiencies in our society and to the social policies that families need in order to become stronger, more competent, and better functioning in adverse circumstances. Poverty is a social problem, not merely a personal one, and meaningful solutions and ways of coping must be structural in nature" (Secombe K. 2002, P. 388).

Others, in agreement, have argued that the overwhelming emphasis on individual agency to change circumstances increases the likelihood that inequalities will be maintained, (Bacon N. et al 2010) and that there will continue to be a neglect of consideration of structural factors which disadvantage some young people (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, P. 6), (Howard S. et al 1999, Pp. 308-309). Within this context, 'deficit model' children or families will continue to be seen as being deficient in some way and success or failure of families and individuals will continue to be deemed to result from strengths or deficits within individuals or families (Walsh F. 1998, P. 12). Specialist 'resilience' programmes will also continue to focus only on enhancing life skills while ignoring the need to address structural inequalities (Bacon N. et al 2010, P. 51).

There is a questioning and exploration of what supports the development of resilience in young people.

It has been posited that in late modern society the old institutions of industrial society – family, community and social class – have been undermined by the process of global modernisation, making it necessary for each individual to navigate society for him or herself (Smith J. 2005, P. 167).

Resilient youth, "exposed to multiple risk factors, show successful responses to challenges and use this learning to achieve successful outcomes" (Catalano R.F. et al. 2004, Pp. 102-103). They have been deemed to exhibit characteristics of determination, meaning and purpose in life, caring for self and receiving help from others (Williams N.R. et al. 2001, P. 242). Their qualities have also been described as including social competence, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and a future (Howard S. et al 1999, P. 311).

It has been suggested that resilience results from the interaction of young people's own attributes, characteristics of their families and aspects of the wider social environment. For example, a resilient young person would perform better in school and have less behaviour problems and higher aspirations than a non-resilient young person; his or her family would be more likely to be stable, supportive, committed to supporting their child's education and would take part in leisure and domestic activities together; there might also be additional external support such as a supportive teacher or another adult who might act as a guide or mentor (Schoon I. & Bynner J. 2003, P. 24). It has also been argued that interactions in which resilient young people engage often include not only elements which provide support; they also include encouragement to adopt high standards and take personal responsibility (Damon W. 2004, Pp. 20-21).

Much of the literature discusses risk and protective factors which can hinder or help young people's development. However, it has been stressed that, though these are useful constructs around which action plans can be formed, in practice they are more useful in predicting outcomes for populations than for individuals (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, P. 3). A protective factor only operates when a risk factor is present and although protective factors serve to decrease vulnerability to risk, they do not necessarily enhance potential in other areas. For example, the use of condoms may serve as a protective mechanism for sexually transmitted diseases, but only when an individual is sexually active and exposed to a disease (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, P. 4). In relation to what constitutes risk, what might be protective and how they respond to challenges and opportunities, different young people behave and react differently in different situations at different times and they may be more or less resilient at different points in their lives, depending on the interaction

and accumulation of individual and environmental factors which they encounter (Howard S. et al 1999, P. 310). As individuals and as groups young people vary markedly in adverse circumstances (Wyman P.A. et al. 1999, P. 645) and different things contribute to their risk and protection (Thompson S.J. et al 2003, P. 297). For example, there are marked gender differences in how young people react to stressful situations at different ages. It has also been suggested that for gay men and lesbians, managing disclosure about their sexuality can promote resilience by bringing people that are gay-affirming closer together while at the same time creating distance from those who are more hostile (Oswald R.F. 2002, P. 377). It has been argued that young people interpret risks differently and that they make everyday judgements, decisions and choices pragmatically, rather than in a mechanistic and dehumanised fashion against pre-given, external and fixed criteria (Lawy J. 2002, P. 421). A homogenised identification of certain groups and individuals as being 'at risk' can be inaccurate and can lead to stigmatisation (Catterall J.S. 2004, P. 304). As two young Foyer residents wrote in 2005:

"Do not stereotype us into groups – we are all individuals with individual concerns and problems to deal with" (Barry M. 2005, P. 185).

