

Who Cares? Scotland Report

International Summit of Youth in Care

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1. SUMMIT OVERVIEW

The overall aim of the International Summit of Youth in Care was to bring together youth with a care background from a range of countries to consider and share their care experience and look to see how they could direct ideas and initiatives that might make a positive difference. The ambition was to provide a global platform to enable young people from care backgrounds' voices to be heard. Young people in care and agencies involved in working with them were invited to consider becoming involved.

Through discussion on the benefits and value of the Summit it was agreed that CELCIS and Who Cares? Scotland would work in partnership to engage with the International Summit and support a young person from Scotland to apply to attend the Summit in Baltimore USA. Alex Horne was identified as an appropriate young person to approach to see if he'd interested in attending the conference and carrying out the consultations with other young people that were required by our involvement. Alex was extremely interested in this opportunity and submitted an application form to the Summit organisers to gain a funded place at the conference. Alex was fortunate to be accepted as a delegate and a personal account of his experience in the whole process is included as part of this report. As Alex was only 18 it was felt he should be supported by a worker and as one of Who Cares? Scotland Worker's with a strong relationship with Alex it was agreed the author should accompany him.

Prior to attending the summit Alex had to consult with five other young people from Scotland with care backgrounds on five areas of their care experience. As part of the event representatives from each of the five groups were also involved in a live internet link up with Scotland where they presented the considerations of their groups and discussed these directly with the young people involved in the initial consultations in Scotland.

2. INITIAL CONSULTATIONS

Prior to attending the conference Who Cares? Scotland and CELCIS identified a range of partnership agencies that could potentially nominate young people with a care background to engage with the consultations. As a result five young people were nominated through The Debate Project, Scottish Throughcare and Aftercare Forum; Hear My Voice Project, Stirling Council; The Voice of Reason Group, Robert Gordon University and Who Cares? Scotland.

The young people involved had a range of care experiences and were invited by Alex Horne to the Who Cares? Scotland office to undertake the consultations. As can be seen from the framework below the themes and questions for the consultation were provided by the Summit organisers. However it was necessary for Who Cares? Scotland workers to sit with Alex prior to starting the consultations to review and understand some of the references referred to in the consultation brief and “translate” the questions into a form that could be more easily understood by the Scottish young people. Alex then undertook the consultations with the young people supported by a Who Cares? Scotland Worker who acted as scribe.

a. Consultation Questions

Below are the themes and questions provided by the Summit organisers for the young people contributing to or attending the International Summit of Youth in Care:

Prevention & Placement

1. How might we best prevent and reduce the number of youth in care?
2. How might we prevent and reduce the number of subsequent placements that youth experience while in care?
3. How do we keep our youth connected to people they know once they are moved?
4. How could the Transition Framework be applied?

De-institutionalization

1. How is institutionalization in the US similar to or different from institutionalization abroad?
2. Is congregate care acceptable in certain circumstances?
3. How do we move systems toward de-institutionalization and engage with those systems that are reluctant to change?
4. How could the Transitions Framework be used as a tool in this process?

Identity & Culture

1. How important is identity and culture to self-esteem and belonging?
2. What role does this play in the emotional well-being of youth in care?
3. How familiar should a foster home/adoptive family be with the culture of the child they are accepting into their home?
4. How are we considering identity, diversity, and cultural awareness in standard training for foster and adoptive parents?

Permanence & Independence

1. In what ways are we preparing young people for the emotional process that comes with aging-out of the system?

2. How can the Transitions Framework support this process?
3. What is your recommendation on how we can support the emotional well-being of youth in transition?
4. What are your recommendations on how best to prepare older youth in care for both independence and permanency?
5. How do we prepare both caring adults and the youth they are connected to, for any negative emotional challenges and reactions that might result from this positive change?
6. How can the Transitions Framework be applied as a learning and coping tool?

Youth & Alumni Engagement

1. How do we emotionally prepare youth before engaging alumni and youth in care in child welfare outreach and initiatives (panels, speakers bureaus, councils)? Should this be standardized?
2. What methods of support are currently in place to support their well-being?
3. What are the long-term investments being made in the youth we engage? Should there be?
4. How are they valued as subject matter experts?

b. Not Lost in Translation (making the questions accessible)

As can be seen from the themes and the questions there was a need to “translate” these somewhat for the young people being consulted in Scotland there also a need to explain the concepts mentioned in particular the reference to the Transitional Framework*.

The young peoples view on the question are summarised below.

