

# Transitions from residential child care to adult independence: an example of best practice

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D2N2 TRANSITIONS EVENT

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# Overview

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- **The theory:** What is a 'best practice' approach?
- **The research:** (in a nutshell)
- **The findings:** Joshua\* and Sunnydale House
- **Implications for Practice**

*\*key details have been changed in order to protect individual's confidentiality and anonymity*

# What is a 'best practice' approach?

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'It is recognising the actualities of practice, within which 'best' is simply the best that could be achieved at that time. It is 'best' taking a reality check. 'Best' in terms of what was achieved **despite and because of all the complexities and difficulties'**

(Jones et al., 2008:288)



# What is a 'best practice' approach?

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- Focuses on what practitioners do **in day to day SW**
- What happens in the doing, dialogue, the *relating* to & with service users
- **Appreciative inquiry** – 'what works well here?' (Bellinger and Elliott, 2011).

**Does not mean 'perfect' practice**

**BEST PRACTICE**

# The Research Project (in a nutshell)

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- **6 month ethnographic study**
  - Observations
  - Semi-structured and ethnographic interviews
- **25 participants**
  - 19 staff members
  - 6 young people
- **Focussing on adult-child relationships and the use of touch in practice**
- **Local authority children's home**

# Joshua's Transition

## A Best Practice Perspective

### Joshua (17 YO male)

**Age 0-13:** Joshua lived with his mother in a 'chaotic' home, his mother had various partners who were physically abuse towards Joshua.

**Age 13:** Entered care (section 20) due to being 'beyond parental control'. He spent 2 months in an assessment centre and then moved to Sunnydale (aged 14).

**Age 14-17:** Joshua lived at Sunnydale House.

**Age 17.5:** Joshua is moved to independent living setting.

# 1. Preparation

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- A long period of preparation:

*Dianna tells me that one of the young people (Joshua) will be moving out in a few months. She tells me that they have been preparing him for this throughout the last year as they didn't want it to come as a shock. Gently at first, but now they are "full flow" with preparations. (Field notes, day 1)*

- Early links with After Care (supported by SW and RCW)
- Not entirely focussed on transitions, but a 'drip feeding' approach

## 2. Understanding (of behaviours)

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- **Understanding, not reacting** to ‘challenging’ behaviours
- **Reflective** practice

*‘It is the monthly ‘group therapy’ session and the main topic is Joshua and his upcoming move. Dave is saying “we need to give him a break over the next few weeks, it’s going to be difficult so let’s not be picking him up for silly things please”. Chris says that he is actually finding it really difficult too and there is a murmur of agreement around the room. The therapist nods sympathetically, saying it is difficult for everyone. Janet notes she has noticed that he has been dismissive of her recently, she thinks he is starting to push everyone away’ (Field notes, day 17)*



# 3. Practical support

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- ‘Coping with transitions was easier for care leavers who had a key person to go to for help’ (Baker, 2017:4)
- Sharon co-ordinated the transition support.
- Not always Sharon *doing*, but she was *coordinating*.
- Lots of unknowns/firsts:
  - *Shopping for practical household objects*
  - *Learning how to manage bills*
  - *Having formal conversations*
  - *Forms of identity available (passport/driving licence)*
  - *Food shopping/budgeting*
  - *Using a pay phone*
  - *Learning to sew!*

# 4. Control

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- ‘Young people’s sense of **control** over the **timing** and **decision to leave** care varied’ (Baker, 2017:4).
- **How** to say goodbye:

*Joshua has told Emily he doesn’t want a party, he just wants to leave without a fuss. The staff have discussed taking him out individually or in small groups, he’s happy with this and is going to choose where he wants to go and with who. (Field notes, day 57).*
- **When** to say goodbye:

*Joshua has been at his new home for 3 nights, he chose to move out 2 days before his official moving date. Today is his last official day with Sunnydale as his home. He sits alone in the games room, people walk in and out to see him, it’s so poignant. (Field notes, day 62).*

# 5. Advocating

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- **Advocating** (challenging oppressive practice)

*Reece (manager) walks into the office after a meeting with the head of service, he is looking anxious as though he had bad news to share and is concerned about the reaction of Sharon (Joshua's key worker) who is fairly fiery and Reece is quite a reserved/timid character. Reece tells the room that John (head of service) wants to move Joshua out of the home a month early, because another home in the LA is closing and they need to move the final young person out quicker than originally planned. You can feel the tension in the room as the story is revealed. Sharon is furious, her cheeks go red as she starts raising her voice and spitting out how unfair this is (and a few obscenities about John). She says "we've promised him he is staying until the end of July, how can we do this to him?". Reece tries to explain that the LA need to find a home for Jayden but Sharon is having none of it: "this is not happening, I will lie in the drive and let them run me over if they move him early". (Field notes, Day 20).*

- It is possible to challenge poor practice and decisions (although it isn't easy!)

# 6. Relationships

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- **Staying in touch?**

*Sharon arrives in the home, she's just popped in on Joshua on her way in to see how he's doing. She says he's out of teabags so she's going to nip round with some later. (Field notes, Day 71)*

- **Swapping numbers (controversial – two strong camps)**

# Practice Implications

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1. Adopting a '**best practice**' approach allows us to acknowledge what works well despite (or because of) challenges faced. You could adopt this in your team meetings or in supervisions.
2. **Relationships** with young people as they transition out of care are fundamental, not only to informing practice decisions but also considering long-term relationships.
3. **Understanding behaviours** – being prepared for challenges during the build up to significant transitions.
4. **Preparation and practical support** – not taking for granted how much is unknown for young people.
5. **Advocating** for young people in unjust scenarios – challenging but powerful.
6. **Control** – allow young people to take control over what they can.

# References

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