If one is going to be able to predict better outcomes for young people, it is clear that there is a need for more research about what combinations of protective factors operate most effectively for which young people and at which times (Bogensneider K. 1996, P. 129). It has been argued that resilience results from the interaction between at least four distinct processes: the successful operation of protective processes, the operation of certain exceptional personal characteristics (for example intelligence or sociability), the successful recovery from a stressful situation or crisis event or through the process of 'steeling', a process whereby individuals overcome challenging experiences that strengthen their capacity to withstand subsequent stressful situations (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, Pp. 6-7). There also appears to be consensus in the literature that resilience results from a combination of personality traits with which some children are born and others learn; 'nature' versus 'nurture'.

While warning against any assumption that there are simplistic, fixed solutions to the problems that young people encounter, or that one might draw up check-lists of actions

to be followed that will somehow 'vaccinate' young people against risk, it is clear that it would be useful for Foyers and others who provide services or care for young people, to understand better how they might develop their activities so as to be more likely to support resilience in young people. To support this, there is a growing literature on resilience which includes an emphasis on identifying stable characteristics in a young person or environment, including social institutions that can help to foster development and positive outcomes (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, P. 5), (Luthar S.S. et al 2000, P. 544).

For young people, being able to realistically assess their situation and to make choices in relation to managing its risks is vital to developing and maintaining resilience. Therefore, to support the resilience process, Foyers and others who provide services or care for young people can help young people to assess their situation, develop and implement strategies to manage it and then to evaluate. In practical terms, to manage in the face of current adversity it is important not only to think back to past experiences of success, but also to be able to realistically and hopefully assess one's personal agency in managing difficult situations. By understanding the limits of one's power, one can focus one's best efforts into what is possible (Walsh F. 1998, Pp. 57-60). It may not in the end be possible to control the outcome of events, but resilience can come from active participation in unfolding events rather than a fatalistic acceptance of what happens. How an individual gathers information and resources in order to assess and manage the risks he or she faces is vitally important. Recognising this, the Safe Moves programme, launched by the Foyer Federation in 2002, worked to improve young people's ability to understand themselves and their place in the world:

"Through increasing a person's positive perception of him – or herself, making them more confident and aware of choices available, young people facing such a risk can be supported in taking greater control of their lives" (Smith C. et al 2007, P. 243).

Parents, families and adult mentors

The relationships which a young person develops with parents or carers can help to build a realistic sense of personal control, supporting resilience in the individual (Walsh F. 1998, Pp. 6-10), (Roosa M. W. 2000, P. 567), (Silliman B. 2004, P. 13), (Smith C. & Carlson B.E. 1997,

P. 239). Historically and across different cultures it is clear that processes of support have been found to exist in a range of family circumstances, not just the traditional male/female and two-parent structure; this includes a variety of formal and informal kinship arrangements (Walsh F. 2002, P. 132). By recognising this and also by seeking to understand what has happened to families in adverse circumstances, Foyers and other service providers and carers can support the development and maintenance of resilient behaviours in individuals (Walsh F. 2002, P. 131). In doing this, in both formal and informal contexts, it is important not to make assumptions or implement policies that can stereotype and effectively blame, for example, disadvantaged and poor families and young people for their predicament (France A. 2008, P. 503). In fact, there is significant evidence that facing adversities such as poverty can in fact encourage cohesion and support within families (Ortner D.K. et al 2002, P. 160).

Many young people who come into Foyers have had problematic family situations which have led to a crisis which has resulted in them facing housing difficulties. Despite this, the literature suggests that it would be useful to support and encourage residents to maintain some connection with family members. Even where young people have run away from home, outcomes are often better if a young person is supported to re-establish relationships with family members (Thompson S.J. et al 2003, P. 297). Foyers might usefully invest in efforts to understand young people's experience of family and assist them in repair and growth (Walsh F. 1998, P. 3). In times of distress, meaningful kin and community connections can be very important; moreover, change, for example, leaving home and other potentially painful transitions can also serve to catalyse growth and transformation (Walsh F. 1998, P. 53).

