

STATES OF JERSEY

Health, Social Security and Housing The Coordination of Services for Vulnerable Children Sub-Panel

WEDNESDAY, 22nd APRIL 2009

Panel:

Senator A. Breckon (Chairman)
Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier
Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour
Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

Witnesses:

Mr. J. Byrne (Jersey Care Leavers Association)
Ms. C. Cooper (Jersey Care Leavers Association)
Ms. E. Le Poidevin (Chair, Jersey Care Leavers Association)

Senator A. Breckon (Chairman):

Please relax, you have a cup of tea there. Nobody is on trial for anything here. We just want to have some words with you and find out what you do and perhaps your opinion on a few things. My name is Alan Breckon. I am the Chair of this panel. It is a sub-panel and we are looking at the coordination of services for vulnerable children and that we have drawn lines at 16, 18 and 21, so wherever you want to go, really. Deputy Trevor Pitman is the Vice-Chair and the other members are Deputy Geoff Southern and Deputy Roy Le Hérissier. I will just go through the process; we are recording this. This is more for our benefit. Nobody is on trial for anything; it is just so that we can remember what was said rather than somebody trying to take lots of notes. You will get a copy of this process. If you say, for example, “60” and it should have been “16” you will get the opportunity to correct that. So, as I say, if you cannot answer something do not worry about that because it is fairly relaxed, although it is a formal setting, and none of us would admit to appearing in the Magistrates Court or the Police Court, as it then was. We are doing this review because there are obviously some issues that have been going on, not just recently but over the years and it is, as I said, Coordination of Services for Vulnerable Children. If you want,

perhaps, to introduce yourselves first for the benefit of the tape and then I will just lead it. But, as I say, there is no pressure and just keep it low key.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin (Chair, Jersey Care Leavers Association):

I am Eirann Le Poidevin. I am the Chair of the J.C.L.A. (Jersey Care Leavers Association).

Ms. C. Cooper (Jersey Care Leavers Association):

I am Candy Cooper and I am on the committee of Jersey Care Leavers Association.

Mr. J. Byrne:

My name is Joe Byrne. I am a paid(?) development worker hired by the J.C.L.A.

Senator A. Breckon:

Thanks for that. I wonder, first of all as an introduction, if you could tell us a bit about why you were set up (you said you were coming up to an anniversary) and what you have been involved with?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

The association was set up in the wake of the historical abuse hearings and the Haut de la Garenne thing. It is to give each other (people that have been in care) support, to try and change the future of the care system. Because of our varied and vast experiences of the care that all of us received, we do not want to see any other children going through anything that we went through. Not all our members have had a bad time and really that is one of the good things about it because we would like to learn. There is no reason why one child should have a bad experience in care and another child, who lived in exactly the same home at the same time, should have a good experience in care. They should all have a good experience. As adults here on the Island we should all be looking after the children; they are the next stock to come forward and look after the Island and to take care of us in our old age.

Senator A. Breckon:

Generally, have your views and opinions, and those of the people that you represent, been listened to?
Are people in authority listening to you?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Do you want to answer that?

Ms. C. Cooper:

Sorry, could you say that again?

Senator A. Breckon:

What I am asking is how have you been received by the authorities, whether you have approached the ...?

Ms. C. Cooper:

Generally, quite well. Obviously some parts of the establishment do not agree with what we say but as far as ... we have had funding from Health and Social Services Department. So in that respect they realise that there is a need for a group like us to be a support for other care leavers and that we have a lot of valid points to say because our members are all care leavers so they have the experience that other people do not have.

Deputy G.P. Southern of St. Helier:

One of the things you mentioned was why one person should have one experience and another should have another experience. There was a report that came out this week in the U.K. (United Kingdom) that says the quality of service you get in care is a matter of luck. Some areas you will get first class quality care and next door you will not. Obviously you have got some sort of collective impression of care service in the past that you want us to improve on going into the future. What are the good and bad points, if you like?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I would like to see all the homes over here like Brig-y-Don. I was in Brig-y-Don and my stepson was in Brig-y-Don. Everybody that I have spoken to that went to Brig-y-Don has always had a positive outcome, yes. The staff there ... I do not know why, Brig-y-Don seems to be the rose out of ... you know? It is just a lovely place; it is a homely environment. Maybe it was wrong because the other States homes were big. There were too many children and you could not make them homely. They were more ...

