



**Health
Information
and Quality
Authority**

An tÚdarás Um Fhaisnéis
agus Cáilíocht Sláinte

**Social Services
Inspectorate**

A

CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CENTRE

IN THE

Local Health Area

HSE Dublin Mid Leinster

FINAL

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Introduction

The Health Information and Quality Authority Social Services Inspectorate (HIQA/SSI). Kieran O'Connor, Inspector Manager carried out a one day unannounced inspection on 30th June 2008 of a community children's residential centre in the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster Local Health Area under Section 69 (2) of the Child Care Act 1991.

The inspection focused on standard 5, 9 which states "The Health Service Executive has a written policy on its aftercare provision. It outlines all aspects of support and entitlement for a young person leaving the care system. Young people up to a minimum age of 21 years should be supported, as they request, by an aftercare service".

The inspector's judgements in this inspection are based on evidence of findings verified from several sources including interviews, direct observation and a review of records. Interviews were conducted with, two of the young people in the centre, the centre manager, two of the staff team, the monitoring officer, and the local health manager. Telephone interviews were conducted with one young person, the supervising Social Worker, the audit inspector of Child Care Services, and the statutory care Reviewing Officer.

This inspection commenced following a complaint made to this office by a young person in the centre. The inspection was not an investigation into the complaint itself as this is a matter for the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster. The inspection was to review how the standard on aftercare was been met for this young person and other young people in the centre. Their complaint related to their statutory care plan review.

The young person had attended their statutory care plan review where general agreement had been reached about their aftercare that they were happy with the recommendations. However, some recommendations made in this review were subsequently changed unilaterally and without consultation with the young person. This prompted the young person to make a complaint about aftercare provision to the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster, the HIQA SSI and the Ombudsman for Children and the Irish Association of Young People in Care. The inspector wrote to the local health manager and requested that the HSE review this young person's complaint and inform the SSI of its outcome as soon as possible. Subsequently the young person accepted some amendments to their care plan but requested that as part of their aftercare plan, the recommendation that centre staff visit them as a support once a week in the short term remain in place. This recommendation also had a safety aspect to it. There were a further two reviews and the request was not acceded to. This left the young person in a distressed state. The inspector corresponded with the local health manager outlining these concerns during this time, and noting a request that he furnish this office with the findings of his review of this young person's complaint. This was originally requested on 28th May 2008. Despite the fact that an urgent investigation was promised, the request has not received a response to date.

The HSE Dublin Mid Leinster draft aftercare policy statement reads inter alia "The HSE is committed to improving the opportunities of young people in the age range of 16 to 21 to leave care or have left care through the provision of quality preparation and aftercare support. It goes on to state that "the principles underpinning the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster's policy is that the welfare of the young person should be of paramount importance and due consideration should be given to his/her wishes as the HSE must act as a "corporate parent". Young people should have a voice in planning and services should be offered in a user-friendly and flexible manner respecting the young people and their right to make choices".

The inspector perused the centre's aftercare policy. This policy outlined the supports needed to enhance a young person's ability to gradually adjust to independent living including; "When a young person leaves the centre it is practice to maintain their bed for them in the unit, usually for seven weeks, but this can vary depending on the needs of the young

person". This aspect of the after care policy was another recommendation in the young person's original statutory care review that was subject to change.

The inspector reviewed records of aftercare service in the centre and found good aftercare practices in the past. Aftercare plans were devised in full consultation with young people and an all encompassing package including accommodation, education and follow up by the residential centre's staff were provided.

This centre was subject to a full inspection in December 2006 where child safety, consultation with young people and aftercare were subject to recommendations at that time.

Findings

Inspectors were seriously concerned about the following:

- The level of distress the young person experienced during this considerable period of time waiting for a resolution.
- Decisions taken by professionals with extensive knowledge of this young person were modified by external managers not directly involved in their care. Statutory reviews are mandatory by regulation and by implication have authority to make decisions.
- Three statutory reviews were held in six weeks and this is both very unusual, and can give an appearance of diminishing the importance of reviews. Whatever the reality, the young person had experienced each review as an opportunity for the HSE to give them less and less of an aftercare service. At all times the young person was prepared to compromise on other aspects of aftercare but said the most important thing for them was the support of staff in their new home, and the chance to go back to school in September to complete the leaving certificate.
- The issue of equity arose because previous young people who left care received an excellent aftercare package. In the interests of equity inspectors recommend that this young person receives an equally comprehensive one.
- An unfortunate side effect of this situation is that other young people in the centre were now becoming anxious about their future level of aftercare support.

The passage from residential care is difficult and young people need a great deal of support to successfully transfer from care to full independence.

Inspectors are mindful of the current HSE Dublin Mid Leinster budgetary constraints. However, given the reasons the young person is living some distance from the centre, the Inspector recommends that in line with local policy a flexible and creative way is found to listen to young people and grant their reasonable wishes. It is vitally important that we listen to the expressed wishes of young people in care and only in exceptional and clearly reasoned situations should their wishes not be acceded to.

The inspector requires that the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster develops an action plan in response to these recommendations within ten working days from the issue of this draft report. This response should outline how the HSE Dublin Mid Leinster will satisfy itself and the HIQA SSI that the issues of concern to the young person are comprehensively addressed.

Recommendations:

1. The HSE Dublin Mid Leinster should ensure that the young person's wishes are given further consideration without delay.
2. The HSE Dublin Mid Leinster should ratify on their draft aftercare policy as a matter of priority.
3. The HSE Dublin Mid Leinster should review the effectiveness of their complaints policy in response to expressed concerns by young people in their care.