As well as supporting the importance of family relationships, studies of resilience often emphasise the crucial influence of significant relationships with other caring adults and mentors, such as coaches and teachers (Walsh F. 2002, P. 130). Adults, such as Foyer staff, can perform an important mentoring role in supporting young people, encouraging them to feel good about themselves and to assess and manage their situations so that they can feel hopeful about their lives. Support from adults has been deemed to be especially important in contexts where young people attempt to seek

out experiences that will help them overcome adversity. It is therefore critical that such resources are made available to them so that their own "self-righting potential" can be fulfilled (Kim-Cohen J. et al. 2004, P. 664). Smith has described a study undertaken in twelve Foyers and four floating support schemes, where she found that the very positive relationships which young people were able to establish with staff were instrumental in helping them "turn their lives around" (Smith J. 2005, P. 175).

A developmental and dynamic perspective

Risk factors rarely occur in isolation. To be resilient therefore, it is necessary to have a range of responses from which to choose (Smith C. & Carlson B.E. 1997, P. 234), (Small S. & Memmo S. 2004, P. 6). For Foyers and other providers and carers, at all times, it is necessary to have a developmental perspective whereby young people can be supported to choose from a range of viable options over time to address the challenges that they face (Walsh F. 1998, P. 12). A more static or fixed approach will not be helpful. A particular solution to a presenting problem may only solve that particular problem and at that time, but the promotion of resilient processes can help preparation to surmount unforeseen problems and to avert crises (Walsh F. 1998, P. 23). Characteristic traits which have been deemed to be useful and which should be encouraged include: positive communication; problem solving and conflict management; companionship; cohesion around values and; social support (Ortner D.K. et al 2002, Pp. 159-160).

4. Research findings

The following summarises the key responses from young people across all the Foyers.

What do the young people feel they have in common?

First of all, they said that they are all young and homeless, though few reported having been street homeless; more often they had been staying on friends' sofas. One group liked the fact that they were "all different" from each other. They described the value of seeing what you have in common with other young people.

"We've got different dress senses and attitudes but we all get along."

Getting along with peers was seen as very important and many of the young people viewed peer support as an important source of strength.

"We're all either friends or acquaintances or associates."

"We all get stressed out...we all get lonely and bored."

"We stick together...We look after each other, like lending food or money."

"We listen to each other and we can go and knock on each others' doors...we all need to talk."

Only one young person described his fear about social bonding. As someone who had previously been in trouble with the law and on the basis of previous bad experience, he said that he tried not to socialise or make friends as his experience was that this could lead to getting into trouble for someone else's behaviour.

Most had experienced some kind of family dispute before coming to the Foyer. Some continued to have relationships with their families, others not. Of the former, several young people reported that their relationship with their family was better since they moved into the Foyer.

There was also a consistent feeling that young people had chosen of their own volition to come to the Foyer. For some, this brought independence; others felt they had independence already. Several people described their joy in their living surroundings:

"We've got nice rooms and showers!"

Although they were conscious of being stigmatised by the outside world, they consistently reported feeling less

stressed and that their lives were better by being in the Foyer. The latter feeling was highlighted most in a Foyer where there were higher levels of training and employment opportunities. One group emphasised that they liked that they had to be in college or jobs and they also wanted more education and training opportunities.

All described financial pressures and the difficulties of finding any kind of work, let alone well paid work.

What makes Foyer residents feel good about themselves?

Residents from the different Foyers all said that working and earning money made them feel good. Although having enough money was a recurring theme, they were not just interested in working for money and they were also not specific about what kinds of jobs might make them feel good. It was better than doing nothing and having things to do was important for all the groups:

"It makes the time go by."

One young man talked about how volunteering made him feel good and to think less about himself.

Having friendships and communicating verbally and socially also made them feel good. This included talking about problems and it also meant that mobile phones were seen as important. One group felt that,

"letting go of stereotypes"

made them feel good. Even where family relations had been poor, several young people described that they felt good when they were getting on with their families. Meeting people with whom one might not normally associate was deemed to be a positive experience:

"Meeting different types of people from different walks of life and different religions."

One young woman described how seeing her children made her feel good:

"Seeing my kids...why?...cos' you can act stupid around them."

Seeing that they were making progress also made young people feel good.

Being tidy and having things in order was important for one group.