Senator A. Breckon:

Impersonal.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

They were very impersonal. It was more like a prison than a home, a lot of the children's home. Brig-y-Don, it is a small amount. It is a very homely environment.

Mr. J. Byrne:

Can I just take it? Brig-y-Don, I agree with what Eirann says. I think too many times we look at what has gone wrong. We try and learn but you can also look at what has gone right, what is going right, and learn from that. My own personal experience with Brig-y-Don as it is, I also am involved in coaching children in football and all that. The Brig-y-Don staff used to ring me up and bring children down for coaching and all that. So efforts were being made. I think there is a point here that you can have a look at everything that has gone wrong but you can also learn what has gone right.

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

Could I just pick up on that? Again, in the *House of Commons Report* there is a quote that says the key to success is about having good quality staff, having them trained sufficiently and giving them the backup. I do not want to put words in your mouth but I perhaps pick up that you would have some sympathy with that view. Is the staff key to ...?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes, definitely. I think the staff are key; they have to be. They have got to be motherly; they have to have that maternal ... whether they have got children or not, you know, there has got to be a maternal attitude, whether they are men or women. I do not know, in the past with not having checks and everything, the perfect place for anybody that was deviant towards children was a children's home to go and work. But now in this day and age it should not be like that because there are checks in place to stop these people.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You mentioned the size of Brig-y-Don as being smaller than the other homes in the past and certainly the *Williamson Report* suggested that the move in the future will be towards smaller units.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes. I think they are more manageable.

Ms. C. Cooper:

The one thing, though, is that (and I know quite a few care leavers are of the same opinion) there seems to be a move towards children going into foster care and closing all the children's homes. That is not necessarily a good thing because some children only thrive in a care home environment, but a smaller care home, nothing like Haut de la Garenne was. I know there are a lot of members that do not think that children's homes should be totally closed down.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

So you would say that there must be a place for children's homes in the system?

Ms. C. Cooper:

Yes.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Again, and this is quite timely, this report in the U.K. has said exactly that. There is a wide range of options, fostering being one, adoption being another. Children's homes of various types must be available and high quality and must be available to "fit" the person, so if it is appropriate for you to be there then that should be made available and catering for that need. They also mention the key to an effective caring system is personal contact, almost; there is somebody in the system with whom you can identify and form a bond with, even if your circumstances mean that you have had bonds broken. That is key to making the system work and that identification should be encouraged.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier of St. Saviour:

Eirann, you mentioned and then Geoff developed about different homes. But you mentioned people having different, in fact, possibly opposite experiences in one home. Why do you think that happens?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Why does one deviant adult pick on one child and not another? We do not know. We have not got that answer. It is the same with parents with children at home; we do not know why they will not take to one child but they will take to another. There is not an answer; that is down to the pervert themselves. I do not think anybody will ever answer that. But I think also, like Candy said, we are all different and it is a different situation for each child. Like Candy said, one will thrive in foster care but another child would not; they would much rather be with a group of children.

Senator A. Breckon:

I wonder if I can ask you what you think about the age mix, because there has been a view expressed like 0 to 8, if you know what I mean, only babies now. Then we see pressure at 13, 14, youngsters who

have problems with behaviour, and we are getting perhaps a disruptive element, if you like, that could be introduced that could affect others. Would you like to comment on that, of your own experience with age differences?

Ms. C. Cooper:

To be honest, we have not really thought about that one.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

That is a question we will be thinking about.

Mr. J. Byrne:

Would you mind repeating that question? I was not sure I understood what age group you were talking about.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

The different age groups in the home.

Mr. J. Byrne:

In care?

Ms. C. Cooper:

Yes.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes, for the children. You might have a ...

Mr. J. Byrne:

Should they be kept separate?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes.

