

SECURE ACCOMMODATION IN SCOTLAND: ITS ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH ‘ALTERNATIVE’ SERVICES

**Report of Research for the Scottish Executive
Education Department**

by

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November 2005

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This web only report is accompanied by the Insight report 33 ‘Secure Accommodation in Scotland: Its Role and Relationship with Alternative Services’, available both on-line and in printed form.

**Both reports are published by Information and Analytical Services Division,
Scottish Executive Education Department, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6
6QQ. If you have any enquiries about these reports please contact the
Dissemination Officer on 0131-244-0894.**

Both reports were published in September 2006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been carried out without the support and co-operation of many people whose contribution we would like to acknowledge. Special thanks are due to the young people who agreed to us finding out how they had fared, and sometimes also talked with us. The research team learned a great deal from them and their experience and for this we are very grateful. We also very much appreciate the vital contribution of social workers, residential staff and workers in community-based projects who both helped with recruitment and took time to provide key information on their work with the young people and how they had responded. Too many people and agencies were involved for each to be named, but all their support was greatly valued. Secure unit managers were also very helpful in facilitating access to staff and young people and in keeping the research team up to date on service developments within their units. In addition we are grateful to a wide range of professionals and decision makers who agreed to be interviewed for the study. These included social work managers, panel chairs, reporters, head teachers, LAC nurses, mental health specialists and children's rights officers.

The study was made possible through funding from the Scottish Executive Education Department. Throughout the study, the support and advice of research managers and policy staff was invaluable and much appreciated.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

This Scottish Executive funded study of secure accommodation and services which offer an alternative was carried out between November 2002 and 2005, by a research team from the universities of Stirling, Strathclyde and Glasgow. The research focussed on the use and effectiveness of secure accommodation in relation to young people placed on the authority of a children's hearing.

The study was completed almost ten years from the publication of *A Secure Remedy*¹, a joint inspection report which had advocated the development of community-based alternatives and the more targeted use of secure provision. This prompted the development of a range of alternatives including intensive community-based support, specialist fostering and close support residential provision. Different kinds of 'alternative' services continued to come on stream as the research was underway, with intensive support/monitoring and electronic tagging (ISMS) being introduced shortly before the research ended. During the same period, plans to increase secure provision were approved and building began on three new sites. There were also changes in practice within existing units, with an increased focus on mental and physical health assessments and the use of standard cognitive behavioural programmes.

These developments and the commissioning of this research show that developing the most effective use of secure accommodation and alternatives remains a priority in both policy and practice terms. Though not its explicit aim, in some respects this study provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which the developments and ideals proposed in *A Secure Remedy*² had been realised.

Aims and Nature of the Research

The aims of the research were to provide:

- a) clearer understanding of the purpose and effectiveness of secure accommodation in meeting the needs of young people, their families and communities;
- b) a framework to assist the decision-making process on the use of secure accommodation by children's hearings and social work departments.

¹ SWSI (1996). *A Secure Remedy*. Edinburgh, Social Work Services Inspectorate for Scotland.

² *A Secure Remedy* proposed the ideal situation as one in which a secure place is available for each child who requires it, but no child is admitted who can be accommodated safely in an open setting.

More specific objectives included obtaining information about a sample of young people admitted to secure accommodation, including their characteristics, background and current circumstances, reasons for admission and how they fared during the secure placement and after they moved on. Similar information was to be obtained on a group of young people considered for secure accommodation, but sustained in an open residential or community setting. On this basis the aim was to identify which interventions/combinations of interventions within secure care promote the most effective outcomes for children and young people and assess to what extent the 'containment' aspect is crucial to the success of these.

Alongside examining and comparing the experiences of and outcomes for young people, the study was to develop better understanding of decision-making in relation to secure accommodation, with particular attention to decision makers' expectations of the secure placement. Cost implications and benefits were also to be assessed.

The research addressed each of these aims and objectives, but in different ways from what was anticipated in the study's initial design. The main change was to shift from a primarily comparative design which focussed on outcomes for two distinct samples, to a predominant concern with decision-making process and how these influenced pathways through services. This shift was prompted by a recognition that secure accommodation and 'alternatives' were typically offered as complementary services at different points in a young person's care career and that the relationship between the use of secure accommodation and 'alternatives' differed across local authorities.

Taking these considerations into account, key elements of the research were as follows:

1. Relevant information was obtained on 53 young people shortly after their admission to secure accommodation between October 2002 and 2003. Across units recruitment rates varied from 20-60%, resulting in over representation of young people from one authority. Girls and young people under the age of 15 are slightly over-represented, reflecting their greater willingness to take part in the research. Initial data were obtained from records and from interviews held with social workers, key workers and some young people. Updates on their progress were obtained from social workers at two points, approximately 12 and 24 months after admission;
2. Similar information was collated on 23 young people considered for secure accommodation but sustained in an open setting for at least 6 months. This was obtained from records and in one interview with a key worker or social worker and, in some cases, the young person. Young people were recruited from community-based services offering an 'alternative to secure accommodation' and from residential schools;
3. Information was gathered on costs of typical packages of care for key sub-groups within both secure and alternative samples. Sub-groups were formed according to the placement from which the young person had been admitted to secure accommodation or living in when considered for secure placement;

4. Interviews took place with senior and first-line social work managers, panel chairs and reporters on decision-making in relation to secure accommodation and views about its function and effectiveness. These were semi-structured interviews which also incorporated the use of vignettes through which informants were asked to discuss case scenarios and the likely responses. Respondents were drawn from eight local authorities, selected to give a geographical mix and reflect different patterns of use of secure accommodation.
5. Two rounds of interviews were held with a senior manager in each secure unit. In addition key 'other professionals' were interviewed including the head teacher, psychologist, Looked After Children (LAC) nurse and children's rights officer.
6. A review was conducted of subsequent placements for all young people made subject to secure authorisation by a children's hearing between 1st July and 31st December 2003. Information from SCRA³ and local authorities indicated that this applied to 104 young people, 59 boys and 45 girls, of whom 79 (76%) had been placed in secure accommodation by the time the survey was completed.

KEY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The research set out to provide clearer understanding of the purpose and effectiveness of secure accommodation, alongside a framework which would assist decision making about its use. One of the key study findings was that the use of secure accommodation and how effective it could be was highly context specific. Secure accommodation was required when the current level of risk could not be safely managed in an open setting, so the point at which an admission was necessary and appropriate depended to a considerable extent on the capacity of local resources to manage young people in crisis. Correspondingly its effectiveness was dependent not just on what was offered within the secure setting, but on appropriate services being available when young people moved on.

The study reported that so called 'alternatives' to secure accommodation were seldom introduced at the point when secure authorisation was being seriously considered. More usually projects offering an 'alternative' were introduced at an earlier stage, thus preventing the need for secure accommodation from arising, or they provided after care support. So secure provision and 'alternatives' were complementary services rather than directly alternative options. The ways in which they complemented each other varied across local authorities, depending on both the availability of secure accommodation and other resources and prevailing attitudes about their use.

This recognition of the interconnections between secure accommodation and other services and the extent of local variation has implications for strategic planning at a national and local level. Several research findings lent support to the view that three key resources would reduce the need for secure accommodation: residential provision which could manage young people in crisis; intensive community-based support and social work and project staff who were able to effectively gauge and manage risk.

³ Scottish Children's Reporters Administration

Each of these three resources were key in preventing admissions and in producing better outcomes for young people after leaving. Thus boosting them can be expected to reduce the time young people need to spend in secure accommodation, whilst also making placements more effective.

In addition to what alternative resources are available, the use of secure accommodation reflects the level of risk decision makers' are willing to tolerate. This study indicated that panel members were willing to tolerate a lower level of risk than social work professionals and could be sceptical about the protection offered by individual packages built round an individual child. These arrangements were sometimes developed out of necessity, when no secure place was available, but whereas some social work managers viewed this as an opportunity to extend the capacity to provide security without locking young people away, some panel members viewed them as a poor substitute. In light of this, giving panel members more authority to enforce the implementation of secure authorisations may stifle the development of innovative practice. However, it is also important that social workers have a high enough level of training, experience and contact with young people and their families to be able to safely assess and manage risk.

Findings in relation to current capacity highlighted that there can never be a straightforward answer to how many secure beds are required. The influence of availability of other services on the need for secure placement has already been considered. Two other sets of findings were relevant. First there was a discrepancy between the widely held view that it was difficult to find a bed when needed and the results of a survey of placements following secure authorisations which indicated that almost three quarters of young people admitted had been placed on the day of the authorisation and that most young people who could not be placed no longer required the bed when one became available or they returned to a children's hearing. Had a place been available, these young people would have been admitted, suggesting that if capacity is increased, so will the number of admissions. Whether this is to be welcomed or not depends on what a secure placement can offer.

The second set of relevant findings point to the fact that secure placements currently offer very different experiences. All offer security, so if the role of secure accommodation is defined simply in terms of keeping a young person or the community physically safe, it makes sense to talk of what 'a secure placement' can offer. However they are also expected to assess and start addressing the difficulties which resulted in the secure placement and this is approached in quite different ways. Variation in practice reflected a range of factors including distance from the young people's home area, whether the unit catered primarily for young people who offend or who are at risk and whether the predominant underpinning ethos was to support emotional development through providing nurturing care or increase cognitive understanding and so help young people control their behaviour. This research suggested that each of these approaches could work well for certain young people, but that placements were ineffective when what young people were offered did not correspond to their needs. Thus current developments towards provision of more specialised units are likely to increase placement effectiveness, particularly if admissions can be based on well-informed professional assessment.

Practice within secure units is continuously developing, so that the current situation will be different from that described in the research. Health, educational and psychological assessments were all being developed, with welcome results, both in terms of benefits for individual young people and through strengthening links with other education and health services. However it remained a challenge to ensure continuity of service and that assessment recommendations were implemented either during or following the placement, particularly in relation to specialist education and psychological services. The case for developing inter-agency collaboration over a longer time scale remains strong. Within this, there is a clear need to develop a capacity to offer sustained, skilled work with parents, young people and other family members. Among the young people involved in the secure sample, very little family work was reported, though developments in practice were reported in the final round of interviews with unit managers. However effective models of family support were evident in some of the work undertaken by projects offering intensive community based support. Social workers have traditionally had expertise in this field and, with appropriate training, supervision and time could be well placed to resume this role.

One of the potentially key roles of the social worker is to provide continuity over time, whilst also linking across relevant family members and the range of services currently involved with young people. The importance of continuity and having someone to rely on is clear from this study. It was the on-going relationship with families which enabled some intensive support projects to avert admissions when crises arose, whilst the same principle was key to a step-down approach helping young people retain some of the benefits when they left a secure placement. In the present climate social workers frequently move job and often have insufficient time to spend with young people or be reliably available during or following a secure placement. If the social worker is not able to provide this linking role in a way that is helpful to the young person, it would be important that care plans identify someone else. In light of the potential disruption to networks which a secure placement can cause, this person should ideally be identified at the start of a secure placement or even when admission is being considered.

This research confirmed messages from other studies that many young people who are admitted to secure accommodation have been identified as having difficulties from a young age. For others problems first surface in their teenage years, though these often relate to earlier trauma or loss. In the secure sample a particularly high proportion of young people had experienced the death of a parent or other close relative. The obvious answer is to make services available at an earlier stage, but knowing how to effectively reach young people most in need is more difficult. Ideas can be sought in the wider literature, for example in relation to early intervention, parenting work and outreach. These emphasise that hard to reach parents are best engaged by starting to address their own priorities⁴ and that children from families with multiple, long-standing difficulties are likely to need ‘thicker’ forms of intervention which specifically address education, health and social problems from an early age⁵. For

⁴ Ghate, D.; Ramella, M. (2002) Positive Parenting The National Evaluation of the Youth Justice Board’s Parenting Programme. Policy Research Bureau for the Youth Justice Board, London.

⁵ Little, M., Mount, K. (1999). Prevention and Early Intervention with Children in Need. Aldershot, Ashgate.

children and young people, the key is to have people they can come to rely on and trust over time, so that problems can be shared when they arise. Providing this presents quite a challenge, but is important if we are seeking to provide what is best for children and young people. Community-based family centres might be a model which could be developed for this purpose.

Whether secure accommodation offers value for money could not be answered by this research because as yet there is little agreement on what can be expected from a secure placement and no comparable services with which to compare it. In the short term, secure accommodation had certainly kept young people safe, while there were clear educational and health benefits. However for a significant minority, social workers considered that there had been little change to the behaviour which prompted the placement. Two years later, about a quarter were rated as having had a good outcome, but for a similar number the outcome had been poor, with the remainder being in the middle. Given the seriousness and complexity of some young people's difficulties, these results may be viewed as satisfactory. However the alternative sample also included young people with serious longstanding difficulties and some of them were also managing to cope, without the disruption and potential stigmatisation of a secure placement.

It is tempting to add that non secure options will also be cheaper, but our summary of indicative costs indicated that there was a degree of overlap, depending on what the alternative package entailed. Over the year prior to and following the secure placement, estimated costs for young people admitted to secure accommodation ranged from £66,800- £354,400. Corresponding costs for those considered for secure accommodation, but not admitted were £20,800- £217,100. If one also takes into account that community-based support works best if offered over several years, the cost differences may be reduced even further.

This research has demonstrated that for young people who are putting themselves or others at risk a range of secure and open options is needed, so that diverse individual needs can be catered for. Recent developments in service provision are clearly moving towards this position. The research has also indicated that provision prior to and following the secure episode is crucial in determining the use and effectiveness of secure provision and that this support may need to be provided over a longer time frame if the benefits of specialist intervention are to be realised. Because the mix of services across local authorities is so diverse, more specific evidence about the effectiveness of different packages and pathways may need to be sought in research carried out at a local level.

Little, M., Axford, N., Morpeth, L. (2003). "Children's Services in the UK 1997-2003: Problems, Developments and Challenges for the Future." *Children and Society* 17(3): 205-214.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 This is the report of a three-year study commissioned by the Scottish Executive to develop understanding of the use and effectiveness of secure accommodation in Scotland. It was carried out by researchers from the universities of Stirling, Strathclyde and Glasgow. The use and development of secure accommodation was a priority for the Scottish Executive Education Department when this research was commissioned in 2002 and, as reflected in significant developments in the intervening period, remains a key policy issue as the research is concluded in 2005.

1.1.2 This introductory chapter begins by summarising key policy and service developments in relation to secure accommodation within the Scottish context, then goes on to briefly highlight some relevant points from the wider literature and developments in the U.K. Consideration is then given to the research design, with particular focus on how this was adapted as the research progressed to accommodate growing understanding of the nature and use of secure accommodation and ‘alternatives’ in Scotland.

2. THE SCOTTISH CONTEXT

1.2.1. In recent years between 200 and 250 young people have been admitted to secure care in Scotland each year, with about 90 in placement at any one time. A majority are boys but girls typically account for more than a quarter, most being placed for welfare reasons, rather than offending (SWSI 2000, 2002). Approximately two thirds of young people in secure accommodation are placed there on the authority of a children’s hearing. The remaining third of the secure care population are subject to a court order, either serving a sentence for a serious crime or on remand.

1.2.2 The report *A Secure Remedy* (SWSI 1996) was important in defining policy aims and setting the agenda for change in this field. It defined the optimum position as one in which a secure place would be available for all young people who required it, whilst no one would be admitted to a secure setting if they could be safely accommodated within an open setting. This recommendation prompted the growth of a range of community-based ‘alternatives’, including schemes offering enhanced or intensive community-based support and specialist foster care. By adding electronic tagging to an intensive support package, the Intensive Secure Monitoring System (ISMS), introduced early in 2005, aims to provide a direct alternative for young people facing secure placement.

1.2.3 *A Secure Remedy* also focused on improving the service offered to young people in secure accommodation, ensuring a high standard of care and education and that services were in place to address the difficulties which had resulted in the admission. The report itself and two subsequent surveys (SWSI 2000, 2002)

confirmed that the secure population encompassed sub-groups with quite distinctive problems and needs. Girls, sexually aggressive young people, those with long-standing, chronic problems and young people whose difficulties emerge in their teens were recognised as having different requirements, even if they also had certain basic needs in common. Recent policy and service developments have focused on developing capacity to cater for this diverse population, both through increasing overall provision and enhancing the service within each individual unit.

1.2.4 Significant developments in overall provision were announced in March 2003, with the announcement of plans to create an additional 29 secure places. This raised the total from 96 to 125, whilst also allowing for greater geographical spread and dedicated provision for girls. In addition to the secure places, there are to be 30 further close support places and extra funds for intensive community support. The decision to augment the secure estate was taken because a range of key stakeholders such as children's hearings panel members, police and social work managers had identified a need for expansion.

1.2.5 A range of measures were introduced, with a view to improving the quality of provision within units. Besides the requirement to meet National Care Standards for all accommodated young people, the Secure Accommodation Forum was established to provide a setting in which best practice could be shared and developed. An increasing number of units introduced programmes to help young people address offending and other difficulties and the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care was commissioned to develop a set of information and practice guides (SIRCC, 2005).

1.2.6 Over the period of the study, developments across secure units have taken place in relation to the formalisation of assessment procedures and/or the further involvement of inter-disciplinary aspects to assessments. The issue of the transition of young people leaving secure accommodation is seen as a priority and some units have been developing outreach services or planning such developments. The provision of mental health services to young people in secure accommodation is also seen as a priority area and specialist projects have been developed or links with CAMHS and other services built on. The training agenda is being addressed in all the units with emphasis currently being placed on training of staff for registration with the SSSC. Dedicated training materials have also been commissioned from the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

1.2.7 Significant changes in the decision-making process have also been proposed. In the consultation document 'Getting it Right for Every Child' (Scottish Executive, 2005a) it is suggested that local authorities should be obliged to implement the decisions of a children's hearing, thus removing the discretion of social work managers to decide whether a secure requirement should be implemented.

1.2.8 Partly because of the nature and role of the children's hearing system, secure accommodation in Scotland is quite different from similar provision in other parts of the UK. One of the key differences is that it is located within residential child care provision and that a high proportion of young people are admitted primarily on welfare grounds. However policy and practice issues inevitably have resonance with

those in other parts of the UK, whilst the literature which informs them is primarily based on English-based research.

3. KEY ISSUES FROM RELEVANT LITERATURE

1.3.1 Since there is space for only a brief review of the relevant literature, comment is confined to those issues which emerged as particularly important in this study.

1.3.2 It is widely accepted that a key challenge for secure accommodation is to cater effectively for a very diverse group of young people. For Harris and Timms, ambiguity is an essential characteristic of secure care. Taking a historical perspective, they argue that secure care is not a coherent service for troubled children, but a means of catering for a wide range of young people deemed to require containment and fitting readily within no other setting. Its indeterminate nature is captured in the subtitle of their book: 'Between hospital and prison or thereabouts' (Harris and Timms, 1993).

1.3.3 Harris and Timms' book was written over ten years ago, yet their point about secure care's ambiguous nature remained very relevant for this study. Secure care caters for two populations, those requiring care for their own safety and those who present a risk to others. Traditionally the first group is viewed as needing care or 'treatment', while the second requires control, reform or punishment. However with adolescents these distinctions become blurred partly because 'juvenile offending' is widely attributed to faulty parenting or socialisation, but also in light of evidence that both groups have similar characteristics and needs (Goldson 2000; SWSI 2000). A number of commentators point out that the inherent ambiguity in the secure care task cannot be attributed solely to the requirement that it should cater for different kinds of needs. Equally important is the fact that attitudes to troublesome teenagers and how they are constructed within policy is not constant, in that their vulnerability is emphasised at some points and their criminality at others (Goldson 2002a; Harris and Timms 1993; Muncie 2002).