“It’s good to have your say with these types of things but they could’ve made it a bit easier to understand”

“The questions were quite difficult to understand”

“The transition Framework was really difficult to understand”

“The American terms made it more difficult to understand the questions but once they were explained it was ok and relevant to young people in care anywhere I suppose”

*The transitional framework is based on the work of William Bridges, which see transitions happen in three stages: Endings, the Neutral Zone and New Beginnings. It emphasises the need to pay attention to the transitions young people go through when dealing with change in order to address the emotional and psychological impact of change. Bridges feels that only by paying attention to this can we more appropriately prepare young people to manage transitions.

c. Summary of Young Peoples Responses

How are we preparing young people for leaving care?

- *By talking to young people*
- *Providing written information in the form of leaflets*
- *Providing a throughcare service*
- *Not enough!*

What do we need to do to help prepare young people more?

- *We need more focus on the emotional impact of leaving care; it's more practical advice at the moment*
- *More regular one to one contact with workers*

What do we recommend?

- *Better communication between the agencies involved and that all the agencies (health/housing etc) really get to know the young people*
- *Pathway planning should be happening for all young people*
- *Planned and staged moves with overnights - building up to full time tenancy*

Institutionalisation

(United Kingdom compared to other countries)

- *There's not as good a system in other countries – children living in sewers/orphanages*
- *Systems in the United Kingdom are fairer – young people have rights, however if they're infringed upon it will effect their adult lives*

Is residential care acceptable?

- *Units yes, schools no (not even boarding schools/private schools)*
- *Yes for young people who can't handle foster care (maybe because of the trauma from being taken away from their own family)*
- *Yes as it offers a lot of support*
- *Yes, it gives opportunities for learning although the result can be isolation from mainstream /other young people*
- *Peer Mentoring/buddy'ing system*

How important is identity and culture to self esteem and belonging?

- *Sense of belonging regardless of race etc*
- *Gives someone more confidence – personally and in the community*
- *Crucial for their future – it's how you see yourself*

- *Defines you as a person*

What role does this play with emotional wellbeing of young people in care?

- *Makes them feel happier and more accepted amongst their peers*
- *Gives them confidence – increases emotional wellbeing*
- *If young people accept themselves they can accept others and other influences*
- *Not being accepted feels like you're being shunned, ridiculed by others*

How important is it that foster carers are familiar with other cultures?

- *Familiar enough so they don't insult or offend*
- *Very familiar or need to learn, understand and accept it – don't put their own beliefs on to others*
- *Should offer support to the young person to follow their own culture*
- *Have awareness of risks and prejudices*

Training for foster/adoptive parents – identity/diversity and cultural awareness

- *There's more focus on religion than cultural backgrounds*
- *Unsatisfactory – there's many more religions and cultures people don't know about, they should be learned and accepted for young people in care*
- *Identity is being considered more – young people are being allowed to 'find themselves' however there needs to be more work done around diversity and culture*
- *It's important that foster parents are trained on different cultures so they can understand and respect them*

What Investments are being made for engaging young people?

Should we be doing this?

- *Who Cares? Scotland/TCACF/Respect Me/LGBT/Youth Clubs & Libraries – continually funding these*
- *Continuity of workers*
- *Education (breaks the cycle of issues)*
- *Peer mentoring*
- *Life Changes Trust/other charities that invest in young people futures*
- *YES we should be doing this!*

How are we emotionally preparing young people for being involved in initiatives? (e.g. councils, panels etc)

- *Talking to them beforehand, asking them to fill something out to help them prepare*

- *We ask for their agreement to be involved and ask for their views beforehand however the materials are usually very formal and not young person friendly*
- *By not using jargon*
- *By giving plenty of planning and preparation*
- *Youth participation should be standardised – it empowers young people and supports inclusion*

What methods are in place to support their well being?

- *Having your say form/leaflets on bullying/drugs/alcohol/health support groups/information*
- *videos/internet safety videos*
- *Who Cares? Scotland/Throughcare Aftercare Forum/similar agencies*
- *Pathway planning and support workers should be available from the age of 14 rather than 16*
- *Mental health support and counselling service (not always available though)*

How are young people valued as subject matter experts?

Should they be?

- *They are experts due to valuable life experience and should be included in the development of existing services and the creation of new services*
- *By being listened to*
- *By being treated seriously and respected and should be treated the same as anyone else*
- *Giving your input makes you feel better about yourself which is really valuable; you're giving something back. All young people whether they've been in care or not should be valued. Being treated well and listened to when you're young can effect you when you're older*
- *And YES young people should be valued as subject matter experts*

How can we prevent and reduce the number of youth in care?