Ms. C. Cooper:

I do not think so.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

This is not for the record, just for background. When you were in Brig-y-Don did they have ... because the obvious thing about Brig-y-Don is they deal with very young kids.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

No, it is all different ages.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

You had different ages when you were there, did you?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Well, I was 5 when I was in Brig-y-Don the first time.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Yes, that is what we heard, yes.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

There were different ages and when my stepson was in Brig-y-Don there were different ages. They might have a baby for a week or 2, they might have toddlers. He was 8 when he came to live with me. There was a lad that was there from the age of 3 to the age of 16 but they do have to leave at 16. It has got to be ... if the State wants to take children away from their parents they have to maintain and

provide somewhere where these children/adults need to go for advice. The State is taking over the parental guidance of these children. I was a ward of court until I was 21 by the State. Luckily enough I did get on with my parents but it did not make it any easier that I was estranged from them. If they take over being your parents, like all other children you should be able to go and get advice like you would to your parents until ... you know, for their life. This is quite a ...

Mr. J. Byrne:

I understand the question now and I would like to make a comment because I have got personal experience from it basically and I would be against certain age groups ... when I was in care in Ireland ... the reason I was in care was I come from quite a large family, I have got 17 brothers and sisters, and each time my mother was having a child she would have a bad labour and we would have to go into care because of that. This is not a new thing that happens in Ireland; age is split. What it meant to us was that my eldest brothers and sisters were taken away from us and put somewhere else and all us wee ones were left to fend for ourselves and it was not a good experience for us. I think that if a child is in care for a long time - we were not, we were only in care for, you know, every year for 2 or 3 months as such when she was having a baby - it would be a bit like moving school, going to secondary school or sat in school for the first time. You keep moving to a different care home with bigger boys and all that, you know, and I know people did not like it where I came from.

Senator A. Breckon:

There was a view expressed that if you had 4 and 5 year-olds then it was not necessarily a good influence if you had 13 and 14 year-olds, teenagers perhaps with an attitude.

Mr. J. Byrne:

I think within the homes they should be split, as in separate playgrounds, or whatever you want to do, separate eating times, but to be in the same home in my opinion would be the best option because you will see the people who you ... in long-term care as you are moving up you will see those people. There has to be, obviously, a separation; you cannot mix 4 year-olds with 13 year-olds.

Senator A. Breckon:

The other thing as well, and I wonder if you would like to comment on this, on Monday we went to the La Preference and to La Moye and to Young Offenders Greenfields and Brig-y-Don. We also spoke to some of the people living in these places as well. We had sort of free access. You mentioned the 16 bit and I wonder if you would like to comment on where the support is. Young people said to us when you get to that age: "Well, okay, if you need to start getting housing then what do you do, who helps you? If you need to be looking for a job then if you have not got somewhere to live then you have a difficulty. How do you get the support with a benefit?" I mean, do you have experience with that?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes, we have just got a 21 year-old housed from the Housing. What I cannot understand is we had to write a letter yesterday to Social Security explaining why he does not live with his parents when he has been in care since the age of 3 and he is estranged from his parents. It was such a stupid idea, such a stupid question, because if Housing are willing to house him there must be a problem. But then there is the argument about being under 25; Social Security do not normally pay anybody's rents. We have sorted the problem out and that but there needs to be a provision for ... a lot of things have been closed down over here. There used to be Camelot, I went into Camelot in St. Saviour's Road, and that was a girls' hostel and it was sort of moving from children's home ... it was like a stopgap preparing you for moving on into society. You had to pay your rent on time; you had to be working, have some sort of job; once a week you had to stay in and do your washing. You had to ... you know, it taught you the things that parents usually teach you: managing your money, taking care of your personal hygiene. That is lacking over here now. There are some children in Greenfields that might be better off in somewhere like that.

Ms. C. Cooper:

The Association feel quite strongly about this fact that from 16 to 18 or, in some cases, 25 if you are trying to get housing benefit, that it is just woefully lacking. There is nothing there.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Let us face it, if children are going to be neglected in that way then we have got to expect them to end up in courts.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

There has to be some support in that transfer from being a child to an adult.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

There has to be some sort of support because of lot of them in children's homes, you are in a children's home, you are not allowed in the kitchen. So 9 times out of 10 you do not even learn how to use a toaster. Now, that would not happen if you were living with your parents.