1.3.4 In this research questions of ambiguity emerged as even more multi-layered than these commentators suggest. Young people could be constructed as 'children in need'; 'offenders' or 'children with rights' and somewhat differently within each of these categories. It also became evident that how young people were viewed reflected aspects of the ethos, service provision and organisational arrangements within different local authorities and units. As Harris and Timms claim, ambiguity about the role of secure accommodation was therefore inevitable. In this study it became evident that definitions of 'alternatives to secure accommodation' were equally diverse.

1.3.5 Whilst acknowledging the ambiguity of the task, secure care is evidently expected to provide care and control, while also effecting some behavioural change. Cognitive behavioural approaches are generally credited as the most effective way of changing criminal behaviour, though their appropriateness in work with young offenders has been questioned (Pitts 2002). Bullock and colleagues note that strongly cognitive-based interventions are less effective with young people who are very difficult and disturbed (Bullock et al., 1998), a consideration with obvious relevance

for secure provision, since many of the young people there have serious and long-standing emotional difficulties (e.g. SWSI 2000). The extent to which longstanding difficulties can or should be addressed within secure care is contested, but there is considerable evidence that many residents require a caring and supportive environment (SWSI 2000; Walker et al. 2002). The different needs of boys and girls have been highlighted, with O'Neill reporting particularly poor experiences and short-term outcomes for girls placed on welfare grounds, since the service is geared to cater predominantly for male offenders (O'Neill 2001). A number of studies have highlighted that though the secure care task is talked about in terms of tackling problems, its first and predominant function is to contain (Goldson 2002b; Kelly 1992).

1.3.6 Questions about what secure accommodation *could* and *should* offer young people were at the heart of this study. Inevitably, given the diversity of population and ambiguity of role and expectations, no definitive answer to these questions can be reached. However this study provided an opportunity first to differentiate between different perspectives about how secure accommodation should help young people and then to examine the extent to which these corresponded with service provision, young people's characteristics and experience and how they fared after leaving the secure placement.

1.3.7 The importance of understanding the interaction between young people's own characteristics and behaviour and the actions of professionals and service providers is well established in the literature. Bullock et al.(1998) highlight that the routes by which troubled children reach secure care are a product of child-related factors and decisions and actions taken by professionals. These researchers differentiate between the life *route*, which refers to children and their families' actions, and *process* which encompasses actions taken throughout the child's life by professionals in health, social work and education or by courts and children's hearings. Harris and Timms (1993) observed that decisions about secure care placement itself were rarely based on theoretically sound professional assessment of young people's needs. Rather key participants in the decision-making process developed 'narratives' which defined young people in certain ways, thus justifying their favoured course of action.

1.3.8 Goldson (2000) identifies a number of influences which increase the likelihood of secure placement on welfare grounds. First there is a tendency to locate the problem in the individual young person, whereas deficiencies in the welfare system might be equally relevant. For example open residential units vary in their capacity to provide appropriate care, control and support for seriously troubled young people, yet their failures are seldom mentioned when young people become out of control. In addition he cites evidence that class, gender and ethnic origin influence the route young people take through child welfare services. Agency priorities, geographical location and ease of access to secure placements or alternatives also determine which children find themselves in locked accommodation.

1.3.9 These analyses suggest that in order to reach the optimum position identified in *A Secure Remedy*, attention is needed not only to practice in relation to individual young people, but in how that practice is shaped by agency ethos and patterns of resource provision. Whether certain kinds of risk to self or others can be managed in an open setting is a function of the young person's behaviour, how risky behaviours

are viewed and the capacity of existing resources to manage them. In the original research plans the intention was to examine each as related but distinct issues. However in time it became evident that they were inextricably linked. This had implications for how the research questions could be most appropriately understood and addressed.

4. THE RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1.4.1 The broad aims of this research, as outlined in the specification and proposal, were to provide :

- 1) a clearer understanding of the purpose and effectiveness of secure accommodation in meeting the needs of young people, their families and communities;
- 2) a framework to assist the decision-making process on the use of secure care by children's hearings and social work departments.

1.4.2 The study was expected to concentrate on admissions to secure accommodation through the hearings rather than the courts. A survey of young people placed in secure accommodation on remand was commissioned by the Justice Department and reported separately. The report is available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/04/Rev-YPDSA

1.4.3 The specific objectives were as follows:

- a) To identify the characteristics of children and young people who have experienced periods in secure care and describe the nature of this experience for them and their families;
- b) To obtain evidence on the impacts of secure care on children/ young people and assess to what extent the outcomes observed match with those envisaged by the hearings in reaching decisions about the use of secure accommodation. Within this to identify and explore any differences in understanding which may influence decisions;
- c) To identify which interventions/combinations of interventions within secure care promote the most effective outcomes for children and young people and assess to what extent the 'containment' aspect is crucial to the success of these;
- d) To compare the impact of secure care upon the children/ young people and their families with the experiences of those with similar behavioural characteristics who receive alternative services (including non-secure residential settings and specialist fostering placements);
- e) To provide guidance on the most appropriate uses of secure care (in relation to identified needs of children and young people) in order to inform the decision-making process at hearings;

- f) To assess the cost effectiveness of secure care, including a comparison with the costs and benefits of a representative range of appropriate, alternative services.

Research Design and Methods

1.4.4 The research addressed each of the original aims and objectives, but it did so in ways which were different from those originally envisaged. The research reported here is based on data obtained in the following ways:

1. With respect to 53 young people admitted to secure accommodation between October 2002 and 2003, information was obtained on; biographical characteristics and background; reasons for their admission; services provided prior to, during and following the secure placement. The data were obtained from records and from interviews held with social workers, key workers and some young people. Updates on their progress were obtained from social workers at two points, approximately 12 and 24 months after admission;
2. Similar information was obtained on 23 young people considered for secure accommodation but sustained in an open setting for at least 6 months. The sources were records, one interview with a key worker or social worker and in some instances, an interview with the young person;
3. Information was gathered on costs of typical packages of care for key subgroups within both secure and alternative samples;
4. Interview took place with senior and first-line social work managers, panel chairs and reporters on decision-making in relation to secure accommodation and views about its function and effectiveness. These were semi-structured interviews which also incorporated the use of vignettes through which informants were asked to discuss case scenarios and the likely responses;
5. Two rounds of interviews were held with a senior manager in each secure unit;
6. Interviews with key 'other professionals' in secure units, including the head teacher, psychologists, Looked After Children (LAC) nurse and children's rights officer. These focused on the service provided by themselves and colleagues in the same discipline;
7. A review was conducted of subsequent placements for all young people made subject to secure authorisation by a children's hearing between 1st July and 31st December 2003.

1.4.5 The secure sample was recruited in collaboration with key workers who passed on a letter prepared by the research team to each young person admitted to secure accommodation on the authority of a children's hearing. The key worker briefly explained what the research would entail, then, if the young person agreed to meet with the researcher, further details of the research were explained at that time.

Each of the young people gave written consent at one of these meetings. Key workers or social workers were also asked to give parents a letter which provided some information about the research, let them know that their son or daughter was being invited to take part in it and asked them to let the social worker or key worker know if they objected to this. Two young people who agreed to take part in the study were not included because their parents raised objections.

1.4.6 A sample of 53 young people was recruited from a potential sample of 146, so the take up rate was low at 36%. Recruitment rates varied across units from 20% to 60%. Key workers sometimes said that young people who did not take part were generally suspicious of any intervention in their lives, especially when they were to be tracked over two years. Others were already taking part in other research and did not want to be involved in a second study. A higher proportion of girls compared with boys agreed to take part (41% of girls and 26% of boys). As a result girls are slightly over represented in the sample, accounting for 55% whereas they typically form less than half of young people admitted to the secure accommodation through the children's hearing route. This may mean that there is also some over representation of young people admitted on welfare rather than offence grounds. In terms of age and reasons for admission to secure accommodation, the sample is broadly representative of the overall population of young people admitted to secure accommodation on a children's hearing order.

Changes to the Research Design and Methods

1.4.7 During the first year of the research it became clear that two aspects of the research design did not correspond with how services were delivered in practice. Expectations that social workers and key workers would provide questionnaire-based data proved unrealistic, partly because of lack of time and partly because frequent changes of social worker meant a certain amount of detective work was involved in locating who was able to provide up to date information on young people's progress. As a result, information was obtained in telephone or face to face interviews. This was more time consuming, but on the positive side yielded a fuller understanding of the issues than would have been conveyed in a questionnaire.

1.4.8 The second discovery was that far fewer young people than had been anticipated were being made subject to secure authorisation or seriously considered for secure placement then sustained in an open or community-based alternative. Attempts to recruit this sample continued for 2 ½ years and involved repeated contacts with residential schools and projects providing an 'alternative' to secure accommodation. Typically staff in these services' initial response was that many of the young people they cared for or worked with met our criteria. However on closer examination, very few young people had been close enough to secure placement to warrant being included in the sample. Instead most services offering an 'alternative to secure' catered for young people whose behaviour, if it continued, might result in secure authorisation being sought. In addition some supported young people during and after their secure placement, so may have reduced the time spent in secure accommodation or the likelihood of them returning.

1.4.9 Acknowledging a somewhat different role for ‘alternative’ services than was implied in the original research design had a number of important implications for the research. First it questioned the widely held perception that large numbers of young people were made subject to secure authorisation, but not placed in a secure setting. It was important that the research gained as accurate as possible an understanding of this issue, so a survey was carried out of placements of all young people made subject to secure authorisation between 1st July and 31st December 2003. In addition, recruitment of a sample of young people who met the study criteria continued, including only those who had been sustained outwith secure accommodation for at least six months. Twenty-five were recruited, with only three boys and three girls who met the criteria declining to take part.

1.4.10 A second implication of finding that few young people were sustained in an open setting for any length of time after consideration for secure placement was that a quasi-experimental comparison between young people placed in secure accommodation and those sustained in an open setting was not feasible. In addition it became evident that young people accessed a host of different services alongside or following admission to secure accommodation, so it would not be possible to isolate the effects of the secure placement. There was very little knowledge either of how individual young people came to be referred to and make use of certain services, or of how this mix of service provision impacted on their lives. This therefore became the primary interest of the research. This shift of focus was helpful because it allowed the research questions to be addressed in a way which did justice to the range of complex influences which shaped what services were offered and how young people responded.

1.4.11 The key changes to the proposed design and reasons for them are summarised below.

Proposed Methods	Actual Methods
Comparison of the characteristics and experiences of 75 young people admitted to secure accommodation and 75 young people considered to meet the secure criteria, but sustained in an open setting. Young people were to be recruited shortly after being placed in or considered for secure accommodation and their progress tracked for 18-24 months.	53 young people placed in secure accommodation were recruited as soon as possible after admission and their progress tracked for 24-30 months. 23 young people who had been considered for secure accommodation, but sustained in an open setting for at least 6 months were recruited up to a year after they had been considered for secure accommodation.
Cost effectiveness of secure accommodation as compared with alternative options for young people with similar difficulties.	Approximate costs were calculated of a range of typical pathways through services.
Obtain data on young people’s progress primarily through questionnaires completed by social workers and key workers.	Data was obtained through telephone and face to face interviews with social workers and key workers. Some interviews were also held with young people.

Qualitative data would be obtained on 25 young people from the secure sample, through interviews with key participants.	With the shift from questionnaire based to interview-based data, similar information was obtained on all young people within the secure sample.
	Survey was undertaken of placements of all young people made subject to secure authorisation during a six month period
Interviews with young people	Fewer interviews were carried out with young people than planned because of the inclusion of the above survey and shift to a more time-consuming method of data collection from social workers.

1.4.12 The reasons for these changes in the research design might be viewed as important findings in themselves. Social workers being under pressure and frequently changing impacted on the service young people could be offered, whilst more realistic appreciation of the relationship between secure accommodation and ‘alternatives’ was important in understanding young people’s routes through services. The findings are presented in two parts, with chapters two-four focusing on stakeholders’ views and organisational issues and chapters five to nine charting the young people’s progress. The implications of both elements and data on costs are brought together in two concluding chapters.

PART 1 FINDINGS: PERSPECTIVES ON SECURE ACCOMMODATION

CHAPTER 2: PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE AND USE OF SECURE ACCOMMODATION

1. INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 Findings reported in this chapter are drawn from a range of sources including interviews with secure unit heads, first line and senior social work managers, reporters, panel chairs and a range of other professionals working within the secure units, namely head teachers, psychologists, LAC nurses and children's rights officers. Respondents were drawn from all secure units and from eight local authorities. The local authorities were selected to give a geographical mix and reflect different patterns of use of secure accommodation, as indicated by the number of admissions in the previous year and whether the authority had its own secure provision. Respondents' views were inevitably shaped by their position within and knowledge of the system, but there were also marked variations within different groups of respondents. For that reason, and to avoid repetition, the findings are reported under topic headings, rather than respondent groupings. Connections between distinctive perceptions and expectations of secure accommodation and local authority ethos and practice are considered towards the end of the chapter.

2 EXPECTATIONS OF SECURE ACCOMMODATION

2.2.1 Asked to outline the main functions of secure accommodation for young people placed by a children's hearing, there was broad agreement that its primary role was to keep them safe and secure at a time of major crisis in their lives, while at the same time providing an opportunity for their emotional, educational and health needs to be assessed and help offered to reduce the difficulties which had resulted in the secure placement:

*Mainly to protect the young people... but also at times the community.
But also to try and make changes in the lives of these young people and
their families* (S.W. manager 2)

*Protecting the child, protecting the public from harm. I don't see it as a
punishment* (Reporter 1)

*Keep a child safe and the public... just try to get something, just a stop in
the child's life to get resources put in place* (Panel Chair 1)

*I suppose the obvious answer is to provide somewhere which provides
safety, care and education for young people who need to have the kind
of structure briefly around them to help them and sometimes stop and
take stock and then be able to move on and move back into the
community again*
(S.W. manager 3)

2.2.2 Though brief, the above summary of responses about the function of secure accommodation encompasses all key elements. These were to:

- protect the young person and the public;
- assess needs and allow young people to take stock of their situation;
- engage with young people and effect change;
- equip young people to move back into the community.

2.2.3 A number of respondents gave a similar answer, but qualified it by saying that this was an ideal which had to be differentiated from the reality. One panel member expressed quite limited expectations of what might be achieved because of the short time scale:

There's a limit to what we can do in secure. A lot of it is just about keeping the children occupied, trying to talk to them about why they do what they do and, you know, it's more of a holding thing (Panel Chair 2)

2.2.4 A social work manager said that though expectations were usually framed in terms of meeting young people's needs, the subtext was that secure accommodation catered for young people who had reached a point of non-engagement with any services:

The reality of when secure is used in my experience is when all the support mechanisms that could be used have been tried and someone is basically out of control and disengaged with any adults (S.W. manager 2)

2.2.5 This latter comment is important because it highlights that the use of secure accommodation can be understood both in terms of what it offers young people and the function it serves within the child welfare system. As this research progressed it became evident that it would be necessary to understand the function of secure accommodation from both perspectives. Its relationship with other services is considered throughout the report, but primarily in chapters three, four and ten. This chapter reports on key stakeholders' views about the capacity of secure accommodation to fulfil its key functions. In chapters five-seven its effectiveness is assessed on the basis of young people's experiences and outcomes.

3. CAPACITY OF SECURE ACCOMMODATION TO FULFIL ITS KEY FUNCTIONS

2.3.1 Views about the capacity of secure accommodation were obtained in response to a specific question about whether the service was able to fulfil the key functions identified above. The majority of respondents identified gaps in capacity. A common explanation was that beds were not always available when necessary, so young people in crisis could not always be accommodated. A number of panel chairs

thought that the remedy would be to increase the number of secure places, but more commonly respondents thought the answer lay in more flexible and targeted use of existing resources. Some expressed a preference for smaller, local secure units, whilst others focused on developing the capacity of open residential and community services to provide more intensive and structured care and support. Availability of places is considered in more detail in chapter four.

Capacity to protect the young person and the public

2.3.2 The predominant concern was that young people should be safe, with public safety viewed as an important consideration, but less frequently a major concern. In most instances secure accommodation was viewed as providing a safe environment. Some respondents thought one of the main values of secure accommodation was that it could allow young people who had grown accustomed to fear and uncertainty to feel safe and secure. However, a small number of respondents did raise concerns about the potential risk of bullying, with a few expressing particular concern about girls who had been abused being placed alongside boys or other girls who were intimidating.

2.3.3. A number of respondents, primarily social work managers, did identify some less tangible risks from the placement in secure accommodation, mainly to do with how the young person came to be perceived. There were concerns that resorting to secure accommodation implied to the young person that he or she could only be controlled and kept safe by being physically held, whilst others commented that the stigma of having been in secure accommodation could impede the young person's progress in the future. Some people expressed the view that peer influence could result in young people developing undesirable or unhelpful behaviours, but others argued that secure units were well enough resourced and structured to make sure that adult values and culture prevailed.

2.3.4 It was generally accepted that the public would be protected if young people were in a secure setting, though a few panel members pointed out that offences could be committed when the young person was home on leave or if young people ran away while on outings from the unit.

Capacity to assess needs and allow young people to take stock of their situation

2.3.5 Alongside keeping safe, the other key function of the units was to allow time for assessment and for young people to take stock of their situation. The ideal was that young people could take a step back from the behaviours which were putting themselves or others at risk, whilst staff could help them work out what would help prevent the same pattern of behaviour being repeated when they moved on.

2.3.6 There was widespread agreement that units did offer a degree of breathing space and could allow for full assessment of educational, health and emotional needs. In the three years during which the research was carried out, the capacity to offer multi-disciplinary assessment increased, with LAC nurses routinely offering a health assessment and a system operating in each unit for a mental health or psychological assessment to be offered to all or some of the young people admitted. Improvements were also reported in arrangements for educational assessment, for example quicker

access to records from the young person's previous school. The importance of linking assessments together was also emphasised. Some professionals said that, as placements became shorter, on average 3-4 months, completing a detailed and holistic assessment could be an important element of what the secure placement offered.

2.3.7 Though each aspect of the multi-disciplinary assessment was valued, respondents often emphasised the need to better understand what emotional or mental health difficulties might be contributing to the young person's problematic behaviours and how these might be addressed. The psychologists or mental health professionals who were interviewed indicated that since most young people had multiple problems, assessment took some time. There was a strong emphasis on engaging with the young person, so that they became active participants in understanding the source of their difficulties and how these might be helped. Typically a range of difficulties were identified which needed attention, so a staged plan was developed to tackle them.

2.3.8 A number of the mental health staff pointed out that a lot of the young people's difficulties stretched back for many years. Though longstanding difficulties, for example in relation to attachment and loss, could not always be addressed within the secure placement, some suggested that secure unit staff should understand how these might impact on the young person's behaviour and response to the secure placement, and be able to draw on these insights when considering how an individual young person should be managed. It was suggested that unless staff had sufficient understanding and support to work in this way, the use of the time in secure placement would not be optimised. This kind of in-depth assessment and staff development was very time-consuming, so could not be routinely carried out within current resources and time-scales.

Capacity to engage with young people and effect change

2.3.9 Placement in secure accommodation was widely viewed as an opportunity to introduce services which had not been accessed by young people while in an open or community-based setting. From a rights perspective, several people pointed out that a secure placement should never be made or continued in order to access services, but it was seen as a great benefit that a range of services would be made available during the secure placement.