- *Parenting classes – more help to parents so children are not removed*
- *Early intervention and more intense support at home*
- *More support to young people who take drugs again so they're not taken into care*
- *More youth clubs – spaces for young people*
- *However if young people need to go into care that's what should happen*

How do we prevent and reduce the number of subsequent placements?

- *Peer support*
- *Better matching process of young people to carers and listening to young people's views*
- *Needs led placements rather than availability – ask the young people where they want to live*
- *By building and maintaining relationships*
- *Creating safe environments*
- *Train staff in de-escalation techniques*
- *Create and maintain positive environments*

How do we keep young people connected to people they know once they've moved on?

- *By encouraging contact and supporting it*
- *By ensuring all parties want to keep in touch, having regular visits and maintaining contact*
- *Social networking sites*

How can it help?

- *By providing a structure*
- *By making sure all the services work together and flow better*
- *It could be used as a tool during staff induction or used during training – if people are reluctant to change then management should re-think their recruitment process*
- *It's a hard question; but by giving a structure to what should be happening*

The Transitions Framework. How can it be applied?

- *Young people who have previously lived together in care could be matched to live together upon leaving care.*
- *They can support each other on the path to independence*
- *It could state what people the young people want to keep in touch with and how this could be dealt with*
- *By funding contact visits, by maintaining friendships which are important*
- *Make being in care a positive experience for young people*

d. Taking the messages forward

The detailed young people's responses to all the questions were noted on the forms by the Who Cares? Scotland workers and then passed to our admin department who input the information into an online collation site where all the results of the young people's responses internationally were being collected. The responses of all the individual young respondents were then grouped together under each theme by the Summit organisers, who collated them with the responses from other young people across the wide range of participating countries.

In Scotland Kirsten McManus, Who Cares? Scotland's Participation Worker and one of the young Scottish consultation respondents (Ryann) reviewed all the responses. Working together they distilled the responses to those outlined above, these were put together as part of a powerpoint for presentation for the Live Link up Forum Event with Baltimore (see below) and LACSIG event being organised for Edinburgh.

At the summit the Alex communicated the main considerations and feedback from the Scottish consultations to the other young delegates. This feedback combined with that drawn from all the other international consultations were then considered by the young summit delegates in their various workgroups.

3. THE SUMMIT IN BALTIMORE

a. Overview

Thirty young people with care backgrounds from eight different countries were delegates at the summit and there were a further twenty accompanying delegates providing support and facilitation to various aspects of the event. Most delegates were from Canada and America, the others being drawn from various African and European countries. The main venue and residence for the Summit was the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, USA.

b. The Programme

There was a very busy programme outlined for the five days of the Summit which included orientation sessions, introductions from each delegate, deciding and breaking up in to work groups, presentations from the university principal and state representatives, a visit to Washington, attendance at a State banquet and delegate presentations on the final day's conference.

However the underpinning element of the programme and the main focus of the delegates' efforts was their breaking into working groups and considering the main Summit themes of Youth and Alumni Engagement/ Permanency and Independence/ Culture and Identity/ De-Institutionalization and Prevention and Placement.

c. Young Peoples Working Groups

The young people divided into workgroups to consider issues under the themes that they felt most drawn to. The overall task of each group was to fully consider the issues under each chosen theme and by the final day of the summit have prepared a presentation of their considerations and recommendations that would outline the ways in which the issues raised could/should be addressed.

Each group was provided with all the collated feedback from the previously undertaken consultations pertinent to their theme. The groups were supported by group facilitators in the early stages by being given practical information re meeting times agreeing ground rules etc and gaining a shared understanding the overall aim of their group.

They were also given framework as outlined below to help them focus their efforts that asked them to look at the What, Why and How aspects of their particular theme.

1) WHY: Develop a shared understanding of WHY this issue is important to each delegate and to children and youth across the world.

2) RECOMMENDATION (WHAT, HOW): Choose one Recommendation, a Goal that articulates a Challenge to communities and nations for WHAT they should strive to achieve in relationship to this topic, and one program, model or strategy to illustrate HOW this recommended goal could be advanced.

3) PRESENTATION: Create a presentation for Friday's Forum and a written report.

4) STRATEGY: Develop an innovative strategy for how they, as a group of young leaders, could advocate for their Recommended WHAT Goal and/or their HOW program

After the initial inputs the young people whole heartedly took control and engaged in the process of connecting with each other, sharing information about their experiences, identifying key shared concerns, prioritising these and agreeing statements about recommendations for change. They then continued on to develop these to prepare to make presentations on their considerations to a large “multi generational” forum of decision makers and stakeholders held on the final day of the summit and streamed live worldwide through the internet.