Ms. C. Cooper:

During our meeting that we had with Housing we did bring up this 16 business, did we not, Joe? We were told: "Legally there is nothing we can do until they are 18" and that was it. They were not even willing to discuss the options.

Mr. J. Byrne:

Basically, the majority of people I have spoken to here, especially the ones you have got in trouble or got into drugs and all that, have all done it around the same age. It is between the ages of 14 and 18. One chap I was speaking to, when he left care at 16 his family did not want him back, he could not go into care any more, the shelters and all that do not take people until they are 18. So if you look at that, there is a massive hole there. There is a massive hole that needs to be filled. It is not easy for them. I have been researching. I am just looking at what other countries do and there is ways round it. I have got printouts if you would like to have a look at them: supported lodging schemes and training flats, pathway projects. I am not suggesting like you get another care home or such because people do not want care. It gives them their individuality. In some places in the U.K., like if it is over here, say

Dandara, they will go in and they will buy 2 or 3 flats in the Dandara project or something like that, and those flats belong to Housing. So that when people come out of care they allow them to move in there.

Senator A. Breckon:

Integrate back, yes.

Mr. J. Byrne:

Not entirely unsupervised: they have their social worker; they are checked on. They are made sure they are given a place. They have only got it for a short period. It is not a long period. This is not your home. They say: "We will give you 6 months, a year. You get yourself sorted out." Another place will get them a job but they get them back into society easily without just basically throwing them on the street. That seems to me like the big hole over here is between the ages of 15 and 18, definitely, and that needs to be addressed.

Senator A. Breckon:

I can tell you there is a scheme being looked at up at Five Oaks where it is sort of semi-supervised where people are, like you say, like the halfway house. The other thing when we were in the Young Offenders Centre on Monday, some of the young lads in there did say to us: "Well, you come out of here, you have not got much money, you have not got anywhere to live, you have not got a job. In the shelter there are people with alcohol problems. It is not really where we should be and what do we do then?" They did say from there every 2 months there is a group go in, including Social Security and Housing, to talk about what may be the issues when people are coming out but in the main they did not feel it was effective, was the impression we got. You might like to comment on some of the hostel stuff and maybe the situations that people have found themselves in, if that has been the case.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I do not know. For some reason I found, my personal experience was I was a lesser person. I was treated as a lesser person than anybody else, just because I was put into care. I was not put into care for

any fault of my own. I think the people that run these places have to be told. It is wrong. It is appalling and it should not ever happen. Children are supposed to be nurtured. We are not doing our society any good by failing them because they are only costing the taxpayer, the government, everybody here, more money for the rest of their life. What we are doing by failing them is breeding a social security culture. We have to give them confidence and everything that we could do that we would do to our own children.

Senator A. Breckon:

In the main, do you think there was a stigma attached to that that may have affected a lot of people's education ...?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Without doubt. The way I was treated in school, everywhere, everywhere. The children treated me differently, the teachers, everybody: "Do not bother with her, she will get married, she does not need an education, she is in care, she is not good enough." There was one job that I worked at Bersvale's(?) in King Street and Mrs. Hayes was on the panel for Camelot. She would not allow me to have lunch with any of the other girls because I was one of those, I was a naughty person.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Have you found from your membership who have had more recent experience of care that things are changing or have changed in recent times?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I do not know. I think society as a whole has changed.

Ms. C. Cooper:

Unfortunately our youngest member at the moment is 21 and we do not think that there has been an awful lot of change, do we, from the oldest members?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

No.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

That is interesting because certainly we have heard from those involved in the care system from the Ministry saying: “Of course, now we are talking about 18 and sometimes 21 in terms of negotiating that transfer into the adult world. Yes, that happens now.” So it is interesting to see that you are not picking up that impression.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

What are they telling you is missing, Candy? Just to give you some background, as a result of that *House of Commons Report* they are doing an experiment. It goes by the very fancy name of Social Pedagogy and it is basically trying to introduce ... they are going to Scandinavian countries. They think the British are far too procedure oriented, they are far too legalistic in the way they handle children’s homes and there is a lack of emotional warmth, partly because staff were afraid, it has to be said. Staff are afraid of getting close to people, they are afraid of touching people, because of all the controversy that is swirling around the children’s services. How do you think we can improve things other than the obvious thing of putting more money into the service? Give it a go, go on.