Health and Education

2.3.10 In terms of health, the most common needs were to visit a dentist or optician and have immunisations brought up to date. In addition, it was not uncommon for longstanding but untreated conditions, such as asthma or hearing difficulties to be identified and addressed. Drug-related problems could also be assessed and young people given appropriate advice. Young people were also given information on how to access services for sexually transmitted diseases and appropriate tests or treatments arranged. Some of the advice was given on a one-to-one basis, but in addition some LAC nurses provided sex education as part of the school curriculum, though the gender mix and range of sexual experience meant group teaching was not always considered appropriate. Capacity to offer education and advice on sexual health varied across units, so that in some the LAC nurse thought the service was as effective as it could be, whilst in another there were still plans for development.

2.3.11 Re-engaging with education was viewed as a major need to be addressed in secure accommodation, since many young people placed had missed out on a significant amount of schooling. Re-engagement was viewed as important, not simply in terms of learning but because reintroduction to a school or college placement would be important in sustaining any progress made while in secure accommodation.

2.3.12 Most respondents spoke positively about the educational provision in secure accommodation, though some gave examples of one unit taking several weeks to get information from a young person's previous school. A few questioned whether very small units could provide the breadth and flexibility of curriculum required. However those working in smaller units had given considerable thought to how the service could best meet such diversity of need and were evidently committed to ensuring that young people in their care did not miss out. In terms of certification, most units focused primarily on Vocational Qualifications and could offer a wide range of subjects. The modular format of these was well suited to the shorter term placements.

2.3.13 Across staff in units and respondent groups the main difficulty identified in relation to education was finding suitable provision for young people to move on to when they left. Education staff reported that the limited range of resources available meant there could be pressure to place young people in educational settings which did not correspond with their assessed ability. For example, it might be suggested that a young person who was capable of doing eight Standard Grades attend an educational unit which only offered two.

2.3.14 Much more positive developments were reported in relation to careers advice and planning. Through links with Careers Scotland, sessions could be provided on practical skills such as applying for jobs and more general preparation for work, whilst each young person was also offered an individual career planning interview. The range of vocational options in further education colleges was also cited as a positive option for young people in their last year of education, rather than returning to a school or specialist education project.

Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

2.3.15 Within all respondent groups, the capacity to engage young people with services which would help address their emotional and behaviour difficulties was viewed as a key function of secure accommodation. Provision in this field was diffuse, varied and constantly being developed, so the interviews encompassed very different kinds of discussion about what *should* be provided in secure units, what *was* provided and whether current capacity was adequate to allow the units to engage with young people and effect change. Given their differing roles, stakeholders' understanding of what was entailed in introducing and providing services varied across respondent groups. Unit managers, social work managers and psychologists or other mental health staff provided the most informed and considered responses on these issues. A number of reporters acknowledged that this aspect was not directly relevant to their role, though some had formed a general view that current provision was not adequate. Several panel chairs pointed out that it was difficult for them to assess whether their expectations of secure accommodation in this respect were in fact

met, because they did not usually see individual young people after the secure authorisation was made. However, from sitting on review panels, a few had formed the view that the service catered well for young people's needs, whilst others identified gaps, primarily for more specialised help to address mental health and addiction issues. Some panel chairs also emphasised the importance of the key worker forming a caring relationship with the young person and offering one- to-one contact rather than simply relating to them as part of the resident group.

2.3.16 Views expressed on this issue highlighted some of the ambiguities which permeate secure accommodation, so they are reported in some detail in the next two sections. Respondents' comments in this respect were closely connected to differing ideas of what was meant by a 'service'. Some respondents readily included the experience of living in secure accommodation, which we therefore cover first. Others only referred to specific programmes or services such as programmes to reduce offending or drug and alcohol use, so this is discussed afterwards. A number of respondents, primarily social work managers and mental health professionals, talked about the relationship between the residential experience and specific service provision.

The experience of living in secure accommodation

2.3.17 From some points of view the experience of living in secure accommodation made it more rather than less difficult to address the difficulties which had resulted in the placement being made. A number of respondents suggested that the very nature of institutional life meant that the priorities of the institution rather than the individual came to the fore, whilst residents became preoccupied with adapting to the regime and getting out, rather than the addressing of the difficulties which had resulted in their placement. Standard, rather than individually negotiated, arrangements for family visits and home leave entitlement were cited as examples of the needs of the institution taking precedence. At a more fundamental level, there was also a view that placing someone in secure accommodation conveyed a message to the young person that their problems could only be resolved by imposing external controls, rather than developing their own capacity to manage them. The enforced nature of the placement could also foster superficial rather than meaningful engagement on the part of the young person.

2.3.18 Doubts were commonly voiced about the effectiveness of addressing difficulties outwith the context in which they arose. Offending and drug and alcohol use were viewed as closely related to young people's peer and social relationships, so ideally work should be carried out in that setting. Correspondingly, it was difficult to address family issues without involving other family members. No one who expressed these reservations proposed that all work with young people whilst in secure accommodation was unproductive, but they took the view that it would be more effective to offer this in open or community-based services, so provision there should be boosted. They also suggested that service provision while in secure accommodation would have a more lasting impact if services and resources were available to allow a gradual, step-down approach from the structure and support offered in secure accommodation.

2.3.19 A final frequently made comment was that the multiplicity and complexity of many young people's problems meant they could not be addressed within a short-term secure placement. This lent support to the view that consideration should be given to what *could* be achieved within the time scale, and care taken to avoid embarking on programmes which would have to be cut short or relationships which would need to be broken and so constitute another rejection for the young person.

2.3.20 These comments provided a degree of balance to the widely expressed view that placement in secure accommodation provided a good opportunity to address young people's difficulties. The following comment was one of the most uncritical made by a panel chair, but several encapsulated similar sentiments:

'As far as the panels are concerned, they're delighted if a child manages to get a place in a secure unit and, you know, at the three- month review they're invariably positive because the child has been contained and isn't doing anything wrong'. (Panel Chair 1)

Specialist services

2.3.21 Turning to specialist services, most respondents took the view that capacity to help young people address serious difficulties was improving, but still inadequate. The growth of mental health or psychological assessment was very much welcomed because it enabled young people and staff to better understand the nature and causes of problem behaviour or emotions and so be better equipped to manage it. Arrangements for psychological and mental health provision were different across units, with one unit relying primarily on psychologists employed within its own service and others having access to a team of child mental health specialists, including psychologists, social workers, psychiatric nurse and occupational therapist employed by the local health authority. The latter was thought to be beneficial organisationally because staff could facilitate links to other health authority services. There was little support among mental health staff for the view that admission to a psychiatric unit would be a preferred option for many young people in secure accommodation, but in some situations it was helpful to be able to quickly access a psychiatric or neurological assessment.

2.3.22 Whatever the organisational arrangements, the general view was that capacity to identify evidence-based methods for addressing emotional and behavioural difficulties had greatly improved, but that insufficient resources were available to deliver appropriate programmes or therapeutic help. Three main models were described through which the units' capacity to cater for emotional and behavioural difficulties might be enhanced:

- providing consultation to staff to boost understanding and management of young people's difficulties;
- delivering group and/or individual programmes in collaboration with unit staff and/or monitoring the integrity of staff-run programmes;
- providing individual sessions with a psychologist or mental health worker for the young person.

2.3.23 The first two involved care staff. They worked wholly or in part through the young person's experience in the residential setting and had the advantage of developing the care staff's knowledge and skills. The third provided more intensive support to young people with individual difficulties. Different models predominated across different units, but all staff felt that there could be value in augmenting each. In terms of the issues to be addressed, faulty social learning, disrupted attachment, trauma and abuse were key. These were typically reflected in a range of behaviours including deliberate self-harm, violence, offending and sexual vulnerability or aggression. The ideal to be aimed for was that issues addressed in individual or group sessions would be actively reinforced through the young person's day to day experience, for example by care and teaching staff encouraging the development of pro-social behaviours or appropriate responses to negative experiences.

2.3.24 The use of evidence based programmes was more developed in some units than others. In at least one unit teaching and care staff worked together to deliver programmes. Programmes most commonly mentioned were for anger management, cognitive skills and violence reduction. One point emphasised by several respondents and all mental health specialists was that, in order to be effective, any approach had to be based on thorough understanding of the young person's needs and ways of responding to interventions. 'One size fits all' programmes were considered to be unhelpful and some specific concerns were raised about girls being asked to take part in programmes focusing on consequential thinking and offending, when most needed to learn how to value and nurture themselves and so enhance their self-esteem. In addition, a good fit between young people's needs and programmes offered was likely to boost young people's motivation and engagement. Thus the ideal was to combine appropriate programmes with individual work.

2.3.25 A second general point was that interventions should take account of the short time scales by providing a kind of survival kit that would help young people better understand their difficulties and develop a more positive view of themselves. Several evidence based approaches, such as pro-social modelling and dialectic behaviour therapy, were being introduced, but it took time and resources to train staff and introduce them, so the potential for effecting change was not yet being maximised.

2.3.26 Capacity to engage effectively with parents was viewed as limited, which was a matter of considerable concern, since a number of young people would return home. In the initial stages of the study the research team was not informed of any specialist staff working specifically with parents and young people. However in the final round of interviews with unit managers, some described more recent developments in outreach and family work. Sometimes this was viewed as the social worker's remit, but distance and shortage of social work time meant very little effective work could be undertaken.

Equipping young people to return to the community

2.3.27 It was not unusual for respondents to point out that it was unrealistic to expect that a period in secure accommodation would make significant changes to a young person's life since many of their difficulties were longstanding and severe and because they would be returning to an environment which had contributed to their difficulties.

'I think children in secure accommodation are not there long enough to have a benefit. ...What they do come back to, well that's all pieced together, which is not ideal.' (Panel Chair 1)

2.3.28 Returning to their family could be particularly difficult if its way of life or relationships were likely to undermine progress. As noted above, there was little evidence of preparatory work being done with families. More often respondents emphasised the obstacles to family work. These included placements being some distance from home, lack of field social work time, parents' unwillingness to engage and a tendency for staff to frame the problems from the perspective of the professional services, rather than let parents say how they viewed the situation and what they would want to change.

2.3.29 Some respondents thought it was important to recognise when families lacked the capacity to offer more to the young person, in which case the focus should be on helping young people to acknowledge this and learn to parent or at least look after themselves. One psychologist emphasised the importance of this kind of work being based on an understanding of the cognitive and emotional processes through which young people develop, rather than expecting that simply getting older would equip them to cope.

2.3.30 Negative influences in the wider community were mentioned as equally important to the family environment. For some young people removal from the home community, either to residential school or foster care, was thought necessary if any change was to be sustained. For others the key was to strengthen positive influences and supports within their own communities. Developing the latter was easier if the secure placement had been in the young person's local area. The provision of appropriate education, in a school or college, was also mentioned as key to providing a focus for life after the secure placement. The view was that opportunities for college attendance and vocational training after school had greatly improved, but that finding appropriate education for younger pupils remained a weakness in the system.

2.3.31 In addition to considering the environment to which young people would return, a number of respondents, mainly psychologists and mental health professionals, emphasised the importance of considering what the transition from secure accommodation meant for the young person. A number of social work managers and mental health staff pointed out that the physical security and safety of the placement could promote attachment to staff. This was often viewed positively, but unless its significance was recognised and managed, leaving the placement could amount to another rejection and result in young people feeling bereft. Thus scope for continuing relationships with key workers or sensitively managing the transfer to new carers was an important ingredient in boosting the effectiveness of the placement. For some young people it was also important that therapeutic or medical services were continued after they had moved on. Not surprisingly there was recognition that it was more difficult to provide continuity when the placement had been some distance from the young person's home area.

2.3.32 There was a widespread view that current arrangements seldom allowed for this kind of needs-led planning. More usually young people had to fit into whatever

resources were available and placement endings could be organised around maximising the use of resources rather than the emotional needs of the young person. Whilst individual planning was viewed as key, a step-down approach into a resource-like close support was considered suitable for many young people, but places were not always available. Managers in units which had close support provision on the same site found this much easier to arrange than others. Irrespective of how successful the placement had been, returning to the community was viewed as a highly risky stage when many of the benefits of the placement could be lost.

4. SUMMARY POINTS

2.4.1 The key expectation was that secure accommodation would keep young people safe and, if applicable, protect the community.

2.4.2 There was also an expectation that the time in secure accommodation would be used to assess young people's difficulties, introduce appropriate services and help them make changes.

2.4.3 There was a strong view that units' capacity for assessment and tackling difficulties had improved in recent years. The importance of developments in health care were frequently cited as particularly helpful. However, these improvements were seen as patchy and very few respondents thought that the service was able to fulfil the functions expected of it. There were requests for additional resources within secure units, but some respondents also took the view that comparable services should be available through open residential and community-based support, since they could be more effective in that kind of setting.

2.4.4 With increased input from psychologists and mental health professionals, there was increased awareness of the nature of young people's difficulties and how these might be most effectively addressed. However the capacity to offer appropriate interventions or support had yet to be developed.

2.4.5 In addition to specific programmes and interventions it was considered important that the experience of group care should facilitate changes in attitudes, perceptions of self and behaviour. This had implications for the respective roles of specialists and care staff.

2.4.6 A central issue was that many of the young people had entrenched difficulties, so would require skilled help and support in the long term, yet secure accommodation aimed to be short term. For this reason, it was widely held that the capacity to effect change depended as much on continuity and suitability of service provision as on what could be achieved within the placement itself. It was emphasised that appropriate after care support strongly influenced the service's capacity to influence young people's behaviour and sustain progress when they returned to the community or an open setting. This implies that any consideration of placement in secure accommodation (or indeed alternatives) should from the start be made on the basis of a long-term plan.

CHAPTER 3: PERSPECTIVES ON THE NATURE AND USES OF ALTERNATIVES TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION

1. INTRODUCTION

3.1.1. One of the key aims of this research was to develop understanding of the circumstances in which young people considered for secure accommodation could be effectively maintained in the community or an open setting, through the appropriate use of ‘alternatives’. Key stakeholders’ perceptions and expectations of these services was evidently important in determining the role they could fulfil.

3.1.2 As discussed in chapter one, the original research design implied that there were a number of clearly identified services which could be offered at a point when young people were close to being made subject to secure authorisation and so might be viewed as constituting a direct ‘alternative’ to a secure placement. It soon emerged that what was meant by the term ‘alternative’ was far less clear cut. The research team’s attempts to recruit an alternative sample revealed that, apart from some intensive community-based support projects, most services offering ‘alternatives to secure accommodation’ were not offering a direct alternative, but either *intervening at an earlier stage* in order to halt the development of risky or problematic behaviour or *engaging with young people after admission*, when the aim was to enable young people to move out of secure accommodation sooner than would otherwise have been possible and avoid readmission by providing after-care support. From the survey of placements of young people made subject to secure authorisation, it became clear that when authorisation was made but no bed was available, the most likely ‘alternative’ was for young people to remain in a residential unit or school. Sometimes the need for secure placement was avoided, yet few of these resources labelled themselves as an ‘alternative to secure accommodation’, since the arrangement was unplanned. The term ‘alternative to secure accommodation’ implied a positive option, whereas sustaining young people in a placement because no secure place was available was generally viewed in a negative light.

2. DEFINITIONS OF ALTERNATIVES

3.2.1 Responses to the question ‘*what kind of services would constitute an alternative to secure accommodation?*’ highlighted different views on whether there ever could be ‘alternatives’ to secure placement.

A Direct Alternative to Secure Accommodation?

3.2.2 In the quotations presented below, two positions on whether there could ever be a direct alternative to secure accommodation are illustrated in responses to a question about what respondents would expect from services offering an ‘alternative to secure accommodation’:

I struggle slightly with this question because of the range of projects that have been set up as an alternative. I don’t know if it’s right just to

equate them because either children meet secure accommodation criteria or they don't.
(S.W. manager 7)

I suppose we wouldn't use them instead of security, in that if they require security, they require security, but what [our use of alternatives] does show is that very often people don't require security in terms of being locked away.
(S.W. manager 8)

3.2.3 The first quotation is an example of several responses which questioned whether it was in fact possible to have a direct alternative to secure accommodation. The argument was that young people should only be placed in secure accommodation if they require physical security, and if they require physical security, nothing less than that should be offered. As expressed in the second half of the first quotation, this position was often associated with the view that whether or not secure accommodation was required could be decided by applying certain objective criteria to the behaviour of the young person concerned.

3.2.4 The second respondent also took the view that physical security would be needed for some young people, but also emphasised that it was possible to provide security and safety without using locked provision. For this manager, 'alternatives' were intensive packages built around an individual young person in order to provide safety and security without the removal of liberty. According to this point of view, young people could meet the secure authorisation criteria, but still be kept safe without being admitted to a secure unit. Whether or not secure accommodation was required depended on what kind of alternative supports might be available.

3.2.5 This second perspective was associated with a keen awareness of the negatives associated with depriving young people of their liberty and an incremental 'process' approach to service provision, that is a willingness to develop packages in response to the specific needs and behaviour of individual young people. Elements of this approach⁶ were evident in three local authorities, two of whom had no direct access to their own secure provision and found it difficult to access secure places when these were required. Thus their commitment to developing alternatives had at least in part resulted from necessity.

3.2.6 From the process of recruiting the alternative sample and the survey of young people made subject to secure authorisation it was evident that in most cases the reason given for sustaining a young person in an open residential placement or in the community was that no secure place had been available. Most respondents were reluctant to view this practice as constituting an 'alternative' either because they considered the secure authorisation should not have been made or because they considered it was inadequate to protect the young person. One social work manager acknowledged that young people had been sustained in a residential setting in his own authority, but argued that this did not constitute an alternative because the children's hearing had been mistaken in making them subject to secure authorisation in the first place:

⁶ This approach is discussed in more detail in chapter four in relation to assessing risk and decision-making.

' we have young people who have been on secure authorisations which we have not implemented because we have not felt that they should be in secure.... we have kept them in our own residential units, but we have never really seen them as warranting secure provision... so I would say that is not an alternative as such' (Social work manager 9)

3.2.7 Correspondingly there was a high level of dissatisfaction amongst panel chairs that social work staff did not always implement their authorisations because this could leave young people vulnerable. Asked whether they thought an alternative could be provided by sustaining young people in an open setting, most panel chairs expressed some doubt about alternatives providing a substitute for secure accommodation:

That could be an alternative to some forms of secure accommodation, but it depends why the secure accommodation was an alternative in the first place. If it were for serious offending, then it might not be right. If it were to protect the child from self-harm then it might not be right. Maybe a short spell in secure accommodation to start addressing those behaviours, to calm things down might be right.
(Panel chair 3)

Again, the majority of children put in secure are absconding from whatever is being provided at the moment, so my theory would be an open situation is not going to work, they're not going to be contained in it. (Panel chair 1)

I want to see alternatives to secure accommodation, but I think these alternatives are very difficult because if you're working with a child in a residential setting where perhaps that child is being allowed to go home at night, there is a danger the child will abscond and if we put children into secure it's because it's secure. It's not to allow them to abscond. Most children who go into secure certainly would abscond if they got the chance. So I think alternatives would be prior to the child requiring secure. I think we need more of these kind of establishments.
(Panel Chair 4)

3.2.8 Among panel chairs interviewed for this study little enthusiasm was expressed for flexible, child-centred packages devised to cater for individual young people:

We don't have alternatives as such. Social work just put together a package but there are no actual alternative services, they don't really exist

(Panel chair 6)

3.2.9 Though arrived at for a number of reasons, the majority view across respondent groups was that there could not be a direct alternative to secure accommodation. Underpinning this was the notion that certain behaviours and levels of risk required physical security, irrespective of what other resources might be available. Alternatives were viewed as having a very important role in preventing

young people from reaching that point and supporting young people to return to the community after they had been helped to settle down, but there was considerable reluctance to view them as capable of replacing secure provision at the point when an authorisation was justified. However there was no consensus as to when that point had been reached.