As an additional incentive the young people were told that a panel of experts (see below) would decide which workgroup’s would receive funding to actually implement their plan. Therefore any plans they made/presented should be as concrete and realistic as possible, and include an estimate of the financial and other resources they would need to implement the plan.

d. Multigenerational Forum on Transition Events

On the final day of the Summit the young people were involved in the following:

- Early in the morning five young people (including Alex) were tasked with being the representative of each of the workgroups and join a live link up with the young people in Edinburgh to present and discuss the findings of each of the groups (see below *).
- Later in the morning all the groups were to present their group presentations to a large audience of invited stakeholders.
- In the afternoon the groups once again made presentations to a larger conference audience of other young people and invited dignitaries and policy makers. At the same time the groups were being judged and received feedback on their presentations and recommendations for change by a five person panel of professional experts. The panel consisted at the big event of :-
 - Dr. Maria Herczog, President Eurochild & UN Children’s Rights Committee member
 - Bryan Samuels, Commissioner of Administration of Children, Youth and Families
 - Hon. Pamela Gray, DC Superior Court
 - Kathleen Strotzman, Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute
 - Julie Gilbert-Rosicky, International Social Service-USA
 - Irwin Elman, Office of Provincial Advocate, Ontario

e. Live Link up between young people from the Summit with Scottish Young People

On the morning (early in Baltimore) of the live link up with Scottish young people,

representatives from each Summit group gathered around a monitor and big screen to link up with young people doing the same in Edinburgh. The young people were well prepared to take it in turn to present the findings from each Summit working group.

In Scotland some of the young people involved in the consultations and other young people young people with care experience and awareness of the issues under consideration were brought together at a Forum event in Edinburgh. They were given the opportunity to consider the findings of the consultations, discuss the issues involved and formulate some questions prior to linking up with the young people in America.

During the live link up between the countries the young people from the Summit initially presented their groups findings then opened this into a discussion with the Scottish young people. The delegates from Baltimore also answered the questions presented to them from Scotland.

Details of the discussions involved in the Forum and Link are held by Who Cares? Scotland and CELCIS for future consideration. Below are a few examples of the questions raised and discussed:

- Are young people discriminated against for being in care in your countries?
- Are there peer mentoring modules/ systems?
- Are you encouraged to participate in the development of services?
- What age do young people leave care?
- Do you think age should change?

After the live link up and Forum discussions the Scottish young people were also able to link up with the two year on LACSIG Event which was running at a similar time. This provided an opportunity for strategic planners and policy makers to meet with Forum members.

4. SUMMARY

The overall experience of the Summit was positive with the scope and vision of the Summit's aspirations inspirational. On the whole all the young people the author spoke to had a positive experience and as can be seen from Alex's report he definitely had "brilliant" time and the author was proud of Alex's overall contribution to the international discussions and considerations of the wide range of issues. All the young people attending the conference seemed to get so much from being there and it was impressive how motivated they were to work together to sincerely consider all the issues and get on with the work set for them in their working groups. The interaction between the young people, the sharing of their stories and their motivation to make a positive change for other young people was powerful and humbling.

Being at the Summit was an intense experience and the programme was extremely busy. Unfortunately some of the great planning and preparation for the event was let down during the week by constant changes to the programme. This led to quite a bit of confusion about arrangements and at times adversely affected the young peoples and facilitators ability to stay on track with the overall expectations of the Summit. There was disquiet expressed by some of the supporting facilitators (drawn from a range of agencies) that the communication about changes and any emerging issues was poor and that the contribution and efforts made by the young people was adversely affected by this. In particular it was felt that the planning for the final day's multi generational Conference and the young people's presentation could have been better and that the momentum and power of their message was somewhat dissipated as a result. This was disappointing as the organisers had clearly put much effort into the programme and organised for high profile and influential people to come along to the event.

However overall being involved in the Summit was a very positive experience for all the young people involved. The Summit demonstrably supported the ethos and importance of young people being brought together to consider and develop ideas on why, how and what needs to change to improve young peoples experience of care should be developed at all levels. The experience of the Summit also powerfully exemplified why young peoples voices should be central to all we do in planning and delivering services.

Working with partner organisations in engaging with the all aspects of planning, preparation and taking part in the summit has definitely been a worthwhile experience. The challenge will be in reviewing the overall experience together, learning from it and optimising this to develop stronger engagement with both similar and other youth participation events in the future. At the time of writing the full Summit Report has not been produced by the organisers but hopefully this will provide a strong basis for considering if and how we engage with them in the future.