Ms. C. Cooper:

To be honest with you ... go on then.

Mr. J. Byrne:

This is about my own personal opinion but I am listening to people who are talking to me. They use a phrase like “politically correct” now, the world has gone politically correct crazy, basically, and some of the care leavers I know who now have a problem with their own children, their children are being taken off them far too quickly and far ... sometimes in their ... I mean, obviously in Social Services for

correct reasons but in their opinion it is wrong. It would be unfair to say that the care system has not improved, because surely after all this time it has improved in certain areas, but in other areas it is a lot tougher now, you know. Children will be taken off parents at the drop of a hat, basically.

Ms. C. Cooper:

Also I think more so if the parents have also been in care.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes, I have been threatened.

Mr. J. Byrne:

There is a stigma, a label, people are labelled.

Ms. C. Cooper:

We were threatened with our children being taken away because ... let me explain, I have not in care personally but my partner was in care. We had an accommodation problem and the first thing it was like: "Oh, well, we will take the kids into care." Now, both my boys are at university doing law degrees so that would have been totally wrong to have taken them away but it was because my partner had been in care: "Well, you know, they are bad parents."

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I have this even now. They seem to think that even though you are a lesser child for being in care you are less an adult as well. I still get that. I still get it now. People judge me on how well Gemma has done (my daughter). So I must have been an all right balanced person because she went to university. Well, you do not get any guarantees; it does not matter whether you are a millionaire or pauper. You know, sometimes it is the luck of the draw whether your children stay on a good path and achieve or not. You can have a brainiest child in the world but they will not get out of bed.

Mr. J. Byrne:

There is no easy answer to your question of what can you do to improve it. In my personal opinion, the last resort should be a child taken away from their family. There should be panels like this, panels set up. It goes from one to the other, to referral, to referral, to referral. It just seems - again, it is not my opinion, it is what I am hearing - it is one item gone wrong and, bang, your child is off you.

Senator A. Breckon:

Can I ask question on that? We talked about the sort of rights and that but do people in that position know what they can test if the system is telling them this is what is going to happen? Do they know that they can challenge that and how they can do it?

Mr. J. Byrne:

This is one of the reasons why we are set up. We are here to advise them, you know. I hope you do not mind me saying, we would like to be involved more in children's services. Am I right in saying that?

Ms. C. Cooper:

Yes, because, I mean, there is nothing greater than experience and the thing that the Association want is for people to ask the people that were in care.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I think maybe employing more adults that have been in care might help because you just have a natural affinity with each other. We do not sit and bitch and tell people within our membership what happened to each other; we just know we are one of the group, because we were in care. We just have a natural understanding.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is there then a role for either you or others to act as advocates on behalf of children in care?

Ms. C. Cooper:

I was just coming to. This was one of the things that we would like to have set up, some sort of advocacy service.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes.

Ms. C. Cooper:

Children in care at present would probably relate better to somebody who had been in care because they know what it is like.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

They feel and we feel that we know where they are coming from. Somebody that they feel is on their side, because a lot of children that are in care it is a them and us situation. There is an awful lot of adults telling you what you have got to do. Normally it is only a mum or mother and father or a father and it is all by ... it is all a rule. Your whole life is one big rule and half the time there is not a lot of choices. You are not given a choice; you are told what is happening. Choice is a big thing, even for me now and bringing up my children, definitely that was the one thing they have always had is a choice because we had no choice.