There were some specific products, such as chocolate, tobacco, alcohol and cannabis ("at least sometimes"), "film nights with popcorn", the X Box and activities, like watching soaps, sunbathing, having sex, shopping, listening and making music, "sleep (if you can get it)" that were mentioned as giving pleasure.

What makes Foyer residents feel they are managing and in control of their lives?

Several people described how understanding the situation they were in was important in helping them feel that they could manage:

"This was helped by coming here and also when someone who I really admired and who saw good in me died."

Having time for reflection,

"stepping outside of yourself, talking to people"

helped people feel they were in control. The young people often described how through reflection they were able to assess how they had contributed to their current situation:

"I was angry at my parents and needed my own space, physical and mental."

"I'm realising now that the things that my parents used to tell me, they weren't so wrong."

Having a say in how things are run and a voice was stressed by one young man who also said that he felt good when he followed through on what he promised to do and it was recognised:

"Following up on what you say, taking action to show that you're serious to make an impact."

All the groups felt that finding work was important:

"It's important to have a job and a career, to manage and not just live on benefits."

Going to college and accessing training for employability and help with CVs were important for all groups.

It was also important to develop skills to look after yourself, which included budgeting and cooking:

"staying healthy, getting up and doing stuff"

"looking after yourself, getting your own shopping, organising yourself"

Changing old habits was also important:

"not trying to kill yourself"

"coming off drugs, dumping stupid boyfriends"

Several people said that they felt good when they had aspirations:

"setting goals...dreaming, seeing things progressing"

However, all the groups were very conscious of being judged in a negative way by the outside world:

"We're on the bottom level."

Receiving recognition of progress, and not just from the key worker was appreciated:

"older people treating you like a real person"

What makes Foyer residents feel hopeful about the future?

Despite their difficult experiences, all of the groups found reasons to be optimistic about the future. They described different reasons, from having friends, relationships,

"My boyfriend's not very talkative when we're out but he talks a lot when we're alone."

to having hobbies, such as making music, reading, listening to others and being listened to.

Individuals had developed their own strategies for keeping hopeful:

"Well, I can't just be a bum all my life...I can see a nice future."

"I'm hopeful because I just take every day as it comes...you need to prove yourself by your actions."

One young woman described a sense of empowerment gained by taking part in a political demonstration (against the Iraq War):

"It was great, thinking you could influence things."

Seeing others succeed and learning from them was emphasised by one group.

Having someone to look up to was also important:

"so you can be like them"

One young woman described how being pregnant made her feel hopeful about the future:

"Having a baby – because after that you're not just living for yourself."

All groups appreciated the opportunity to influence the place where they lived, to be liked and listened to:

"We should do things like this meeting more often."

What do the young people think are the most important positive things that Foyers give to help build and maintain resilience?

The young people discussed what they thought were the most important positive things that Foyers provide. This varied from place to place, with secure and safe accommodation being named by most residents as the most important. The table at the bottom of this page summarises the five top priorities from the young people from the different Foyers.

In individual discussions and groups the meanings of these priorities were explored. Most of the group members felt overall very positive about most of their experiences in the Foyers. For some, safety and security related mainly to having safe, secure accommodation. One young man described safety as having "food, water, hygiene" but some young people also talked about developing and maintaining emotional security after traumatic periods of life.

Having a sense of community for some was like being in a family:

"The most important thing is the sense of family...this can be a massive family instead of your own family."

"The most important thing it gives is 'freedom' – not to do what we like but in a sensible way."

Being helped to plan and to get support to become independent through the provision of life skills training and learning opportunities was important for all the groups:

"Independence means being able to live on your own and not relying on other people...you can come and go."

Many of the young people shared a strong sense of personal responsibility:

"Help, though you can only help yourself...people here help you help yourself"

Being able to rely on informal, positive support from all staff was seen as being as important as formal structured key working:

"There's always someone to talk to...People speak nicely to you...You need to have someone to talk to...You get stuck otherwise."

Foyer Number	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4	Priority 5
1	Safety and security	Life skills and independence	Respect	Acceptance and equality	Advice and information
2	Positiveness	Independence	Learning opportunities	Flexibility	Possibilities of new experiences
3	Security	Everyday support	Life skills	Training/employment/volunteering opportunities	Integrating with the community
4	Accommodation	Opportunities	Structured planning	Training/employment/volunteering opportunities	Independence
5	Security	Opportunity to grow	Personal support	Positiveness	Quality accommodation

One young man described the issue of 'trust' as really important. He described having had other experiences where he did not trust people. So what made him feel trust here?