Earlier Intervention and Aftercare

3.2.10 Asked whether services offered at an earlier stage should be viewed as an alternative to secure accommodation, approximately half of the respondents agreed they should, with the others saying they were not alternatives unless they were offered at the point when secure placement was being considered. Irrespective of how they were described, there was considerable support for making additional resources available at an earlier stage.

I see it as a continuum. You know I think if these young people are picked up early in life and you look at what can be put around them, and then if that is constantly being increased, you know, what do you move on to next? I don't think social work is as incremental in its approach as it should be.

(S.W. manager 6)

3.2.11 Respondents referred to support offered by criminal justice teams, specialist foster care and education projects and intensive community support schemes as potentially valuable services which would prevent young people ever reaching the need for a secure placement. In one local authority with fairly extensive provision of this kind respondents were convinced that their availability had reduced the number of young people going into secure accommodation. In most other authorities, those interviewed said alternative services were not yet well enough developed to have had a noticeable impact.

3.2.12 Services which support young people after they left secure accommodation were viewed in equally positive terms. They were also more often considered to merit the term 'alternative' because they could limit the amount of time young people spent in secure accommodation. It was common for respondents to say that some young people remained in secure accommodation longer than necessary because suitable placements and support were not available to enable them to leave. As with services which might prevent secure admission, respondents were concerned that young people receive appropriate support, irrespective of whether the service was termed an 'alternative' or not.

3.2.13 Boosting the capacity of open residential provision to provide structure and more focused work with young people was frequently cited as a potential way of avoiding young people reaching secure accommodation and sustaining them when they left. However there was a reluctance among some panel members to think of children's units as an 'alternative to secure accommodation', since these were the young people's home where the emphasis should be on normalising care.

3. EXPECTATIONS OF 'ALTERNATIVES'

3.3.1 Asked what 'alternatives' to secure accommodation should offer, respondents indicated that a considerable amount was expected of them. In short, alternatives were expected to provide what would have been offered in secure accommodation, while also compensating for some of the disadvantages of a secure placement.

3.3.2 The most common response was that the level of contact with the young person should be high, at least daily and preferably with a 24 hour stand-by service. This intensity of service, coupled with developing a productive relationship with the young person and his or her family was viewed as central to making change. The capacity to work with families and in the young person's community would potentially mean that changes could be sustained.

I think they should offer a high level of contact, availability for young people and their families, so out of hours contact, out of core hours. And I suppose an attempt to develop meaningful relationships and actually do focused work once the immediate crisis is over. (S.W. manager 5)

Well they should offer a stable basis for work to be done, concentrated work to be done with the young person to address the reasons why they might go into secure - either they're persistently absconding and when they are absconding perhaps placing themselves at risk or placing the public at risk... but in terms of local resources and what not, the question has to be asked,' is it better to try and address the problems in the child's own environment than put them into a false environment?' (Panel chair 6)

3.3.3 Foster care was frequently mentioned as a form of care which incorporated many of the ingredients of a potentially effective alternative:

[in this authority we have no alternatives, but there are plans for professional foster carers] I would feel they might be better off with professional foster carers because that would overcome the problem of what happens when they leave secure accommodation. There would be more of a long-term look at the child, rather than they have their freedom restricted and then they're back where they started (Reporter 1)

3.3.4 In addition to compensating for some of the drawbacks of secure accommodation, alternatives were also expected to include the perceived advantages, for example allow access to appropriate resources, especially education:

I think they should offer the safety of the child, but I also think a lot of panel members want the child to go into secure when they're not having an education either and they're guaranteed that in secure. I think any alternative has to have education built into it. (Panel Chair 1)

4. SUMMARY POINTS

3.4.1 There was strong support for augmenting services which worked intensively with young people before they reached the stage of requiring secure accommodation and for those which supported young people during and after secure placements. Opinions on whether these should be called 'alternatives' varied.

3.4.2 There were different views on what was meant by an 'alternative to secure accommodation'. One position, widely held view among social work managers and panel chairs was that, if young people were accurately assessed as requiring secure accommodation, no other resource would be able to hold them safely. Others took the view that whether a young person could be held safely depended on what alternatives were available, so that whether secure accommodation was required was a function of the nature of service provision as well as the young person's behaviour. According to the second point of view, services could be devised which would sustain some young people who met the secure criteria in an open setting, though there would still be a smaller group who would need physical security for their own and/or others' safety.

3.4.3 'Alternatives' could be thought of as specific projects or as packages of services put together to suit an individual young person. Ideally, 'alternatives' were expected to compensate for some of the drawbacks of secure placements, while still conferring some of the benefits. These might act as a direct alternative, but in practice were more often acting as a form of prevention or of after-care that might make possible a shorter stay in secure. The key elements of an effective 'alternative' service were high levels of contact with the young person and his or her family, preferably with a 24 hour stand-by service.

3.4.4. More structured and task focused residential care was viewed as a good way of avoiding admission to secure accommodation and supporting young people following placement, though there was some reluctance to call this an 'alternative to secure accommodation' because this was thought to detract from its central caring role.

CHAPTER 4: DECISION-MAKING AND PLACEMENT AVAILABILITY

1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1 Decision-making in relation to secure accommodation emerged as a dynamic process which took place in three key sites, that is within Social Work Services, at children's hearings and within secure units. The decisions centred around two key dimensions: determining the needs and best interests of young people and deciding who had priority to the secure placements available.

4.1.2 This chapter aims to highlight key elements of the decision-making process and the relationship between them. It draws further on interviews with key stakeholders, including key points from the vignette exercise. Relevant findings are also included from the survey of placements for young people made subject to secure authorisation by a children's hearing. The chapter begins by examining how the decision is made that a young person requires a secure placement, then goes on to look at questions of availability and prioritising which young people should be admitted.

4.1.3 Decisions about whether or not a young person should be made subject to secure authorisation were usually made in two stages. The usual arrangement was for social work staff to decide that a secure placement was required, then ask a children's hearing to issue the relevant authorisation, either prior to placement or within 72 hours of an emergency placement having been authorised by the chief social work officer. Unless a place was obtained before authorisation, one had to be found in order for the warrant to be implemented. For this to happen, one of the secure units had to decide that a particular young person should be prioritised and offered a place.

2. DECIDING WHETHER A SECURE PLACEMENT SHOULD BE SOUGHT

Social Work staff and other professionals

4.2.1 Decision-making procedures for the use of secure accommodation varied slightly between different local authorities but always required the involvement of the Heads of Service and the secure unit. Increasingly it was considered important to involve other professionals such as education staff and psychologists in decision-making meetings. Where such practice existed, this was viewed as placing responsibility for keeping the young person safe with the '*whole authority*' and so shifting pressure from social work staff.

4.2.2 Social work departments varied as to the detail of decision-making procedures, but in all local authorities the decision that secure authorisation was needed was made first by a front-line worker and supervisor, then reviewed by a senior manager. In interviews with both first line and senior managers it was evident that the decision to apply for secure authorisation was often reached at the end of a process through which a range of alternative options had been tried. Though the same

principles seemed to apply generally, details of procedure and approach differed across local authorities.

4.2.3 Varied kinds of very pro-active approach were described in three of the eight authorities in which managers were interviewed. For instances, a first line manager gave the following account of typical practice in his own team:

We obviously know what the Intensive Support projects are in our area....We use our Resource Screening Group which sits on a weekly basis within the team to access the intensive community support. We can manufacture resources, we can use our initiative, our imagination, because we have sessional staff whom we tap into. We can also tap into a drug project based in the team.

There are dozens of young people who would probably come very close to fitting the secure criteria for secure accommodation and I think that is where we use our experience and expertise, our ability to manage risk with the resources we have got. That is where we would use our resource screening group and argue a fairly strong case and we would say 'Yes, the person is beginning to meet the criteria but I think we want to explore these other avenues now. We believe the risk is manageable.' And this is where, you know you do rely on the hairs on your neck standing up. You do rely on your stomach. That sounds very trite, but I think that type of experience does come into play. And what I have usually found is that where a social worker and senior are sitting discussing a case with each other and the concerns are on-going, we usually reach that point about the same time. 'We have really taken this as far as we can, we are becoming quite worried now. Right let's move on to the next stage.' But in between times you are looking at the Resource Screening Group backing you up in terms of accessing resources that are maybe going to cost money. But you are arguing that it's cheaper than placing in security and it's better than a child being locked up. (S.W. manager 10)

4.2.4 The same respondent went on to explain that this way of working might continue during the period between seeking secure authorisation and a place becoming available. On occasion, he said, young people responded well enough to avoid taking up the place once it was offered. This kind of practice lends support to the view that the point at which a young person requires security emerges out of the experience of using resources to try and keep young people safe in the community, rather than a more static or objective assessment of risk.

4.2.5 Practising in this way required a reasonable range of alternative resources and organisational structures through which these could be flexibly accessed and funded. It also required that staff were experienced and knowledgeable enough to assess and manage risk safely. This decision-making practice corresponds with a high emphasis on avoiding restrictions on young people's liberty, so that secure accommodation was viewed as only warranted when all other options had been tried.

4.2.6 In other authorities, whilst secure accommodation was still considered a ‘last resort’, it was also described as a potentially useful part of the care plan. The differences between this point of view and the first one were subtle, but seemed to hinge on whether a placement in secure accommodation could be expected to produce benefits, over and above those associated with keeping the young person safe, which could not be offered anywhere else. The following quotation is from a manager who described an equally dynamic process, but with less emphasis on proactively trying a range of alternative resources and underpinned by an expectation that the secure placement would be of benefit in itself:

‘A lot of the kids that go into secure accommodation come from our own residential units.... people have been trying to work with some quite challenging behaviour and difficulties. And sometime, rightly or wrongly staff would see children going into secure not as an alternative, but as a helpful option. Like a girl for instance who goes missing all the time. There has been a lot of sexual stuff, she has been raped or whatever.. so it [secure placement] would be part of the plan to try and settle the thing down, with the expectation that the child would then go back to the unit they were in. (S.W. manager 7)

4.2.7 Within the last example it might be argued that the secure accommodation option was considered beneficial when the level of risk became higher than unit staff felt they could manage. A manager in another authority claimed that residential schools’ unwillingness to manage risk, especially in relation to young people who used drugs, could put pressure on local authorities to take the view that the risk had to be managed in secure accommodation. Correspondingly, another manager whose local authority directly managed a residential school talked of having the authority to decide that a school could continue to work safely with a young person rather than accept the staff’s view that a secure placement was needed. With independent schools, there had to be more negotiation of what schools could or should tolerate.

4.2.8 From a range of perspectives it emerged that in most instances the decision that a young person merited secure authorisation was reached by professionals when it was decided that the current level of risk could not be safely managed within the resources available. Thus thresholds were not absolute or objectively determined, but rather negotiated through the relationship between the young person’s behaviour and perceived needs and perceptions of what could be managed in available resources.

Children’s Hearings

4.2.9 Decision-making within a children’s hearing was necessarily very different from that which took place by professionals, as the hearing deciding about secure accommodation is normally a single event rather than an on-going process, and panel members have to make their decision on the basis of the information presented to them on the day. Panel chairs, reporters and social work managers were asked whether social workers and panel members were generally in agreement about whether a secure placement was required. Virtually all said that there was agreement in most cases. Some panel chairs said they were keen to respect the professional judgement of social work colleagues and one said that in their authority an agreement

had been reached that social work services would always implement secure authorisations. The panel chair thought that, with this assurance, panel members thought very carefully before going against a recommendation, but also acknowledged that the number of secure admissions in the authority had significantly increased. Other panel chairs emphasised that they made the decision based on the best interests of the child rather than the social worker's recommendation and it was acknowledged that differences of opinion did occur in a minority of cases. When differences did arise it was more usual for the panel members to opt for secure authorisation against the social workers' recommendation rather than be reluctant to agree a request for authorisation.

4.2.10 Asked for reasons for difference of opinion arising, a number of panel chairs attributed this to panel members being unconvinced that the measures put in place by social work staff were sufficient to keep the young person safe. A number took the view that social work services were motivated by keeping down costs, whereas panel members would advocate for what was in the best interests of the young person. Some panel chairs spoke positively about the potential benefits of a secure placement, so in arguing that a secure placement was required, they saw themselves as advocates for young people rather than punitive. Others pointed out that the situations could be very fluid, changing on a day to day basis, so that by the time a family came to a hearing, the situation may have changed from the one on which the recommendation was based.

4.2.11 Most social work managers also acknowledged that there were times when panel members opted for secure authorisation, but social workers thought it was unnecessary. Three reasons were offered: panel members' reluctance to work with as high a level of risk as social work staff felt they could manage; unrealistically positive expectations of the benefits of secure accommodation and a tendency to threaten secure accommodation if the young person did not comply with previous requirements and then feel bound to raise the tariff:

They have a different view about the level of risk, that's one issue. And the other issue is whether they feel that attempts to address that would be better served by secure. I think some panel members have an unrealistic view of secure accommodation. And I think there is also a problem for some of them in accepting a youngster's failure to respond to previous decisions. So they get caught in this tariff situation 'if you don't improve you will come back here and something else will happen' And lots of these kids can't keep to that kind of contract.

(S.W. manager 9)

Sometimes you get an over reaction 'I want this child locked up' and we are saying 'oh wait a minute, though this is the plan. We know there is a risk here, but we are trying to manage that. The care plan is working, it might be slow, we want to think about it, but we don't want to lock this child up'.

(S.W. manager 10)

4.2.12 Neither reporters nor social work managers thought that cost considerations would stop a local authority from requesting secure authorisation if it was required.

Indeed in one local authority managers were authorised to spend up to the cost of a secure placement on putting together an alternative package. Some of the managers knew that panel members believed cost considerations came into play, but insisted that this did not apply if the need for physical security was clear.

3. RESPONSES TO THE VIGNETTES

4.3.1 Another perspective on decision-making was obtained by asking respondents how they would expect to respond in situations described in four vignettes. The vignettes were completed by social work managers, panel members and reporters, so they offered some insight into whether differences in threshold could be identified within different professional groups. The vignettes were fictitious, but drew on the kinds of circumstances encountered by young people who took part in the study. They are reproduced in full Appendix 1. Key questions put to the respondents were:

- how likely is it that the young person would be admitted to secure accommodation?
- what considerations would be taken into account in making that decision ?
- how would you expect the young person to respond in secure accommodation?
- what outcome would you expect for the young person in the longer term?

4.3.2 Social work managers readily engaged with the scenarios depicted in these vignettes, so discussing them offered a useful window on how the myriad of relevant considerations might be taken into account and prioritised. Some panel chairs had a similar capacity to identify and weigh up competing influences on their decisions and think realistically about what the consequences might be. Others found it much more difficult to deal with the hypothetical nature of the exercise, to weigh up a range of considerations and thought that it was impossible to predict how young people were likely to respond. As a number pointed out, individual panel members were not often asked to consider whether secure authorisation was required. Reporters' responses also varied, but as some pointed out, it was not part of their role to make these decisions.

Vignette 1 : Julie

4.3.3 Julie was a 14 year old who had recently been admitted to residential accommodation at her mother's request. She had been going missing at times, staying away from school and using drugs. Her parents had separated and she had been living with her mother since she was eight, but still had contact with her father and his new family. After moving into the residential unit her problems had escalated, in particular going missing more often. On one occasion she had been found unconscious and when taken to hospital was under the influence of drugs.

Likelihood of admission

4.3.4 Of the 18 responses on Julie, all but four said it was probable or possible that Julie would be placed in a secure setting. The exceptions were two panel members

who thought she should be admitted to secure accommodation and one panel member and social work manager who thought she should not be admitted.

Considerations taken into account

4.3.5 The considerations which would make it more likely that she would be admitted were worries about her safety. Several people suggested that, as a female, she was vulnerable to sexual exploitation, so that she would be more likely to be placed in secure accommodation than a boy in the same circumstances. One social work manager pointed out that this is potentially a 'life and death situation', so that panel members would be likely to want to reduce the risk, though the social work care plan would not be to opt for secure after just one incident. However most panel chair respondents were also reluctant to move to a secure placement unless the behaviour was repeated or it became evident that she had become embroiled in a criminal network which it would be difficult to break from. So secure would not be merited by a one-off incident, but only once it became clear that the risks which resulted in her admission could not be managed in an open setting. Were she to be found unconscious again, it was thought that admission to secure accommodation would be a much more likely follow-up.

Young person's likely response to secure placement

4.3.5 Reasons given for not placing the young person in a secure setting also centred round a view that the experience would be distressing and would not facilitate the work which needed to be done to keep her safe in the longer term. The main need identified was to find out what difficulties underpinned the change in her behaviour. Was it peer pressure or were there more fundamental difficulties relating to her family circumstances and relationships? There was a view that the secure environment would not be conducive to undertaking this work, partly because Julie would be anxious and overwhelmed. Some social work managers believed that it was unrealistic to think that this kind of work would be prioritised in a secure setting, a more likely experience being that she would go through the placement without any real work having been done. It was suggested that she needed to feel personally cared for, so that foster care would potentially be a better option.

4.3.6 A number of social work managers and panel members wanted to move her back out of residential accommodation, rather than into a more restrictive environment. Getting her mother on board was viewed as key to potentially rebuilding the positives in her life.

Longer-term prognosis

4.3.7 There was a general view that the long-term prognosis would be better if the young person remained in a community setting. The key was to support her to build on the positives and there was hope this might be possible because she had known stable relationships and her earlier life had been relatively problem-free. However she was, as one respondent put it, 'sailing close to the wind' and could easily become a candidate for secure placement.

4.3.8 Most responses across local authorities and respondent groups encapsulated the tensions as outlined above. There were however subtle differences in how people discussed the examples. Some spoke with an urgency and energetic commitment about what would need to be done to help get this young woman back on track. Others took a less proactive stance which was more about waiting to see how events would unfold and whether the young person would be willing to engage.

Vignette 2: Tom

4.3.9 Tom was a thirteen-year old boy whose mother died from a drug overdose when he was four. Thereafter he had been in a number of foster placements which did not work out, largely because of his aggressive behaviour. He had spent the last two years in a children's unit where he gets on well with his female key workers who takes a lot of interest in him. He attends a residential school on a day basis and with some fellow pupils has recently been involved in a number of serious offences. These include mugging an old woman, stealing a car (in which Tom was a passenger), vandalising a bus and assaulting a 15 year old boy whose injuries required hospital treatment.

Likelihood of admission

4.3.10 Two panel chairs and one reporter thought Tom should be admitted, two panel chairs and three social work managers thought he should not be admitted and the other respondents thought it was possible, but could probably be avoided at this stage.

Considerations taken into account

4.3.11 Respondents approached Tom's situation in two quite different ways. All social work managers, some panel chairs and a reporter considered the impact on Tom of being removed to secure accommodation. They readily acknowledged that there were some very positive elements in his current situation, notably reasonable continuity in the residential unit and a meaningful relationship with his key worker, and were concerned about disrupting these. In contrast, some panel chairs focused primarily on changing the circumstances which were promoting the offending, so wanted his placement at the school to be reviewed or thought that a move to a secure placement might be beneficial. A few respondents mentioned that, in view of his age, an alternative should be sought if at all possible.