Mr. J. Byrne:

In an unofficial way really we are being used as that. I mean, the States of Jersey Police bring people down to us, Victim Support. So, unofficially, we do do that but it would be nice to be recognised officially as ... we do not want to make the decisions, we are not going to say this person should be ... that would not be our job. Basically, we would like to be a referral unit, a referral group that people can be referred to us.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

You took me on to the next question which was were you ever listened to? Was your opinion, your choice ever ... did anybody ever ask what you wanted to happen next at any stage?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

No, never.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Because the other thing that goes hand in hand with advocacy is listen to the kids.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I believe my children, it did not matter what age they were, if you put it in the right way you will get a decent answer. If you are asking them ... you know, these people are making decisions about their life, even if they are 4 or 5 years old. All right, everybody's opinion changes as they grow in life and I do think, you know, maybe they would feel that they have a bit more control.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can I just say, and I hope I am hearing you right, I was a youth worker and I think what you are saying is that people who have been in care or are in care they need to be worked with not worked on.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Would that be fair?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes, definitely.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

What about the *Williamson Report*, Joe. Have you been asked your views on the *Williamson Report* by H.S.S. (Health and Social Security)?

Mr. J. Byrne:

No, we have not been.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

You have not been?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

No.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Have you sent anything in?

Mr. J. Byrne:

No. I mean, it was only when Mr. Le Quesne contacted me I just started to study the report but I have not studied it really.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I have not even looked at it yet. We get so much information sent to us that we need 48 hours a day to read all the different statistics and information and everything. But we must understand as well that Jersey is very different. What we want to do for the future here is very different to England. It is a very small community, everybody knows everybody, your problems, you name it, you know. It needs to be something different from the U.K. to solve our problems.

Mr. J. Byrne:

One thing I would have expected in the *Williamson Report*, I have just found it and I cannot see it ... I have been in Jersey for over 20 years but I mostly worked with finance. But when I started this job what I wanted, the first thing was to have a look at the guidelines and the provisions of the Protection of Children to see what guidelines are set out in Jersey and it became obvious that there was none. There are no actual guidelines. When I researched this it seems like every other country, Ireland, Australia, Canada, all the ones that suffered bad child abuse, they all have these provisions in place now, guidelines. The *Williamson Report* I would have hoped would have come up with something like that; something needs to be written for Jersey. I have got printouts of guidelines here. A lot of them will be inapplicable to Jersey but a lot of it is just basic guidelines set out of what should happen to a child in care and when they come out of care. At least you have got some sort of yardstick to judge on. So, I do not believe but I could be wrong that the *Williamson Report* has recommended that. To me that is something that should be, it is basic. You know, you would need legal teams set up to make sure you are covered in every way, just guidelines then people ... you know your rights, people know their rights and it should be there, in my opinion.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

In Jersey I do not think we have got particularly a “rights” culture, I am afraid, in general.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

You did mention there are some people for whom care is the appropriate thing but one of the things we are hearing, of course, if the fostering policy becomes successful, and there are doubts, although there has been a lot of effort put into it, there are doubts, that might make the entry into children’s homes ... you might get more difficult kids or kids going through behavioural issues going into children’s homes. We got the impression, rightly or wrongly, that was the pressure that Brig-y-Don was facing, for example. Health and Social Services want to move them into a certain direction and they do not want to move there into that direction. But do you agree with that general approach of trying to develop fostering and adoption services as much as possible?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

You know, I think we have to look at every situation because every child and every person is different, they are all different; what works for one will not work for another. I think where possible, especially with children that have been taken away from their families is to keep siblings together. That is a big bugbear with me when they split up children. Then in that situation if you have got, say, 6 children from one family then there is no foster parents that ... they would be very far and few that would take on 6 siblings.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Well, just finding houses in Jersey would be a big issue, yes.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes. So this is where in that situation you do need children's homes but the attitude towards them has to change. The attitude towards children being in care has got to change because it needs to be seen as a positive thing that the Government want to nurture and look after these children and value these children as much as any other child on the Island that have got parents to fight for them, and that that is what the Government should be doing, fighting for these children that are in care; fighting to make sure that they are good adults.