5. LEARNING POINTS FROM THE SUMMIT AND CONSULTATIONS

- Young people's participation should be central – we need to listen to young people
- Young people like the concept of peer support/peer mentoring
- Young people feel a still stigma from being in care.
- Transitions – there needs to be more emphasis and support given to the emotional affect of transitions.
- We need a long term planner regarding all aspects of the care experience.
- Young people need to be better prepared for leaving care.
- There should be more learning from other countries experience in particular examples of good practice.
- Partnership working between agencies is good – however they need to develop approaches that optimise there impact rather than overlap or duplicate what they aim to do i.e. strive to have synergetic partnerships.
- Young people's voices should be central to care planning.
- Young people should be informed of what impact there contribution has made in participation i.e. they need to feel they are “listened” to.
- Young people need access to support well beyond leaving care i.e. up until 25 years of age.
- Need to put more effort into helping young people to maintain supportive friendships.
- Still problems in the public about their understanding of being looked after.
- We need to establish links with and learn from other countries.
- We need to see how we can optimise new technologies to communicate with support young people.
- Locally, nationally and internationally it is important for young people to come together to consider their experience of care and communicate their views to improve things to those making decisions.
- Organisations involved in the care of young people should work together to acknowledge and amplify the voice for young people in care.

6. Alex's Report

Background

In early January 2012 I was asked by Who Cares? Scotland and CELCIS if I would be interested in going to Baltimore, Maryland USA for a conference for youth in care called International Summit of Youth in care for 5 days. I was told I would need to fill out an application to see if I could be accepted by the founder of the summit Latrice Ware to attend, thankfully I was accepted. I was asked based on my own care experience to go because both Who Cares? Scotland and Celcis thought I was prepared to go on this trip.

Consultation

I had to do a consultation with at least 5 young people. 3 were from Who Cares? Scotland, 1 was from the Debate project and 1 from a voice of reason. The young people chosen represented different ages and had similar but different care experiences. The ages of the young people varied from 16 to 25 and they were from Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Paisley and Stirling. The consultation contained 5 key elements about the Summit they were Youth and Alumni Engagement/ Permanency and Independence/ Culture and Identity/ De-Institutionalization and Prevention and Placement. The answers the young people gave regarding the consultation were very similar also adding that the questions were very "American". I conducted the consultation and sent them away to Latrice for her to allow all the groups to use everyone's consultations for their project during the conference.

Summit

On June 25th 2012 me and Grant (National Resources Manager) flew from Glasgow to Baltimore when we arrived in Baltimore there was a bus to take us to the campus. When we arrived it was a meet and greet from everyone. There was over 25 delegates from around the world from countries such as Estonia, Finland, Georgia, USA, Canada the UK and many more. Tuesday was the official start day of the conference/summit the main focus was to get to know everyone a little better before getting into your group which you chose beforehand, mine was on youth and alumni engagement. Our project over the following days was to consider how we could engage with other young people. We came up with the idea of an international internship and a book or magazine with information from each country about their services that they carry out with YP's in care.

Live Link

At the end of the week a representative from each of the five groups pitched their ideas and considerations to the young people in Edinburgh who had completed the initial consultations over a live internet link. The link was used to pitch the ideas of each group and also a Q/A session (translated by yours truly). After the link we went back to be with our groups and pitched our ideas to the other groups then to a large conference audience and 5 panel members who are experts in the field of each topic. The panel members will decide which idea/pitch they felt was best and it will be awarded \$5000 as a start up fund for their pitch. The live link was a success the only fault was that you couldn't have the folks in Edinburgh so it was difficult to answer their questions.

My View

I think the experience was amazing meeting all the amazing people that I did making lifelong friends even making a brother, also doing things like going to Washington D.C and going to Capitol hill seeing Capitol and getting a tour of the museum underneath capitol was an experience I will never forget. I am VERY grateful for the overall experience.

In terms of the future I would like to be involved in the planning of ISYIC 2013 which starts late July and if I did go back I would be more than a delegate I would be a founding member! To be slightly critical I also think the summit was sometimes a bit unorganised. Delegates were sometimes left to do their own thing because there was no agenda for that day or it was not planned for the full day. Also some of the staff at the summit seemed to make decisions without saying to the other staff which could be quite confusing at times. However in spite of that I would do it all over again in a heartbeat because I made some amazing friends and you need something to go wrong at least once or its no fun.

Alex Horne July 2011

Alex, 18, has a care background and works part time with Who Cares? Scotland as a training assistant on the Scottish Government funded national training programme on Corporate Parenting delivered to all elected members and health boards throughout Scotland. He was invited by CELCIS to submit an application to the Summit organisers to gain a funded place at the conference and was fortunate to be accepted as a delegate.