4.3.12 All respondents acknowledged that the offences had been serious and that, if they continued, secure accommodation would be likely. One panel chair took the view that the seriousness of the injuries to the young man who had been assaulted would influence whether Tom should be placed in secure accommodation.

4.3.13 Whatever their point of view, virtually all respondents pointed out that Tom needed help with the many issues which had made his life difficult. Those who favoured secure accommodation thought this might provide an opportunity to offer this help, others emphasised the need to boost community supports. A few social work managers also suggested that he might respond to a restorative justice approach and some additional input from a Youth Justice Team.

Young person's likely response to secure placement

4.3.14 Only two panel chairs thought that Tom might respond well to the structure of a secure placement and that this might provide an opportunity to sort out his many difficulties. However these respondents also acknowledged that this would depend on skilled help being offered and that this might not be available during the secure placement.

4.3.15 Others were concerned that Tom would be influenced by others more involved in crime and/or that his anger at being locked up would result in a lot of aggressive behaviour and so potentially take him deeper into the system.

Longer term prognosis

4.3.16 The majority agreed that the prognosis would be better if Tom was not admitted to secure accommodation, because admission would threaten the modest opportunities he currently had for establishing meaningful relationships and some continuity. The priority for social work managers and a number of panel chairs was to build on these, whilst also helping him address painful aspects of his earlier life and face up to the consequences of offending.

4.3.17 Less positively, one panel chair took the view that *'his life had been mapped out for him since he was four'* and there was a more general acknowledgement his situation could easily *'slide out of control'*. Most respondents emphasised that this was a critical stage and that decisions taken and help offered now would significantly shape Tom's future.

Vignette 3: John

4.3.18 John was a fifteen year old who was due to appear at a hearing, having been charged with six car related offences, including driving a stolen car when under the influence of drugs. Several members of his family had a history of offending and John himself had first been referred to the reporter for shoplifting when aged ten. He had been on supervision since the age of 12 and recently took part in a group work programme addressing attitudes to offending. He was an active group member, but says he plans to continue to commit crimes. He has been excluded from school for disruptive behaviour, but is bright and particularly talented at art.

Likelihood of admission

4.3.19 Panel chairs were equally divided on whether John would be admitted to secure accommodation or not, as were reporters, though they were also concerned with whether the case would have be dealt with by the Procurator Fiscal. None of the social work managers thought John should be placed in secure accommodation.

Considerations taken into account

4.3.20 The seriousness of the offences and potential for future harm were the main considerations which prompted respondents to view secure accommodation as an

appropriate option. Fears that admission to secure accommodation would be unhelpful or have negative effect were the basis of arguments against. One panel chair thought that he was a 'lost cause', so resources would probably not be spent on him. Another thought that there would have to be more volatility in his life and risk to himself for secure authorisation to be considered. Thus for different panel members, the seriousness of the offences, likelihood of the placement being effective and level of risk to self were the key considerations which came to mind in making their decision.

Young person's likely response to secure placement

4.3.21 With the exception of one panel chair, no respondents thought John would benefit from being admitted to secure accommodation. The consensus was that he would view it as a sentence and work his way through it without being affected. Admission to secure accommodation was viewed as unhelpful because it would confirm his view of himself as a criminal.

Longer term prospects

4.3.22 Because John was bright, most respondents thought there was hope for him if someone could reach through his 'bravado' and get him interested in a life other than crime. A car crime project to promote an interest in car mechanics was suggested by both panel chairs and social work managers, with only one reporter commenting on the possibility of building on his artistic and creative potential. Addressing John's and his family's attitudes to crime was viewed as important, but challenging. Some of respondents emphasised that work with John should be based on his particular experience, attitudes and options, rather than relying on a standard programme. There was a consensus that this kind of work could not be done in a secure setting. Should it prove not possible to engage with John in the near future, there were fears that his prediction that he would remain a criminal might prove correct.

Vignette 4: Jane

4.3.23 Jane was 15 years old. Her early life had been very unsettled, with a history of parental substance misuse and neglect. Her sister had disclosed sexual abuse. Jane had been accommodated for ten years in a number of foster placements, having been with her current carers for three years. Recently she has been self-harming and spending days away from school. She has started to see a psychologist, but sometimes misses appointments. Her foster carers are worried that they cannot manage this level of risk.

Likelihood of admission

4.3.24 Only one panel chair thought that Jane would be admitted to secure accommodation, with another four respondents thinking it was probable or possible. All the others thought admission to secure would be unlikely unless the situation deteriorated.

Considerations taken into account

4.3.25 The potential for self-harm was the reason why some people thought a secure admission might be required. It was considered important to know where she went when she missed school, since that might indicate that the level of risk was greater than suggested in the account provided. However most respondents thought that with increased support to herself and carers, the situation could be safely managed in an open setting. The priority was to find ways of identifying and addressing the causes of the self-harm, which a number of respondents considered attributable to previous abuse or trauma.

Young person's likely response to the secure placement

4.3.26 Most respondents suspected that Jane's mental health would deteriorate in a secure placement and that the impact would be negative. No-one thought that Jane would be likely to address personal and traumatic issues in secure accommodation, and one panel member pointed out that a patient and supportive approach was called for, rather than trying to force her to face difficult issues. However another panel member thought that admission to secure accommodation might help Jane get the intensive mental health resources she needed.

Longer term prospects

4.3.27 A number of respondents felt they did not know enough about what was causing Jane's difficulties to predict how she would fare in the future. However, the predominant view was that if her foster placement could be sustained and appropriate help provided to deal with the self-harming, her future would not be too bleak.

4.3.28 The discussions prompted by these vignettes provided insight into how respondents approached decision-making, weighing up competing considerations and according each a relative value. For most informants this involved balancing the need for safety against the perceived drawbacks of an admission to secure accommodation. The exercise revealed greater diversity of opinion among panel members than social work managers. However in a number of instances, panel members were more thoughtful and prepared to work with risk than the social work managers expected them to be.

4 AVAILABILITY AND ACCESS TO SECURE PLACEMENTS

4.4.1 In most interviews with social work managers and panel members, it was acknowledged that secure places could be difficult to access. However, while this highlighted the demand on existing places, managers were reluctant to argue in favour of an extension of the number of secure places in existence. It was noted that if more places were created, then more young people would be admitted to security: *"if you keep increasing places, you will keep filling the beds"* and *"more beds will be filled because they are there"*. Some panel chairs took the same view *if there were a 200 bed unit to open tomorrow, it would be filled within a month and I don't think that's*

the way to go". The implication was that demand for places rises to fit with supply, rather than vice versa.

4.4.2 However others were inclined to think that more beds were in fact needed:

"Well I think you need more places because at the moment it's extremely difficult. Young people have to be really far down the line, they have to be behaving in a way that's totally out of control before they get there"

(Panel chair 1)

I think we need more places because at the moment there are children who meet the criteria, but can't get a place because places are full.

(Panel chair 4)

4.4.3 One panel chair differentiated between 'secure accommodation' in which he thought there were already plenty of places and 'accommodation with security' by which he meant small well staffed units which were not necessarily locked, but could hold children who were self-harming or running away and help address their difficulties. He thought the latter needed to be increased. Among social work managers there was a similar view that smaller, local provision needed to be augmented

"I think there is a need for local places. Whether there is a need for more places is another matter altogether". *(S.W. manager 5)*

"I think we need to have more smaller close residential units that can be used on a short-term basis to avoid the crisis escalating to when it's one continuous crisis you know. If we can deal with crises quickly, I think we could avoid it so I think we need good staff in small residential units which can be used in emergency and crisis situations." (S.W. manager 8)

4.4.4 There was a strong consensus that it was difficult to access secure places at the point when they were needed, though views differed on how this situation should be remedied. Refining the system through which places were accessed was one proposal.

Accessing Secure Placements

4.4.5. One of the main issues for managers and panel members was that they had little or no control over the process through which placements were allocated. Either a central manager or individual social workers were required to phone around units to check whether and when a place might be available. They had no idea what other young people were competing for the places, so had no idea of what priority would be accorded to the young person they needed to place. This lack of control and transparency made it seem an ineffective way of allocating expensive placements for very vulnerable young people, so some respondents wanted a more centralised system. One respondent stated:

“It is a lottery. (...)I do find it quite ridiculous that in this day and age we are still doing a kind of phone round of secures if we have got a kid who we think is a priority in terms of safety, security, that we have got to phone places and then fax off reports or what have you. There should be some sort of system within Scotland prioritising Scotland’s most vulnerable young people. I am not saying that our child should take priority, but someone should have a view as to whether a child in Paisley or Glasgow is a priority case. It is an absolute lottery”.
(SW manager 5)

4.4.6 Unit managers interviewed indicated that a range of considerations were taken into account when deciding which young person should take priority. Whilst the assessed level of risk was a key consideration, staff also had to consider how the young person would fit with the current resident group.

4.4.7 Access to places was affected by the geographical position of authorities and the closeness of their relationship with secure establishments. Local authorities outwith the central belt talked about experiencing greatest difficulty in obtaining secure places. Managers who indicated that they generally managed to secure a place when required noted that this was often due to good working relationships between staff in their authority and the secure units. It was suggested that these could be based on the credibility of referring social work teams and shared agendas between workers in the community and secure units in terms of defining ‘appropriate’ referrals and levels of risk. One respondent acknowledged:

“ I think often if you have had a good relationship with a unit they will try harder to assist you or they will give you some notion of when a placement might become available and they will perhaps earmark that for you. But I think that relies on a bit of goodwill, personal relationships, professional relationships...but it is not a terribly easy system, you know”.

(SW manager 6)

4.4.8 It was suggested that there was a need for consistency in access to secure places and that the Scottish Executive should have greater responsibility for inspecting the decision-making process in relation to admissions.

4.4.9 In local authorities which had their own secure provision, the situation was very different. Though the same system of competing for beds might apply among social workers, the allocation of available resources was controlled by managers within the same authority. Social workers could be told when a place was likely to be available, and what priority their young person had in relation to others. Thus the prioritisation process was more transparent. No local authority was completely self-sufficient, but the three which had their own provision had much more control over the use of secure accommodation. In addition to being able to prioritise young people waiting for places, local authority managers could decide to move towards discharging a particular young person in order to free up a space.

4.4.10 There were some indications that having some control over the use of secure accommodation influenced how it was used. The authority where most young people

were placed in its own secure provision was the only one in which nearly all staff, whatever their role, talked about using secure as a positive option within the care plan for certain young people. How their access to secure accommodation impacted on differences in practice among local authorities will be discussed in more detail at the end of this chapter.

5. KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE MADE SUBJECT TO SECURE AUTHORISATION

4.5.1 It is clear that in interviews with key stakeholders, there was a strong message that it was difficult to access secure places when they were needed. Yet the research team had found it very difficult to identify young people who had not gone into secure accommodation after being seriously considered for or made subject to secure authorisation. In order to clarify what had happened to young people after an authorisation had been made, the study incorporated a survey of placements of young people made subject to secure authorisation during a 6-month period. The findings were reported in detail in an interim report submitted in June 2004.

4.5.2 Information was obtained on all young people made subject to secure authorisation during a 6-month period and subsequent placements. Information was requested from the Scottish Children's Reporters Administration (SCRA) and from all local authorities, each being asked to provide brief details of young people made subject to secure authorisation by a children's hearing between July and December 2003. The return date was 20th February 2004. Initials and dates of birth were provided to allow for cross-referencing across the two sets of information. Any discrepancies between SCRA and local authority returns were checked out with one or both agencies until a consistent picture emerged.

4.5.3 A total of 104 young people, 59 boys and 45 girls, had been made subject to secure authorisation by a children's hearing during the study period, of whom 79 had been placed in secure accommodation by the time the survey forms were completed. The remaining 25, i.e. just under a quarter, had remained in the community or in an open residential setting. During the survey period, at least one secure authorisation had been made in 23 local authorities. In ten of these 23 authorities, at least one young person made subject to secure accommodation had not been placed in a secure setting at the point by the time the survey return was completed. With the exception of September during which only one had been made, the authorisations had been evenly spread across the six months of the study period.

Young People not Admitted to Secure Accommodation

4.5.4 The 25 young people who had not been admitted to secure accommodation ranged in age from 12 to 17 years, with almost a quarter (n=6) aged 12 or 13.

The Secure Authorisations

4.5.5 A warrant had been issued in respect of 20 young people, while in four instances a secure condition had been added to a residential requirement (information on one young person was missing).

4.5.6 Of the 20 warrants, three had been continued once, two when the first warrant expired and one after a gap of a few weeks. None had been continued more than once. In two instances the secure authorisation attached to a residential supervision requirement was retained (after three months) because this was helping the young person to control his or her behaviour.

4.5.7 Details of the grounds for the secure authorisation were provided in relation to 23 young people, but these were described very briefly, so only provide a rough guide as to what the concerns were. In one case the young person was described by the social worker as having committed a particularly 'nasty' crime, but social work managers had been clear that he did not meet secure criteria. An additional two young men were offending in the community and this was cited as contributing to the grounds for the secure authorisation. In the remaining 20 cases the most common concern was that young people were running away from their current placement and were consequently at risk. In relation to girls, worries typically centred around sexual behaviour and vulnerability. Similar concerns about risk in the community applied to three boys. Violence or disruptive behaviour in their current placement was mentioned as an issue for six boys. Drug or alcohol misuse was mentioned in relation to only three young people, but it is likely that substance misuse was more common and that, in the brief details provided, concerns about this were subsumed under more general references to risk taking behaviour.

Placement following secure authorisation

4.5.8 Information on placement following the secure authorisation was available in relation to 22 young people. Most had been accommodated in a form of residential care, either a residential unit (11), residential school (6), or close support unit (2), but two had remained at home and one in foster care. In most instances there had been no change of placement. Based on follow-up contact with social workers, we were informed that three of the 22 young people had been admitted to secure accommodation after the survey forms had been returned, in each case by the end of May 2004.

Reasons why no secure placement had been made

4.5.9 Reasons why no secure placement had been made had been made were given in respect of 22 young people. These were classified as follows:

Situation improved/ risk reduced before a place became available	11
No placement available	4
Secure not considered in the young person's best interests	4
Young person did not meet secure criteria (decided by secure screening group or social work managers)	3

4.5.10 Thus in most cases the placement did not proceed because a vacancy could not be identified (15 out of 22). In the majority of these instances the situation was said to have improved, suggesting that the unplanned alternative arrangements had been at least partly effective.

4.5.11 Of the eleven whose situation had improved before a place became available, six were girls and five were boys. They spanned the age range from 12 to 16. Nine did not have a warrant renewed, while in two cases the warrant was renewed once. Thus for most young people the risks had reduced within three weeks. In some instances it was suggested that the impending threat of secure placement helped the young person control their behaviour. Whatever the circumstances, a children's hearing had decided, in most instances within three weeks, that the young person no longer met secure criteria. At the time the survey was undertaken, their current placements were Residential Unit (7); Close support (2) Residential school (2).

4.5.12 For other young people, social work managers had decided that the young person either did not meet secure criteria (3) or that a placement in secure accommodation would not be in the young person's best interests (4). Those who were not thought to meet secure criteria were all boys: one remained in the residential school where he was difficult to manage and two stayed at home. We learned later that the boy sustained in residential school had been admitted to secure accommodation after the end of the survey period. Of the four young people for whom social work staff decided secure placement would not be in their interests, three were male and one female. They ranged in age from 13-15. In each case it was thought that the young person would be vulnerable in secure accommodation and that he or she should be sustained in an open placement with increased support. Two were in a residential school and two in a children's unit.

4.5.13 For four young people, three 15 year old boys and one 14 year old girl, no placement had been available, but continued to be required. The girl had been admitted to secure accommodation by the end of May 2004. As far as we know, one boy remained in a children's unit, one in a residential school, and one went home.

Young People admitted to secure accommodation

4.5.14 A total of 79 young people, 44 boys and 35 girls, had been admitted to secure accommodation. The age range was 11-17, with a third aged 13 or younger.

Authorisations and Admissions

4.5.15 On the basis of information provided from local authorities and SCRA, it seemed that in just over a quarter of instances a secure condition was added to an existing supervision requirement, with a warrant being issued for the remainder. Where a warrant had been issued, the SCRA information usually indicated that this had been under sections 66 (1)(a) and 66 (2) (b), with a secure condition added.

4.5.16 A total of 16 young people had been first admitted to secure accommodation on the authority of the chief social work officer. The administrative route had been used in five local authorities, but half taking place in one authority. It seemed that this route was used in circumstances where the secure screening group had already agreed that secure placement was warranted, with administrative authorisation being sought when a place became available. No information was available on the time gap between the screening group decision and the young person's admission. All 16

young people admitted by the administrative route had been placed in a secure unit on the same day as the authorisation was made.

4.5.17 The remaining 63 young people had been admitted to secure accommodation following a children’s panel’s decision. Information on the gap between authorisation and placement was available in relation to 53. Thirty-five (66%) had been admitted to secure accommodation on the day the hearing made the authorisation. Of the 18 who were not admitted on the day of the hearing, half (n=9) were admitted within a week, three having been found a place within one day. Five young people had awaited a placement for more than three weeks, one for three months. Four young people had been admitted to English units because no Scottish places were available. Three had remained there for as long as the secure placement had been required, and one returned to Scotland when a place became available.

4.5.18 In Table 1, details are summarised of the gap between authorisation and placement for the 69 young people on whom information was available:

Table 1 : Gap between secure authorisation and placement (Information on 69 of 79)

Admitted on the same day ⁷	51 (74%)
Admitted within a week	9 (13%)
Admitted within three weeks	4 (6%)
<u>Admitted within 3 weeks- 3 months⁸</u>	<u>5 (7%)</u>
Total	69

4.5.19 At the time when the survey was completed (2-8 months after the admission) 43 of the young people (55%) were still in secure accommodation, with a further three having been discharged and readmitted.

Comparison of characteristics of young people admitted to secure accommodation and those who remained in an open setting.

4.5.20 Comparison of the characteristics of both sub-groups indicated no significant gender bias. Girls accounted for 43% of the young people made subject to authorisations, 44% of admissions and 40% of the group who remained in an open setting.

4.5.21 There were indications that young people in certain age groups were more or less likely to be admitted, though with the small numbers involved, these are reported as interesting trends, rather than because they have any statistical significance. Not surprisingly, young people aged 11-12 were least likely to be admitted, with only 2 of the 6 made subject to secure authorisation having been placed in a secure setting.

⁷ Includes 16 young people initially admitted on authority of chief social work officer. Includes three young people admitted to an English unit because no place was available in Scotland

⁸ Includes one young person admitted to an English unit until a place became available in Scotland.

This presumably reflects an unwillingness to place younger children in this setting and vigorous efforts to find alternatives. However the situation with 13 year olds was somewhat different, with 92% of this age group, including all girls, being admitted. Although no gender bias was noted over the whole sample, there were indications that among this younger age group, girls at risk were very likely to be admitted to secure accommodation. Of girls aged 11-13 made subject to secure authorisation, all but one of thirteen (92%) had been placed in a secure unit. Among boys in the same age group, the proportion admitted was 72% (n= 13 of 18).