"Following stuff up...how they talk to you...the first month I was here I didn't trust anyone, it's how they talk to you."

One young man described the communication with managers as being very useful. He suggested that the Foyer might buy a "massive TV licence" for the whole place. How would he get this suggestion to be considered?

"I'd put it to (X) when he's coming in and out."

What improvements do the young people think Foyers could make to support their priorities?

The key theme that young people raised that their Foyers could improve upon was physical security. This was more the case, however, in the inner city Foyer than in the rural Foyer. Several young people reported having things stolen and suggested that the CCTV system could be improved.

The different Foyers operated different rules in relation to visitors and alcohol use. These were not always consistently understood or appreciated by residents:

"Maybe there could be more flexibility around alcohol use for over 18s – and I'm not arguing it for myself."

However, there was also in some of the discussions an acceptance that absolute security was difficult to achieve and that there needed to be some compromises between making the place secure but not feel like a prison. In one group a young man suggested that he would like it if his girlfriend could stay overnight. In response, a young woman in the group said that having guests staying over might compromise this. On reflection he agreed, and went on to give the example that if someone else were to stay with the resident in the next door room, he might run the risk of having his hi-fi stolen. In another group one young man suggested that it might be okay to have overnight visitors if residents took responsibility for them.

Several of the Foyers had Residents' Committees but although engagement was seen as important, there were differences of opinion about how effective the operation of the committees currently was. In terms of influencing procedures, one group suggested that there could be trial runs of new ways of doing things and an evaluation of these.

One young man said that it would be useful to get all different Foyers together to share experience "for a Foyer festival" and meet other young people.

Whereas staff often stressed their important role as advocates on behalf of residents, and clearly they often did this. One young woman protested against this, believing it undermined her own ability to act:

"I don't need it, I need help to help myself."

Regardless of how happy they were with the Foyer, all of the groups expressed hurt and concern about the stigma against them that they believed came from outside agencies and communities. In one group there was consensus that they would not put 'Foyer' as the address on their CVs as they believed they would suffer discrimination. They suggested that a change of name might be useful:

"They think it's like a drug house".

One young man (who had only been in the Foyer for a week and a half) said:

"It's different from what I thought it would be, it's like a five star."

Jobcentre staff and the police were specifically mentioned as being prejudiced by several groups. However, in one Foyer the relationships with community police seemed to be good, including the arrangement of joint football matches. In this same Foyer there was a well-equipped employment and training resource centre next door which seemed to be well used and appreciated by residents.

One young man suggested that bringing in more outside organisations for information sessions, volunteering and community opportunities would improve the links with the external community and hopefully reduce prejudice. He also emphasised improving informal personal interactions between staff and residents rather than relying on notice boards to communicate important information. For another group, the expansion of opportunities to have more informal time with staff was emphasised as the most important area that could be improved. Other things that were briefly mentioned were:

- ▶ to have more activities in the centre
- ▶ to pay less rent
- ▶ to charge less for wash tokens
- ▶ to have more things for girls to do.

4. Discussion

From the literature and the research in Foyers, it is clear that what follows are essential components to encourage and maintain resilient characteristics in residents. It is also clear that there already exist systems and protocols in many of the Foyers to address these issues.

That basic needs – safe, secure accommodation and shelter – are prioritised at all times.

▶ The Foyer needs to feel safe so that other communications can happen and practical interventions can be provided.

That strategies to maximise the possibilities for effective and positive communications with staff, peers, external agencies, families and friends and the wider community are established, maintained and reviewed, working closely with young people to generate innovative ideas and to make continuous improvement.

▶ This is crucial as it supports young people to make a realistic assessment of their situation and to develop realistic plans to manage it.

▶ It also enables young people to build useful social support networks, whereby they can use their experience to support others and they can also gain the information they need to review and plan effectively.

▶ It supports young people to hope and to aspire.