Ms. C. Cooper:

What you do not want to happen is there to be a children's home just for the naughty children because then you are going to get a stigma: "Oh, well, if you go to Brig-y-Don it means you are a naughty child." It is the same old thing again. Obviously, some children who have got behavioural problems would be better off with foster parents. Some children who have not got any behavioural problems might prefer to be in a children's home because they are more anonymous in a bigger home and they find that the family group is not right for them which is why they were in care in the first place. There are all sorts of ... you know, you could talk about it for ever. But there has to be the option there.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

We mentioned staffing at the beginning; you can train in a way but you cannot train for people who have got emotional walls. You can train people who have got formal qualifications ... and certainly residential care has always been the Cinderella sector of social work, has it not? It has a massive turnover. It has often had a lot of young people who then have moved on to other careers. But one of the places we looked at, certainly from what we saw there was a lot of warmth around the place and I do not think that person who was running the home got it from going on a management course.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

You cannot get it from a qualification.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

That person happened to be a very warm person and you could sense it when you went into the home and there was interaction in the kitchen. In fact, we even managed to get a piece of Christmas cake because we spotted it in the cupboard. So we were able to sort of unofficially go into the cupboard. But there was such a different ... you could spot it instantly you walked in.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

You walked in the door.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Yes.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

It was a home not --

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Yes, not an institution.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

-- an institution, yes, and this is what needs to be. Well, so much so that I have 2 children of my own and I have a stepson who I got out of Brig-y-Don, and my 2 children used to say: "Put me in Brig-y-Don." My stepson used to come on a Wednesday and Friday to Sunday before he came to live with us. My children used to say: "Well if Ricky is coming out can I go and take his place?" So, you know, that is brilliant. If that is how children feel about it then that is how they should feel about every place, yes.

Mr. J. Byrne:

Going back to your question about fostering, I advocate it because each child has to be treated as an individual and I am not saying that the children's homes should be for naughty people but if you treat children as individuals each one should get the best support they can. I am split 2 ways about it because I think the checks are better nowadays because obviously a lot of the people ... some of the people I spoke to have been abused while they have been in foster carer. So, it is not a great situation. You could be putting the child from one danger into a bigger danger, you do not know that. I think the checks nowadays are so severe that hopefully it has sort of eradicated that problem of placing a child in danger. So fostering for me is the way forward because if you treat a child as an individual that is the way. That is only a personal opinion.

Senator A. Breckon:

Trevor, do you have anything?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

No, fine, thanks.

Senator A. Breckon:

Is there anything you would like to say to us? I mean, feel free, anything you would like to say about ...

Deputy G.P. Southern:

Have we missed something obvious that you were dying to tell us about and we have not asked you?

Senator A. Breckon:

I mean, improvements that could be made in ...

Ms. C. Cooper:

Just the fact that you are here and you are asking our opinion, that is an improvement.

Senator A. Breckon:

Well, what these issues are about, it is like everything else, it is about ordinary people but it is getting it down to that level and getting ordinary people's influence on what happens. That is really what it is about. People like yourselves who have that knowledge and experience, that is where some of it should be coming from not people - what was it you said - who tell you rather than ask you?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

I was saying it was about being worked with not worked upon. People are individuals. Again, it comes back to what you said about being heard, does it not?

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

Yes.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

This is just an extension of that.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

A pity in a way you did not hear Social Services because, although it was sort of fairly heavy policy stuff, they did say in the recruitment of some social workers, I think this week, they did have 3 of the

children, they formed a panel and interviewed these social workers. I do not think they were the final word but that was part of the process.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

That has happened in the Youth Service for quite a few years, so that is a good extension.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Mr. Le Sueur spoke a lot about a special situation in Jersey so you should really look at that and see what you think about it.

Ms. E. Le Poidevin:

I have spoken to him at a meeting of ours that he came to and he was quite surprised because he said some of the children he sent to prison he did not necessarily know what they were going through, you know, and this was the knock-on effect. This is where we have to get it right because it will just carry on costing the Government money. If they can concentrate on bringing children up right to be good adults then we will all benefit.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

This throws one final thing up which again came from reading the most recent report in the U.K. ...
(audio ends)