4.5.22 Turning to the older age groups, the trend was to some extent reversed, with 82% of boys and 75% of girls aged 15 and over being admitted to secure accommodation. Age 14 seemed to mark the breakeven point, with the secure authorisation being implemented in relation to approximately two thirds of both males (62%) and females (66%). Details of comparison of the two groups by age and gender are in Table 2:

Table 2: Authorisations and Admissions by Age and Gender

Age	Boys with secure authorisation	Boys admitted to secure (% of all authorisations)	Girls with secure authorisation	Girls admitted to secure (% of all authorisations)
11-12	4	1 (25%)	2	1 (50%)
13	14	12 (86%)	11	11(100%)
14	13	8 (62%)	12	8 (66%)
15	24	20 (83%)	14	11 (78%)
16-17	4	3 (75%)	6	4 (66%)
Totals	59	44	45	35

Implications of the survey findings

4.5.23 The survey findings indicated that the number of young people made subject to secure authorisation and not placed there were lower than the 90 per year which had been estimated at the time when this research began.

4.5.24 In addition it was evident that most young people made subject to secure authorisations but sustained in the community were not in contact with intensive support services. More usually they were sustained in their existing open residential placement.

4.5.25 It was beyond the scope of this survey to assess the extent to which young people remained at risk or continued to present a risk while not in a secure placement. However almost half of those not admitted were considered to no longer need a secure place when one became available, which does suggest that it had been possible to reduce the level of risk without recourse to physical security. Had a place been available within three weeks, eleven young people who had been sustained in an open setting would have been placed in secure accommodation. Of those placed in secure accommodation, over half were still in placement when the survey was completed two-eight months later.

4.5.26 In terms of the issues raised in interviews with key stakeholders, the results of this survey lend support to the view that there is no absolute standard against which it can be judged whether a young person meets secure criteria or not. Whilst there are evidently some young people who require physical security because they are in serious danger or present a serious risk to others, there is also a significant group for whom the decision about whether they require secure accommodation or not rests on the capacity of other resources to adequately support them and manage the risk they present. In interviews with stakeholders some social work managers described the incremental ways in which they tried to support young people and ‘run with the risk’, until it became evident that the risks remained unacceptably high, even when all available resources had been tried. Thus boosting workers’ capacity to assess and manage risk will be a means of enabling some young people to remain in an open setting.

4.5.27 The results of the survey are also consistent with requests made by stakeholders for an increase in locally based high support residential units which could cope with young people putting themselves at some level of risk.

6. DIFFERENCES ACROSS LOCAL AUTHORITIES

4.6.1 Taking into account views expressed by social work managers in interviews, the findings of the survey of secure authorisations and the research team’s experience in recruiting young people to the study, it became very clear that decision-making in relation to secure accommodation and the role it played in relation to other service provision differed across local authorities. Four features were identified as strongly influencing how secure accommodation was used: a) ease of access to places; b) the availability of alternative resources which offer intensive support; c) views about the role of secure accommodation; d) practice in and attitudes towards risk management. These influences are not isolated variables, but rather interact to shape how secure accommodation comes to be viewed and used in any authority.

4.6.2 On the basis of the stakeholder interviews and information about patterns of admission, four different local authority approaches were identified:

1. Ready access to secure accommodation, coupled with relatively low access to alternatives and a belief that, though a last resort, secure accommodation can be a positive option;
2. Ready access to secure accommodation, coupled with well developed alternatives and a strong reluctance to place in secure accommodation;
3. Difficulty in accessing secure accommodation, coupled with a strong reluctance to place in secure accommodation and emphasis on developing open and community-based alternatives;
4. Medium difficulty in accessing secure accommodation, with a moderate willingness to use it and moderate commitment to developing alternatives.

4.6.3 In this context, ‘alternatives’ include access to open residential provision which can manage young people with challenging behaviour.

4.6.4 Interviews with front-line staff and managers indicated that decisions about the use of secure accommodation were taken very seriously, but approached differently depending on the considerations outlined above.

4.6.5 Whilst all the authorities which took part in the study could be allocated to one or other of the four categories, our primary consideration concerns the differences between the first two approaches, since these characterised the two city authorities who were key contributors to the study. Throughout the rest of the report these will be referred to as city authority A (approach 1) and B (approach 2).

4.6.6 The distinctive use of secure accommodation in city authority A proved particularly relevant to this study, because young people from that authority formed a disproportionately high proportion of the secure sample. This can be attributed in part to a higher level of recruitment in that authority’s units than any other, but the use of secure accommodation within the authority was also relatively high. Where particular trends or outcomes are affected by this bias, attention is drawn to this throughout subsequent chapters.

4.6.7 However it would be wrong to think that, apart from city authority A, a ‘standard’ or ‘typical’ use of secure accommodation can be identified. Because the use of secure accommodation was shaped by the considerations outlined above, distinctive trends could be identified in each authority. Attention is being drawn to city authorities A and B because of their significant role in this study.

7. SUMMARY POINTS

4.7.1 From the range of evidence presented in this chapter it is evident that decisions about which young people go into secure accommodation result from much more than an objective assessment of the young person’s needs and current level of risk.

4.7.2 In interviews with stakeholders some social work managers described the incremental ways in which they tried to support young people and ‘run with the risk’, until it became evident that the risks remained unacceptably high, even when all available resources had been tried. Thus boosting workers’ capacity to assess and manage risk can be expected to be a means of enabling some young people to remain in an open setting.

4.7.3 Learning to manage risk in an open setting had often been prompted by necessity, i.e. when no beds were available. Yet ‘resorting to’ alternatives in these circumstances was viewed in a negative light, whilst ‘choosing’ alternatives shortly before secure authorisation was considered necessary was applauded. The findings in this chapter did not support this distinction since some of the arrangements prompted by necessity had worked well.

4.7.4 A survey of young people made subject to secure authorisation over a 6-month period indicated the number not admitted to secure accommodation was lower than previous estimates. Most not admitted had been sustained in an open residential placement and did not have their secure warrant renewed. Of those who were admitted to secure accommodation, almost three quarters were admitted on the day the authorisation was made and 87% within a week.

4.7.5 Differences in their use of secure accommodation were identified across local authorities, reflecting the following: a) ease of access to places; b) the availability of alternative resources which offer intensive support; c) views about the role of secure accommodation; d) practice in and attitudes towards risk management. Taking these four considerations into account, four local authority approaches were identified:

1. Ready access to secure accommodation, coupled with relatively low access to alternatives and a belief that, though a last resort, secure accommodation can be a positive option;
2. Ready access to secure accommodation, coupled with well-developed alternatives and a strong reluctance to place in secure accommodation;
3. Difficulty in accessing secure accommodation, coupled with a strong reluctance to place in secure accommodation and emphasis on developing open and community-based alternatives;
4. Medium difficulty in accessing secure accommodation, with a moderate willingness to use it and moderate commitment to developing alternatives.

PART 2 FINDINGS : THE YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES

INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

5.1 Having reached certain conclusions in the previous three chapters about the use and effectiveness of secure accommodation and alternative services, we now turn to examine the extent to which these are supported by the experience of and outcomes for young people who took part in the study. As outlined in chapter one, the study recruited two samples: 53 young people who were admitted to secure accommodation and 23 young people who had been considered for secure accommodation, but sustained in an open setting for at least six months. Only young people admitted to secure accommodation on the authority of a children’s hearing were included in the study, not those placed on remand or sentenced by the courts. This, together with a higher response rate from girls, means that young people with predominant welfare needs may have been somewhat over-represented in the sample⁹.

5.2 In reporting the experiences and outcomes of the young people in each sample, the intention is to provide empirical evidence of how issues identified in the previous chapters worked out in practice. As understanding of the nature of the relationship between secure accommodation and ‘alternatives’ developed in the course of the study, it became evident that directly comparing the effectiveness of each form of intervention would not be feasible, partly because of differences in thresholds, but also since most young people who went into secure accommodation also received some kind of ‘alternative’ service. Instead it became more important to understand the relationship between the use of secure accommodation and alternative services and, in particular, how the decision to admit to a secure placement influenced both the young person’s pathways through both services and outcomes.

5.3. For the most part this understanding has been developed by examining the experiences of the young people within the secure sample. Certain data on the same issues was obtained on a sample of young people who had been considered for admission to secure accommodation, but sustained in an open setting. Direct comparison between these two groups of young people is not warranted, because of differences in sample size, recruitment method and means of gathering the data¹⁰. However there is some value in viewing their experiences as parallel journeys. In order to emphasise that the two samples were not strictly comparable, the characteristics and pathways of each group of young people are reported under similar headings, but in consecutive chapters. Chapters five to seven are concerned with the characteristics and experiences of young people in the secure sample, whilst chapter eight is devoted to those who were considered for secure placement but remained in an open setting.

⁹ Sampling issues are considered in more detail in chapter 1.

¹⁰ see chapter 1 for details.

CHAPTER 5: THE SECURE SAMPLE: WHO THE YOUNG PEOPLE WERE AND THEIR ROUTES TO THE SECURE PLACEMENT

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Age and Gender

5.1.1. The secure sample was composed of 28 young women and 25 young men, aged from 12 to 16. Details of age and gender are in Table 3:

Table 3: Secure Sample by Age and Gender

Age	Male	Female	Total	(%)
12	1	1	2	(4)
13	6	4	10	(19)
14	9	10	19	(36)
15	5	9	14	(26)
16	4	4	8	(15)
Total	25	28	53	(100)

5.1.2 Girls were over represented, accounting for 53% of the sample, as opposed to 44% of those included in the survey of placements and authorisations. Correspondingly, a smaller proportion of young people aged 15 and over were included in the research than were admitted in the six months covered by the survey. This age group accounted for 41% of the sample, as opposed to 48% of young people included in the survey. The main reason for the bias is that girls were more likely than boys to agree to take part in the study, despite specific attempts to recruit boys in the latter stages of recruitment. It is not expected that this bias will distort the overall findings, since gender differences were tested for on each variable and reported if they applied. At some points there is a specific focus on issues relating to young women. However it is acknowledged that older boys are under-represented and that this is regrettable because they are an important sub-group within the secure population.

5.1.3 All of the young people in this sample were admitted to a secure unit in Scotland between 1st October 2002 and 31st October 2003. Following admission, their progress was followed for 18-24 months.

Background Circumstances

5.1.4 Information on background circumstances was obtained from records held within the secure unit, so information was not always complete. Where possible, social workers were asked to fill gaps, but it remains likely that the incidence of some issues such as abuse, bereavement or health issues will be under-reported.

5.1.5 Consistent with previous surveys of the secure population, most young people in the sample had known significant disruption in their family life. Less than a fifth (n=9) could count on both parents as their main carer and almost as many (n=8) had no main carer, so were reliant on social work services for all support. For two young

people the main carers were foster parents who could no longer offer them a placement but expected to keep in close contact. The highest proportion (n=22) were living with a single mother.

Table 4: Secure Sample- Main Carer

Main Carer	Number	%
Mother	22	41
Both parents	9	17
Mother and stepfather	8	15
No main carer	8	15
Grandparent	2	3
Father	2	3
Foster carer	2	3
Total	53	100

5.1.6 According to records, a total of ten young people, eight of them boys, had experienced the death of a parent, one young man having lost both his mother and father. Thus over a third of the boys in the sample had experienced parental bereavement. In a number of instances the death had occurred in circumstances which would be expected to be very stressful for the young person, for example resulting from a drug overdose or violent incident. In addition to the young people who had lost a parent through death, a further two young men and two young women had been adversely affected by the death of another close relative, most often a grandparent. This kind of loss would not necessarily have been recorded in case file, so may be underestimated. Overall 40% of the young men in this sample had experienced the death of a close relative. In some instances this had happened when the young person was very young, but in relation to approximately half of the young people, the bereavement was mentioned as having triggered a deterioration in the young person's behaviour or well-being.

5.1.7 All but two of the young people whose mother was still alive still had some contact with her, however only 40% of both boys and girls still had contact with their father. Half of the boys and two thirds of the girls had a sibling who was still in the care of a parent. Correspondingly a third of the boys (n=8) but only four girls had a sibling currently living in another residential placement.

5.1.8 Information on the history of family contact with social work services indicated a very similar pattern for boys and girls. Over half (56%) of both boys and girls had been aged ten or younger, when their families were first referred to social work services. In these cases, reasons for initial referral were primarily concerned with concerns about the child's welfare, parental problems such as drug misuse and the need for parental support. As children became older, reasons for first referral more often related to their behaviour such as offending, truancy or being beyond parental control.

5.1.9 Twelve young women and four young men were known or suspected to have been sexually abused. Records indicated that six of each gender had been physically abused, whilst fourteen boys and eight girls had been subject to neglect at some point

during their childhood. These figures are likely to be underestimates of the level of previous abuse, since detailed background information was not always available in the records consulted by the research team.

5.1.10 Social work involvement had often been lengthy: six years or more in 43% of cases, with a maximum of 15 years. For others the contact was more recent, with over a third of young people (34%) having had a social worker for one to two years and almost a quarter (23%) for three-five years. There were clear gender differences in that 42% of girls, but only 26% of boys had had social work involvement for two years or less.

5.1.11 Reliable information on how long young people had been accommodated was available on 41 young people. All of these had been accommodated at some point prior to the admission to secure accommodation. The time accommodated was: under 6 months (14); 6 months- 2 years (14); 2-5 years (11); 5 or more years (2).

5.1.12 Turning to the onset of problems which had resulted in secure accommodation, these had begun before the age of ten for only one girl, but six boys. These early behaviours had usually related to aggressive and disruptive behaviour in school or nursery, with two boys having been identified as having difficulties as young as three. Over 80% of the girls, but only 40% of the boys had begun the problematic behaviour at age 12 or older.

5.1.13 All the young people on whom information was available (n=50) had had some kind of difficulty in relation to school prior to the secure placement, with 21 (42%) having had problems identified in primary school and the remainder beginning to have difficulties after moving to secondary school. Three boys and nine girls first began to have problems at the age of 13 or 14, so that their earlier education had not been significantly disrupted. The most common school problem, mentioned in relation to just under half of both boys and girls, was non-attendance (total n =25). For a slightly lower number (n=22), problems centred around aggressive and disruptive behaviour. A specific learning difficulty had been identified in relation to nine young people, though this may be an underestimate since the data was collated from care records available at admission, rather than following detailed educational assessment.

5.1.14 Relationships with peers were a dimension in many young people's lives, potentially offering the support and acceptance many young people craved, but also often associated with dangerous behaviour or offending, sometimes as part of a gang culture. Case records seldom contained detailed accounts of peer relationships, and the research possibly paid less attention to these than is merited in terms of their influence on young people's progress.

5.1.15 This information on the background of young people who took part in the study corresponds with profiles of the secure population obtained in previous surveys (Scottish Executive, 2002). Whilst the level of disruption, trauma and deprivation is high for most young people, there are gender differences in the source and development of the difficulties, with girls typically beginning to act out in adolescence, often in response to specific trauma or abuse, and boys having longer standing difficulties. In this sample the level of bereavement among boys is very

high. At the time when they were admitted to secure accommodation, just under a third of both boys and girls could count on a family member who would be willing to care for them when the secure placement ended. Moving to live in their home in the near future was not necessarily considered feasible, but a family member, usually their mother, was in principle willing to accommodate them.

2. THE PATHWAYS MODEL

5.2.1 These background characteristics of the young people constitute the first stage in the pathways model which was developed as a useful framework within which to understand the complex range of factors which influenced young people's routes through services and outcomes. The underlying assumption is that outcomes result from the interaction between the young person's needs and strengths and the nature of services provided at each stage in their lives. Drawing on the notion of resilience, the young person's life route can be conceptualised as one in which protective and risk factors are constantly in interaction. Effective services would be expected to boost protective factors, whilst also minimising the negatives or risks.

5.2.2. The pathways model is consistent with Bullock and colleague's differentiation between the life *route*, which refers to children and their families' actions, and *process* which encompasses actions taken throughout the child's life by professionals in health, social work and education or by courts and children's panels. However by focusing on risk and protective factors rather than 'actions' the pathway model developed here seeks to encompass the influence of structural influences such as how services are provided and the effects of social deprivation. In addition our focus is specifically on the routes towards, around or from a placement in secure accommodation, with a particular focus on the dynamic nature of the journey. For some young people the route is circular in that they return to be considered for or admitted to secure accommodation on more than one occasion.

A diagram illustrating the pathways through secure or around secure accommodation is at Appendix 2.

5.2.3 This chapter follows the young people who formed the secure sample up to the point where the decision was made that they should be admitted to secure accommodation. Chapter six reviews their experience in secure accommodation and chapter seven focuses on how they had fared by the time the follow-up period ended.

Implications of the Young People's Background

5.2.4 Returning to the young people's background it is evident that ways in which risk and protective factors interact is unique to each young person, with scope for positive and negative influences operating within the three key dimensions of family, school and the young person's own personal experience.

5.2.5 Disrupted family relationships were common, but some young people had at least one parent or other relative who remained in close contact with them, whilst others had no-one they could rely on. Yet being able to rely on a parent was not always entirely positive, since some of the most loyal parents were reported to

actively encourage their sons or daughters to offend and/or mistrust any professionals who tried to help.

5.2.6 The difficulties which resulted in a secure placement had inevitably had some disruptive effect on schooling, but the implications were very different for young people who had at least completed their primary education and those who had seldom ever been in school. Capacity to learn, sustain a school or college placement and obtain educational qualifications was evidently a strong protective factor.

5.2.7 How the young person had been affected by and responded to events in their life inevitably depended on their personality and emotional well-being. Young people who had known little stability from birth were likely to have difficulties relating to attachment, such as low self-esteem and capacity to benefit from supportive relationships. The effects of trauma could be equally pervasive, but quite different and susceptible to change by different kinds of help. It was not unusual for young people to have multiple emotional difficulties, so effective service provision needed to be based on sound understanding of the young person's internal world, as well as external elements of his or her life.

Routes through Services to the point where secure accommodation was considered

5.2.8 It was beyond the scope of this study to chart in detail young people's use of services throughout their lives. Information was taken from records on previous episodes in care placements and schools attended, but this was often incomplete. Whilst acknowledging its limitations, this data was analysed in some detail to see whether patterns of routes through services and care placements could be identified across the secure sample. None emerged. Indeed the diversity in the detail of young people's experience was striking. It was anticipated that some patterns might have emerged in relation to the length of time young people had been accommodated, but even within the categories reported above, variation in circumstances and time spent in different types of placement meant no meaningful patterns could be discerned. This analysis was reported to the Scottish Executive research managers early in 2005.

5.2.9 Subsequently the decision was taken to focus only on the year prior to admission to or consideration for secure accommodation. On the basis of this analysis it emerged that an important consideration in their route through services was the placement young people were in at the time they were considered for secure authorisation, that is whether they were: 1) in a residential unit, 2) in a residential school or 3) living in the community, with their own parents, another relative or foster carers. This section outlines the services which had been provided in the year prior to being considered for secure accommodation for young people in each of these sub-groups or 'pathways'.

5.2.10 In the first three chapters of the report, evidence emerged to support the view that decision-making and resource provision in relation to young people in or close to secure accommodation was shaped by decision makers' and professionals' attitudes and access to secure places. It follows that certain pathways can be expected to predominate within certain local authorities. This in turn is consistent with the view that the effectiveness of specific interventions with young people will be influenced

by the service context, as well as the quality of the intervention and individual young person's capacity to respond.

Pathway 1 : Young people placed from a residential unit (n=31)

Young People's Characteristics

5.2.11 A total of 31 young people, 18 girls and 13 boys, were allocated to Pathway 1, including three who had a place in a close support unit when admitted to secure accommodation. Eight were younger than fourteen years old and the remainder 14+. Only three of the eighteen young women were younger than 14 years old.