▶ It includes formal communications via meetings and key working but also establishes a culture of informal communication at all times so that opportunities for support and intervention can be recognised and acted upon.

▶ This must include having an awareness of structural inequalities, discrimination and stigma against certain groups in society and actively trying to counter this in the culture of the Foyer.

That practical support – life skills as well as education and training to support routes into employment and help to overcome problems such as drug or alcohol misuse, are supported.

▶ Support needs to be developmentally appropriate and targeted to the individual; it needs to be multi-component, recognising that young people change, they have different experiences and react differently to different experiences in different ways at different times.

▶ This support needs to acknowledge and celebrate the skills and experience that the young people come into the Foyer with and build on this.

▶ It needs to provide opportunities for progress and success and actively acknowledge these, while also ensuring a degree of realism in relation to opportunities related to things such as employment.

That strategies to influence and improve the external environment as well as delivering front-line services should be built upon.

▶ While continuing to recognise that individuals have choices, Foyers and the Foyer Federation, acknowledging the structural inequalities that Foyer residents are affected by, for instance lack of decent paid employment opportunities as well as stigma, need to campaign at local and national level to open up more opportunities for young people.

▶ By building resilience into communities we can do more to support resilience in individuals.

5. Recommendations

The following recommendations provide a checklist against which Foyers can review and improve existing practice:

1. The maintenance of safety and security should be prioritised at all times. Regular reviews should be done with residents, checking out how they feel, their experience, concerns and anxieties. CCTV must be adequate and staff should work out with residents how to maintain an appropriate balance between feeling physically secure and 'homely'. Work out with residents appropriate rules and codes of behaviour within the Foyer, including how to deal appropriately with drug and alcohol-related issues.
2. All staff working in Foyers should be trained and supported to understand the needs of residents and to be able to feel comfortable in offering informal advice and support at any time. This includes administrative, reception and night staff. Opportunities for practical support and intervention might occur between a resident and any staff member at any time.
3. Formal communications using noticeboards, group and one-to-one meetings need to be run in an effective, efficient manner. Where action is agreed in meetings, it needs to be followed up and reported. Residents' meetings should be revitalised, with encouragement and training for resident participants so that they can help to shape the agenda and take responsibility for suggesting and implementing improvements.
4. Attention needs to be paid to ensuring that young people understand 'the contract' between them and the Foyer when they enter, that the Foyer is seen as a step and support into independent living, not as an end point or permanent accommodation.
5. Planning and review meetings with key workers should take place regularly. It might be useful to agree consistent approaches to the frequency of these across the Foyer Federation. Attention should be given to relationships between the young people, staff, peers, friends and families. Where possible, but based on the young people's assessment and decision-making, relationships with some family members should be encouraged and supported. Active communication should ensure joint assessment of progress and reviewing of priorities.
6. Staff team meetings need to be held regularly and creative ways need to be developed to ensure that all staff, including administrative, reception and night staff, are included in reviewing what is going on in the Foyer and planning accordingly.
7. Strategies should be developed with young people for engaging with and improving relationships with the external community, including agencies such as the police and employment services and voluntary agencies. This should include providing volunteering opportunities for residents and also opportunities for external people to visit the Foyer and contribute to its activities.
8. All Foyers should have an ongoing programme of equal opportunities training, a well-publicised code of conduct and up to date information for staff and residents to ensure that young women, gay, lesbian and transgender, disabled and black and minority ethnic young people are supported to avoid direct or indirect discrimination by other residents or staff. It should not be assumed that because staff are not aware of active discrimination that it does not occur.
9. Programmes of practical support and training should be reviewed and planned with young people through residents' meetings and other meetings. These should include 'open agenda' meetings where young people are encouraged to review and set the Foyers' agenda. Piloting of new approaches to service provision should be encouraged.
10. Foyers at local level and the Foyer Federation at national level should expand the resources that they have to improve opportunities and reduce stigma against young people. This includes actively seeking to influence policy agendas over the long term.

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References

1. The meaning of 'resilience' is discussed in the Literature Review section of this report.
2. In one case this request was misinterpreted and more than five suggestions were supplied. However, the young people were asked to rate only their top five. As well as this, in several cases staff answers were given in such a way as to try to include multiple answers in one.

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