5.2.12 This was the most common route through which the young people in this sample had come into secure accommodation, especially for young women. Sixty percent of the female sample were included in this pathway sub-group and half of the young men. The young women came from six local authorities, but over half (n=11) were from city authority A. The same authority was also responsible for eight of the 13 young men, so the pattern of service provision for this sub-group inevitably reflects practice there. It is important to point out that the predominance of young people from this authority within this sub-group is in part due to the fact that they are over represented in the study as a whole, because staff there were particularly co-operative in helping recruit young people to the study. However the 6-month survey of authorisations and placements also indicated that, compared with other areas, this authority's use of secure accommodation is relatively high.

Placements in the year prior to admission to secure accommodation : young women

5.2.13 Detailed information on the previous year's placements was available on 17 of the 18 girls admitted through this pathway. Within this sub-sample, there were two distinct groups: 1) twelve young women who had moved through the system from a less restrictive placement and on to secure accommodation; 2) five who were on route from a previous secure placement, but had been readmitted.

5.2.14 1) Half of the young women in the first category (6) had gone straight from the parental home into a residential unit. One had been at home for only a month of the previous year, two for between three and six months and three for more than nine months. Typically concerns about risk-taking behaviours and/or breakdown in relationships with their parent(s) had led to the placement in a unit, but the difficulties had escalated after being placed there. Three had had one residential placement and three had been in two units.

5.2.15 Of the remaining six young women who had not already been in secure accommodation, three had been at home for part of the year, but had also been in at least one other care placement, foster care or residential school, before moving to the residential unit. Three had moved to the residential unit from foster care, having had no other care placements or time at home in the previous year.

5.2.16 2) Of the five young women who had already been in secure accommodation in the previous year, two were readmitted from close support, having been there for approximately four months. Thus they had not managed to sustain the step-down to a more open setting which close support offered. Two had been in foster care prior to the first secure placement and had moved to a children's unit on being discharged,

whilst one young woman had moved between her home, secure accommodation and the residential unit before being readmitted to a secure setting.

Placements in the year prior to admission to secure accommodation : young men

5.2.17 Almost two thirds of the young men (8 of 13) had spent the year prior to admission to secure accommodation between the parental home and the residential unit from which they were admitted to secure accommodation. The length of time spent at home ranged from 5- 11 months. Each had been in the same residential unit throughout the year.

5.2.18 Of the remaining five, one had spent the entire year in a close support unit, one had been in a residential school and two had been in foster care before moving to the residential unit. Only one young man had previously been in secure accommodation, the placement lasting only 6 weeks. The remainder of his year had been divided almost equally between home and the residential unit.

5.2.19 As the above summary of placements in the previous year illustrates, there was considerable variation of experience, even within this pathway. Amongst the majority who had not previously been in secure accommodation, one common characteristic was that the admission to a residential unit had been expected to halt the development of behaviours which put the young person at risk, but had not been able to do so. In a number of cases there had been an escalation of the difficulties.

Education and community supports in the year prior to admission to secure accommodation

5.2.20 Over half of the 31 young people in this pathway group were on the roll of a mainstream school (n=19), though attendance had typically been low in the year prior to admission. Of this group, ten received additional support within the mainstream system. A further twelve had been in specialist provision, such as day care or an off-site referral unit.

5.2.21 In terms of community supports, all but four of the young people had at least been referred to a service which would offer additional support to that which might be provided by the statutory social worker or residential staff. Ten young people had been offered one service, nine offered two and ten had been referred to between three and five sources of community based support. The range of services offered was very wide and differed according to what was available in different local authorities. However they could be divided into services offering help in relation to social support and mental health issues. Two-thirds of young people had been offered social support, for example from a drug support, youth justice or community support team, whilst ten had been offered a mental health resource. It was not unusual for young people to resist engaging with these services, an issue which was specifically recorded in relation to 16 of the 31 young people.

Pathway 2: Young people placed from a residential school (n=13)

5.2.22 Thirteen young people in the secure sample, eight boys and five girls, had been admitted to secure accommodation from a residential school. Only four were under the age of fourteen.

5.2.23 Their **patterns of placements** during the previous year had been as follows:

- entire year in a residential school (2)
- year spent between residential school and another care placement (2 foster care, 3 residential unit) (5)
- year spent between home and residential school (5) ¹¹.

5.2.24 Six young people admitted to secure accommodation had spent at least 10 months of the previous year in a residential school, two having been in two different schools. For the five who had been at home for part of the year, time spent there ranged from one to 10 months.

5.2.25 All of the young people in this sub-group had been in receipt of specialist **education** within the residential school. Four had also had day specialist education, while living at home or in foster care prior to their admission to the residential school.

5.2.26 In the previous year, each young person had been referred to at least one additional source of **community support** and half of the sample had been referred to more than one. Only three of those in the secure sample and none of those sustained in an open setting had had support from a mental health specialist in the previous year. Reluctance to engage with services offered was mentioned in relation to an even higher proportion of this group than for pathway 1 i.e. ten of the thirteen young people in a residential school.

Pathway 3 : Young people living at home (n=9)

5.2.27 Five girls and four boys were living in the community, at the time when they were admitted to secure accommodation, seven with parent or other relative and two with foster carers. All were aged 14 or older, apart from one boy.

5.2.28 Only one of these nine young people had spent all of the previous year in their parental home. Two had been admitted from foster care, while others has also spent some time in residential care (2), foster care (2) or secure accommodation (2).

5.2.29 In terms of education, one boy was still on the roll of a mainstream school, receiving additional support there. All the others were attending specialist day provision, two as a day pupil at a residential school. All were receiving at least one community-based support, with three in contact with a service which offers intensive support. None had been in contact with a mental health specialist. Engaging with services was mentioned as problematic for four.

¹¹ Information missing on one young person

5.2.30 Summary points from descriptions of three pathways into secure accommodation

- 1) most young people had experienced more than one care placement in the year prior to being admitted to secure accommodation, so it had been possible to preserve little continuity or stability;
- 2) more than half of the young people (n=28) had been admitted to a care placement from home at some point in the previous year, an event which would be expected to be disruptive in itself;
- 3) in a number of cases admission to residential units from home had not been effective in stopping difficulties from escalating;
- 4) only three young people had accessed close support prior to admission to a secure placement;
- 5) a range of support services had been offered to young people, but not all had been taken up because young people were not willing to engage. Problems with engagement with community services were mentioned in relation to over half of the young people (n=30), with a particular difficulty among those placed from residential school;
- 6) most moves had been made and services offered on a reactive basis, because young people were in crisis.

3. REASONS FOR ADMISSION TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION

5.3.1 Based on accounts in social work reports, reasons why young people had been admitted to secure accommodation were coded into five categories, allowing for up to three reasons to be recorded for each young person. Those which applied to young men and women are outlined in Table 5:

Table 5: Reasons for admission to secure accommodation

Reasons for Admission	Male	Female	Total
Danger to self	20	27	47 (89%)
Likely to abscond	17	22	39 (73%)
Danger to others	13	5	18 (34%)
Persistent offending	6	0	6 (11%)
Serious offence(s)	2	0	2 (4%)

5.3.2 It is very clear that most admissions had been authorised because the young person was considered to be putting him or herself at risk. The most common situation was that young people were staying away from their placement and spending time with people and in circumstances which were considered dangerous. Excessive drug and/or alcohol use was mentioned as a serious problem in relation to six young men and fourteen young women, whilst in relation to nine young women and one young man, specific concerns were mentioned about them being at risk of sexual exploitation. Eight of the young women and six young men had been engaging in deliberately self-harming behaviour such as cutting themselves or overdosing.

5.3.3 Offending was not given as a reason for admitting any young women to secure accommodation, though nineteen had been charged with at least one offence. The most common offence was assault (8) and there was one serious assault. Other charges were for breach of the peace or theft/ shoplifting. Five young women had been charged with more than two offences. Among the boys, only four had had no charges and for eight offending had contributed to the decision to admit them to a secure setting. Over half of the young men (n=13) had been charged with more than two offences. As with the girls, the most common charge was assault (10), followed by breach of the peace (9). Five had been involved in car-related offending. Two young people had committed a serious offence, one attempted murder and one assault and robbery. Other offences included theft, shoplifting and damage to property. None of the young people had committed a sexual offence.

5.3.4 For most of the young women and some of the young men, the involvement in offending was related to their lifestyle prior to admission. A number of assault and damage to property offences had been the result of disturbances in residential units and theft, while shoplifting had happened when young people went missing from their placements.

5.3.5 These reasons focus on the behaviour of the young person, but it was also evident that care placements and other service provision had not been able to halt what was viewed as dangerous and often self-destructive behaviour on the part of the young person. A total of fourteen were described as out of control in their previous placement, but by implication this might have applied to them all. The decision that he or she should be admitted to secure accommodation meant that a children's hearing and relevant professionals had taken the view that secure accommodation was needed to bring them under control.

4. EXPECTATIONS OF THE SECURE PLACEMENT

5.4.1 The key expectation for most placements was that they would bring some stability to young people's lives and allow them to address the difficulties which were contributing to their self-destructive behaviour. Professionals talked about a need for structure and holding to stop their current way of living, allow needs to be assessed and relevant services to be introduced. A common aim, particularly with young women, was to try and understand what issues underpinned the surface behaviour and begin to address these. In some instances, re-establishing better relationships with parents and other family members was considered important, if the young person was to be able to return home.

5.4.2 Once the decision to admit to secure accommodation had been made, there was almost invariably a view among social workers and key workers that this had been the correct decision and many conveyed a sense of hope that the extreme nature of the step would yield last benefits for the young person. As more than one social worker put it, the expectation was the placement in secure accommodation would '*keep the young person alive*'.

5.4.3 In addition to keeping the young person safe and addressing his or her difficulties, there was an expectation among social workers that the secure placement

would provide an opportunity to co-ordinate future service delivery, allowing it to be based on thorough assessment of the young person's needs and providing an opportunity for service providers to engage with the young person. The hope was that the crisis-driven responses of the previous year would be replaced by more co-ordinated, needs-led and individually relevant service provision.

5 SUMMARY POINTS

5.5.1 The backgrounds of the young people in the secure sample were similar to those identified in previous surveys of the secure population. Over half had been aged ten or younger when their family was first in contact with social work services. There were gender differences, with 42% of girls, but only 26% of boys having had social work involvement for two years or less prior to the secure admission.

5.5.2 A higher than usual proportion of young people had experienced the death of one or more parents. Of the boys, 40% had experienced the death of a parent or close relative.

5.5.3 The study adopted a pathways model, looking at routes into and out of secure accommodation and seeking to understand the interactions between risk and protective factors in the young people's lives.

5.5.4. The most common route into secure accommodation, especially for young women, was from a residential unit. This may in part reflect practice in one local authority which was overrepresented in the sample. The other two routes were from a) residential schools and b) the family home or foster care.

5.5.5. For most young people, the year prior to admission to secure accommodation had been characterised by instability, with placement moves being arranged in response to their escalating difficulties. Most had experienced more than one care placement in the year prior to being admitted to secure accommodation, and more than half had been admitted to care from home during the same period.

5.5.6. A range of community support services had been offered in the year prior to admission, but there had been high levels of non-engagement.

5.5.7 A quarter of the young people had committed at least one offence, but concerns about risks to themselves predominated in the reasons for admission to secure accommodation.

5.5.8 Secure placements were expected to keep young people safe and begin to address the difficulties which had prompted their admission.

CHAPTER 6: THE SECURE ACCOMMODATION PLACEMENT

1 INTRODUCTION

6.1.1 The decision whether or not to admit a young person to secure accommodation evidently had a significant impact on how each young person spent the following year. The admission itself constituted an abrupt shift in a young person's life, then, unless young people remained in secure accommodation for twelve months or more, the transfer back into the community had to be managed in the course of the same year.

6.1.2 In reviewing the year following admission to secure accommodation, the focus is on two dimensions: what the secure placements offered and the immediate impact of the placement, as assessed by the placing social workers. Within each of these dimensions, attention is paid to the extent to which expectations for the placements were met and protective factors boosted in the young person's life.

6.1.3 Young people were recruited for the study from each of Scotland's six secure units. Distribution in terms of gender is outlined in table 6:

Table 6: Location of Secure Placements by Gender

Unit	Male	Female	Total
A	7	9	16
B	4	8	12
C	6	4	10
D	3	4	7
E	3	3	6
F	2	0	2
Total	25	28	53

2. WHAT THE SECURE PLACEMENTS OFFERED

6.2.1 Insights into what the secure placement had offered young people were afforded through information from social workers and key workers, obtained from questionnaires and in interviews. Some young people were also interviewed and their perspectives are reported in the following section.

6.2.2 As people talked about what the secure placement offered, there were clearly two different processes which operated concurrently: 1) the young person adapting to the secure environment ; 2) identifying and addressing young people's needs and issues. In relation to both of these areas, this research only developed a broad indication of what each young person had actually been offered. For example the researchers might have been told that a pro-social modelling approach operated within the unit or that key workers were addressing specific issues such as family relationships. However from such descriptions alone it was difficult to know what the interactions with the young person had entailed. Even when young people were said

to have taken part in programme work, it could be difficult to find out exactly what or how many sessions had been offered and how the young person had responded. It was not unusual to learn that social workers also had limited knowledge of what had been offered.

6.2.3 For these reasons and because the study is concerned with the overall impact of a secure placement, rather than trying to relate outcomes to particular kinds of interventions, no quantitative account of the service provision is provided, rather a brief overview of the key elements of the service.

Adapting to the secure environment

6.2.4 Each unit had its own procedures for introducing young people to the life of the unit. For most young people information about what life in the unit was provided by their key worker and fellow residents. A key worker was usually allocated very soon after admission and the main rules and routines of the unit were explained.

6.2.5 Each unit gave young people information about their rights and that they could ask to meet with a children's rights officer. Depending on the resources available to each local authority's Children's Rights Officer (CRO) service, arrangements varied as to whether a children's rights officer would routinely make contact with a young person following admission. When they did visit, the initial focus was on making sure young people understood why they had come to be placed in secure accommodation and what they could expect from the children's rights service.

6.2.6 In the early days, it was usual for contacts with family and friends to be restricted in order to allow staff to make informed decisions about what contacts were safe. In at least one unit it was usual practice to only gradually allowed young people to have access to all their possessions, e.g. CD player, in their bedroom. These were set procedures which applied irrespective of the young person's individual circumstances, so they conveyed from the start that in certain respects young people would be required to conform to the unit's regime.

6.2.7 Within all of the units there was a commitment to staff modelling pro-social behaviour, alongside the operation of some kind of reward-based system through which young people could gain additional privileges, if their behaviour in the school and care unit merited this. This was partly because, as some unit staff pointed out, effective means of controlling behaviour were seen as crucial if the unit was to be made safe for all residents. Also developing pro-social behaviour and reducing aggressive or destructive behaviours were aims for most young people in the secure sample. Awards could also provide clear evidence of improvements in young people's behaviour.

6.2.8 However, though apparently necessary and helpful in the short term, the existence of reward-based systems lends support to the view that on entering the secure environment young people become preoccupied with adapting to it and securing privileges, rather than addressing the difficulties which had resulted in their admission. This point of view was expressed by several of the placing social workers.

Identifying and addressing young people's needs and issues

6.2.9 Plans for the placement were developed through both a system of formal reviews and planning meetings and individual discussions which took place between the young person and key worker or social worker. An assessment was carried out, though the form this took varied. Some units were beginning to use the YLS to identify issues related to risk of offending, whilst others relied primarily on psychological assessment or contacts with the key workers. In terms of how plans were recorded it was not usual for the files to contain a single document which identified key issues to emerge from the assessment process and how this would inform both the detailed work with the young person in the unit and plans for moving on. The various elements might well have been addressed in different documents, but at the time when the research was being carried out, they were not systematically recorded in a single, co-ordinated care plan.

6.2.10 Asked about the content of planning meetings and reviews, key workers, social workers and young people most often mentioned reviewing young people's progress or difficulties in the unit, arrangements for home leave and developing plans for moving on, including referral to outside agencies such as addiction or community support teams.

6.2.11 Opportunities to help young people address individual difficulties usually occurred in three contexts: planned individual sessions with the key worker or other member of staff; group programmes offered within the unit; contact with staff from agencies and projects based outwith the unit.

6.2.12 Issues mentioned frequently as being addressed with **key workers or other member of staff** were: life story work; self-esteem; keeping safe strategies; offending; temper management; relationships with peers; relationships with parents.

6.2.13 The importance attached to the key worker relationship varied across units. In two units from which the majority of the female sample had been recruited, developing positive relationships with staff was viewed as central. Each young person had two key workers and a key manager, so that there was usually someone available who knew the young person if a crisis arose. Staff used a range of tools and resources to explore relevant issues, but encouraging the young person to trust was viewed as key, if the roots of emotional difficulties were to be addressed. In a few cases there had also been some relationship-focussed work with a parent, but more usually key worker contacts with parents took place around practical issues such as leave arrangements.

6.2.14 In other units, more emphasis was placed on the use of structured **programmes**, delivered by care staff or staff specialising in developing this aspect of the service. At the time when the young people in the sample were in placement, the programme *Offending is not the Only Choice* was offered in three units. Other programmes offered to young people in the sample focused on cognitive skills to reduce impulsive behaviour and bullying. In a unit for girls some head massage and aromatherapy sessions had been organised. In addition, the girls had had group sessions on personal issues, sexualised behaviour, moral dilemmas, personal health and contraception.

6.2.15 Arrangements for bringing in **outside agencies** varied across units and could serve two different, though not mutually exclusive purposes. In some instances other agencies came in to help young people address specific issues during the placement, whilst with others the aim was to engage with the young person with a view to providing support when the young person moved on. Staff from specialist drug support projects sometimes set out to offer both. It was evidently more difficult to begin to engage during the secure placement if the young person had been placed some distance from home. There were also some examples of external mental health specialists offering advice to staff on the management of particularly difficult behaviours such as self-harming.

6.2.16 The kind of service young people received from their social worker varied, depending on the distance between the unit and home area, social work staffing levels in the employing authority and the kind of relationship the worker had been able to establish with the young person. Some units required that social workers attend a weekly meeting, whilst distance meant that others relied primarily on phone contact. In most instances the social worker's role was primarily to co-ordinate services and ensure appropriate resources were in place when the young person was ready to move on. Some also focused on encouraging parents to resume contact with the young person and/or offer him or her as much support as they were able to.

Education and health

6.2.17 Virtually every young person received an education while in secure accommodation, though one young woman had managed to refuse to attend classes throughout. Individual assessment and relatively small classes enabled most young people to re-engage with education and we were informed of six young people who had managed to obtain Standard Grades, despite considerable disruption to their schooling in the previous year. More usually the schools focused on vocational qualifications which could be offered in a wide range of subjects and completed in a short period.

6.2.18 Two- three years ago, the practice of routinely offering health assessments was not yet established in secure units. Nevertheless a range of health issues had been identified in relation to the young people in the sample and appropriate treatments arranged. Dental checks and eye tests were common. In addition a number of young women had had education and appropriate treatments in relation to sexual health.

6.2.19 In addition to more formal health interventions, young people's general health was boosted through receiving regular meals and sleep, which many had been missing out on prior to admission.

3 YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES

6.3.1 Sixteen young people were interviewed across all the units in the study. The majority of young people were interviewed in secure accommodation, although two were interviewed in close support units and one young person was interviewed at home after leaving the unit. Young people who took part in the interviews had been in the unit where they were interviewed for between two and 24 months, with the most frequent length of time being three months.

Perceived reasons for being in secure accommodation

6.3.2 Nine young people believed that their current placement in secure accommodation was intended to keep them safe. For example: *“Because I was putting myself at risk and smoking hash”*. One young person thought that their placement may have been necessary to keep other people safe, while two young people indicated that their behaviour had been so problematic, or they had been so ‘out of control’ that it warranted a secure placement. As one young person reasoned: *“I wanted to come into secure accommodation to stop me running away. I couldn’t stop myself. But I had to wait about six weeks for a placement”*. Four young people suggested that they were in a secure unit to access resources that they needed to help them address problems, or to enable appropriate resources to be put in place for them in the community.

Adapting to the secure environment

6.3.3. Most young people indicated that they had been very upset and distressed at the shock of finding themselves in secure accommodation. Some young people described being terrified and upset on arrival at the unit but noted that they were able to settle down in a short period of time. For one young person, arrival at the unit was a positive experience, which he remembered as: *“warm, it was good to feel warm again because I had been outside a lot”*. A few young people did indicate that they knew, at the time, that it was necessary for them to be placed in a secure unit to keep them or others safe, while the majority said that it was only in hindsight they were able to see that their situation did require placement in a secure unit: *“Now I think that I did need to be in secure, to stop me getting into trouble, but I didn’t think that then”*.

6.3.4 Young people had many preconceptions about what secure accommodation would be like: *“I thought you’d be locked in your room nearly all day and only get out for a wee while to the living room”*; *“Bars on the window. Bare rooms, like a cell”*. However several respondents knew someone who had previously been in a secure unit. While some young people indicated that they had felt afraid in the unit in the initial stage of their placement, they all said that in general they did feel safe and were confident in the ability of staff to deal with any tensions that arose in the unit.

6.3.5 All of the young people said they were provided with information about the unit on their arrival either verbally from staff, or in a written format – and generally both. They reported being given information about the unit, their rights and responsibilities, and about complaint procedures. All the young people interviewed were satisfied with the information they had received. Some units had a ‘Who Cares?’ worker who visited the unit, and almost all the young people were aware of the presence of a children’s rights officer with many of the young people having some level of contact with the officer in their unit.

6.3.6 Young people considered that their key workers in particular, and unit staff in general, were aware of any problems they may be having as well as things they enjoyed doing. All young people interviewed described their relationship with unit staff and their key workers as being either: ‘very good’, ‘quite good’ or ‘average’. The majority of young people described these relationships as ‘very good’. One young

person commented that the most important benefit in secure accommodation was the help they had received from their key worker and noted that: *“if I had got that in a close support unit, it could have worked, but you don’t get that in a YPC”*.

6.3.7 Being able to talk to staff was very important for the young people although the amount of communication surprised some of them. As one young person commented: *“I didn’t think you would have to talk to them as much as you do, I realised there would be some talking expected but not as much as there is”*. The skills that young people considered important in a staff member included the ability to listen, someone who was easy to talk to and who had a sense of humour. Some young people indicated that they wanted someone who could just ‘be normal’ with them.

6.3.8 While few of the young people were able to identify any specific assessment tools they had used, they did indicate that they were given worksheets to complete but were often vague about their purpose. A range of programmes were available including drug awareness and addiction, anger-management, offending and victim awareness and sex education. Programmes were often conducted in individual sessions and very few young people interviewed had experience of group work.

6.3.9 Young people gave examples of being able to participate in a range of activities which they enjoyed in the company of staff, however, school holidays were often seen as ‘boring’ when much of the time seemed to be spent watching television. Overall the routine of the unit was seen as acceptable and young people were generally satisfied with the way the unit operated, although a number of young people expressed a dislike for specified bedtimes.

6.3.10 Contact with social workers was generally ‘very good’ or ‘good’ and most young people saw their social worker once a week while in the unit, although this was not the case for all young people. All the young people interviewed stated that they had been involved in the development of their care plan. For many, the main emphasis of the plan was to help develop relationships with their family, or to support the move from secure accommodation to their family home or a residential school. Some young people’s plans also included access to specialist services such as bereavement counselling or addiction support. Similarly, all respondents had attended review and planning meetings and predominantly felt included in decisions made about their care. Some young people clearly felt more able to participate in these discussions than others. In general, young people indicated that they were satisfied with the plans made to help them move on from the unit.

Things that young people found difficult

6.3.11 While some young people commented that they had not experienced any difficulties in the secure unit, others indicated that it was hard not being able to see friends or family when they wanted to, being watched on a continual basis, not being able to go outside when they felt like it, and experiencing boredom. Where young people had contact with their families, this contact was generally on a weekly basis while they were in the units, with several young people afforded home leave at weekends. Young people indicated that they were less likely to have contact with their friends however, particularly if their friends had not been approved by social workers: *“I’m not allowed to have my best friend on my contact list because she smokes hash –*

this is daft because I'll see her the minute I go out". While relationships with staff were generally positive, relationships with other young people could be less predictable, although the mix of boys and girls (where this occurred) was seen as generally acceptable. Some of the girls interviewed indicated that it may be a good idea to have separate accommodation, however, the majority did comment that they thought it was a good idea to mix boys and girls. The hardest thing for most young people was the simple reality of being locked up: *"It's hard not getting out"*.

How secure has helped

6.3.13 In general, young people were very positive about their key workers and staff in the secure units in general. Young people who had been in more than one secure unit did suggest that differences existed between units in access to support and resources. Most young people acknowledged that workers helped them address issues they were experiencing in their lives, often in relation to other family members, or due to risky behaviour such as drug-taking: *"It's hard being in secure, but when you need secure you have to go there. It does help you. The staff do all they can"*. For most young people, unit staff were seen as the best thing about secure accommodation. One young person, when asked what had been most helpful in the unit replied: *"Staff – they are what is helpful. Giving advice, talking to them. You get annoyed with the crabbit ones sometimes, but it is just for our own good"*. Young people indicated that in some cases, secure accommodation had kept them 'safe' and reduced the likelihood of future risk-taking behaviour. Several young people indicated that their placement in secure accommodation had helped get them back to school or into college.

4. PLACEMENT LENGTH

6.4.1 How long the secure placement lasted was evidently an important consideration in terms of its significance to the young people. Reflecting the legal requirements for renewing supervision requirements with a secure condition, placements had either lasted approximately three months, six months or over six months. Of the eight young people in the third category, four had remained for the entire year. Table 7 provides details of placement length

Table 7: Length of Placement by Gender

Length of initial secure placement	Male	Female	Total
3-5 months	6	12	19 (36%)
6 months	12	12	26 (49%)
7-11 months	3	1	4 (7.5%)
all year	1	3	4 (7.5%)
Total	25	28	53 (100%)

6.4.2 Length of placement was an important consideration because it related to the key issue of the purpose of placements and what they were expected to achieve. From the stakeholder interviews it emerged that the secure placement's primary role was to keep young people safe and stop a spiral of destructive behaviour. Though there were also expectations that the placement would provide an opportunity to start to address

the young person's difficulties, it was also noted that some inherent characteristics of the placements, notably being enforced and cut off from the young person's usual environment, presented obstacles to effecting change. Thus length of placement was of interest not simply in terms of what it had meant to the young people, but also what it revealed about how the placements were being used in practice and their role in relation to other service provision.

6.4.3 Differences in local authority practice were clear in that 14 of the 19 young people who had spent less than 6 months in placement were from the city authority who were responsible for the majority of young people within pathway one, that is admitted from a residential unit. This is evidently a distinctive use of secure accommodation which was not mirrored in other areas. It is therefore accorded particularly close attention in chapter eight when outcomes and benefits of the placement are considered.

6.4.4 The higher proportion of girls than boys spending under 6 months in secure accommodation (43% as opposed to 28%) also reflects the over representation of young people from this authority in the overall sample.

Identified Benefits of the secure placement at the point when the placement ended

6.4.5 Based on social workers' responses, an assessment was made of whether, at the point when the secure placement ended, young people had benefited from having been there. There had been clear benefits for all young people in that all were considered to have been kept safe and, with good personal care, to be healthier than they had been when admitted. All except one young woman who refused to attend school were also thought to have derived benefits from the education provided.

6.4.6 On other dimensions, signs of benefit were more ambiguous. Only in relation to 31 young people (58%) did social workers believe that there had been an improvement in the behaviour which had resulted in the secure placement. This was generally attributed to good relationships having been established with staff, the young person having appreciated the consequences of their problematic lifestyle and enough change in the young person's life circumstances to allow a less risky approach to life to be sustained.

6.4.7 For the remaining 22 young people, acknowledged improvements were qualified by doubts about whether these reflected real changes or were simply a result of having been contained. Some were felt to have adapted well to the secure environment, but not necessarily shown that changed behaviour would be sustained when they were back in the community. There were particular concerns that drug use had not been adequately addressed. Some social workers pointed out that it was difficult to address issues such as drug use outwith the environment in which it took place, whilst others thought that more specialised intervention would have been needed to make a sustainable impact on the young person's behaviour. With some young people, elements of the problematic behaviour had continued during the secure placement. A few had run away a few times or committed offence when on home leave, whilst others had sometimes been violent or destructive within the unit itself.

6.4.8 Some social workers were disappointed that the behaviours which resulted in the placement had not been more specifically addressed during the secure placement. Comments on lack of appropriate help with problematic drug use has already been mentioned. In addition, some felt that the fit had not been good enough between the young person's specific needs and the programmes. A number of social workers commented that, though the young person had appeared to participate in programmes, their learning difficulties meant that they lacked the capacity to really understand or benefit from what had been offered. Other social workers had not expected that the secure placement would effect a change in the young person's behaviour, because they recognised that these were rooted in deep seated difficulties, typically resulting from disrupted attachments and exposure to multiple traumatic events.

6.4.9 The latter point of view was reflected in assessments of whether the secure unit placement had had any positive effect on emotional difficulties which affected the young person. For just over half the young people (n=31) some benefits were identified and in virtually every case where this applied, these were attributed to productive relationships with staff. These positive comments were made in relation to 18 of the 22 young people (84%) placed in the two units run by city authority A. The small number held there and the emphasis on the key worker relationship led some social workers to refer to it as a 'nurturing' environment. The view was that most young people had a good experience in that environment, but some social workers had concerns about how they would fare when they returned to a less protective setting.

6.4.10 Where there had not been any emotional benefits or even a detrimental effect, a common comment was that young people had remained detached from the whole process, doing enough to get through it and move on, but not really being touched by the experience. For some this was seen as a survival mechanism to get through a frightening and challenging experience.

6.4.11 Specific improvements in relation to family difficulties were noted in respect of only one young person. More usually social workers took the view that the placements had encouraged and supported contact with parents, but that little focused work had been carried out. In some instances, where the placement was some distance from the family home, it had been difficult for parents to visit regularly. Keeping parents informed and involved was often part of the social worker's own role and in some cases this work had been key to reducing the young person's anxiety.

6.4.12 Asked whether there had been any disadvantages from the young person having been in the secure placement, at least one was mentioned in relation to half of the young people. The most frequently mentioned drawback was distance from home which made family and social worker contact difficult and reduced opportunities for direct work with professionals from the home area who would provide support when the young person moved home. The disadvantage was essentially that the young person had been cut off from the support network in their home area.

6.4.13 Several comments referred to the time in security having been wasted because the work with the young person had not focused directly enough on the young person's difficulties. In a few cases aspects of how the young person had been treated were commented on, for example too many restraints or time spent in isolation

in the early part of placements. However at the point when the placement ended, no social worker thought the experience itself had been harmful.

6.4.14 Taking this range of considerations into account, the overall rating of whether there had been identifiable benefits from the secure placement at the point when the young person was discharged were as follows:

Yes, clear benefits	33
Some benefits but also some drawbacks	20

6.4.15 In terms of how this rating applied to the main sub-groups within the sample, there was little difference across age groups, but a higher proportion of girls than boys were thought to have clearly benefited (75% compared with 48%). In addition clear benefits had been identified for a higher proportion of those who entered secure accommodation from a residential unit than for those coming from the other two pathways (77% compared with 40%).

6.4.16 These gender and pathway differences largely reflect the higher rate of benefits identified for young people in city authority A (90% compared with 39%). There are a number of reasons why ratings for young people in this authority might be expected to be higher. First the secure provision was local, so that disadvantages associated with distance from home did not apply. In addition, as pointed out in part 1 of this report, staff in this authority viewed the use of secure accommodation in a more positive light than was the case in other areas. The units did put considerable emphasis on developing supportive relationships with the young people, as commented on by both social workers and young people themselves. The positive use of secure accommodation in this authority may have resulted in social workers being more inclined to identify benefits, but there were other indications that because of location, smaller size and the central role of the key worker, most placements had provided reasonably positive experiences for the young people concerned. How they and the other young people in the sample fared in the longer term is the subject to which the report now turns.

5. SUMMARY POINTS

6.5.1 For each young person there were two key dimensions to the placement: adapting to life in the secure unit and addressing the issues which were causing trouble in their lives.

6.5.2 Units varied in terms of the services they offered, but key components were individual work with the key workers or other member of care staff, group work and programmes and services provided by staff from projects and agencies outwith the unit.

6.5.3 Young people interviewed generally thought they needed to be in secure accommodation and had benefited from the placement. They very much valued relationships with care staff. Young people said the worst aspects of being in secure accommodation were not being able to see family and friends, boredom and being locked up.

6.5.4 Social workers thought all young people had benefited from the secure placement in terms of being kept safe and for virtually all there were education and health benefits too. However at the time when the placements ended, over a third were not thought to have benefited in terms of the behaviour which resulted in the placement having been effectively addressed.

6.5.5. A higher than average proportion of young people from city authority A were thought to have derived clear benefits from the placement. This was thought to reflect that they were accommodated in provision which was local, small scale and placed a strong emphasis on relationship building with key staff. Social workers' ratings were also likely to be influenced by the fact that within this authority, secure placement was viewed as a potentially positive option.

CHAPTER 7: LIFE AFTER THE SECURE PLACEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

7.1.1 The findings reported so far have in most respects been consistent with the views and expectations of key stakeholders in that most young people had had some benefit from the secure placement in the short term, but there were some concerns about how they would cope on leaving. This chapter describes how they fared, and on that basis assesses whether the longer term outcome was positive.

7.1.2 In most instances information on young people's progress was obtained through follow-up interviews with the social worker, either in person or by phone, at two points following the initial data gathering stage. Sometimes only one interview was possible, because the social worker left and/or the young person moved on to another social work team or out of the system altogether. In other cases a third interview took place in order to clarify how a situation which had been very fluid had worked out. This meant that the length of time over which young people's progress was tracked varied from 18 to 30 months after admission to the secure placement. Outcomes are reported in terms of the young people's circumstances at the latest point at which information was updated.

7.1.3 Throughout the follow-up period it was clear that most young people went through good and bad patches and that, at any one point in time, some aspects of their lives could be going well and others causing some trouble. For these reasons assessment of outcomes can only ever be an approximate indication of how young people have fared.

7.1.4 The chapter begins by describing transitions from secure accommodation and reviewing young people's moves in the year following their admission to secure accommodation. It then focuses on the period between leaving secure accommodation and the latest point at which updates on progress had been received. Outcomes were rated on the basis of a range of considerations. These are explained and their implications considered in light of young people's experience and progress up to the end point of the research.

2. LEAVING SECURE ACCOMMODATION

7.2.1 The importance of effectively managing the transition from secure accommodation was strongly emphasised in interviews with key stakeholders. In particular it was suggested that the return to the community or an open setting would be more effectively managed if the reduction in the level of structure and support to which young people had become accustomed during the secure placement could be gradual.

7.2.2 One of the often cited disadvantages of secure accommodation is the extent to which it disrupts continuity in the young person's life. Yet for some young people, a change in their circumstances prior to secure is considered helpful if the risky

behaviours which prompted the placement are to be avoided. Thus returning to the pre-secure placement was not always considered desirable.

7.2.3 In light of these issues, there was particular value in examining the correspondence between placements before and after the secure episode. Table 8 provides information on movement across types of placement, but only includes patterns of moves which applied to more than one young person.

Table 8 : Correspondence between placements pre and post secure accommodation

Sequence of placements pre and post secure	Number
Unit>secure>close support	11
Unit>secure>unit	8
Unit>secure>home	3
Unit > secure > residential school	3
Close support >secure > close support	2
Residential school >secure>residential school	4
Residential school >secure > home	4
Residential school >secure > unit	2
Home >secure >home	4
Total	41

7.2.4 For the remaining 12 young people not included in the table, their placement experience immediately pre and post the secure episode was unique to them. Three young people had moved on to supported accommodation (2) or a hostel for homeless people (1), but they each had been in different kinds of placements to begin with. Only one young person had moved on to foster care, having previously been in a residential school. Of the two who had been in foster care prior to the secure admission, one went home and the other to a residential school. The four young people who had moved to another secure unit or were still in secure accommodation had each been in a different kind of placement prior to admission.

7.2.5 Thus a third of young people returned to the same type of placement, and for approximately half of them, this was the same place as before.

7.2.6 Of the 49 young people who had moved back out of secure a year after admission, 15 moved to a more structured setting than they had been in prior to admission (close support or residential school), 19 returned to a similar form of care and 13 moved to less structured environment (home, foster care or a unit from a more structured care placement). Two options, home to supported accommodation and unit

to supported accommodation, were difficult to classify without knowing the nature of both placements.

7.2.7 Although the diversity is striking, it is also the case that the majority of the 31 young people from Pathway 1, that is those who were placed from a residential unit or close support unit, returned to one or other of those forms of care. This pattern reflected practice in city authority A. All of the thirteen young people who moved on to a close support placement were from this authority, as were five of the eight young people who came from and returned to a residential unit. Of the 22 young people from this authority, all but four had come from and returned to either a residential or close support unit. In the 12 months following admission to secure accommodation, only three young people had had more than one placement after leaving the secure placement.

7.2.8 The term 'step-down approach' was used by a number of social workers to refer to the practice of gradually returning young people to a more open and less supportive setting. When assessing whether a step-down approach had applied to young people within the sample, account was taken of where the young person had moved to live and the extent to which a package of community supports had been put in place. Of the 49 young people who had left secure accommodation by the end of the first year, 17 were considered, on the basis of social workers' comments, to have had a suitably staged return. Placements they had returned to were: close support (11); residential unit (3); supported accommodation (2); residential school (1). For a further seven young people, some elements of a step-down approach were considered to have applied.

7.2.9 Of the four young people who remained in secure at the end of 12 months, two were subsequently discharged to a new residential resource in their local area which opened during the time that the research was on-going. This provided intensive support and had education on site, so qualified as a step-down approach.

7.2.10 The main sources of community support for young people leaving secure accommodation were workers from the Throughcare teams and projects offering intensive support. In some instances these services had daily contact with young people and provided an out of hours service for help in crises. Projects concerned with drug use and offending were also much in evidence. As social workers described how young people responded to these services it was evident that the issue was not just to make the service available, but to provide it through an individual or group of workers with whom the young person could effectively engage. There were particular benefits in a number of cases where the working relationship had been established while the young person was still in the secure setting. Conversely some young people had been offered a range of services, but not engaged with any.

7.2.11 Where an effective relationship had been established with the key worker in the secure unit there could evidently be advantages in continuing the contact for a while after the placement ended. This was common practice in city authority A where agreements had sometimes been reached for the key worker to have a specified level of contact for a certain period, usually about 6 weeks. Where the young person transferred to close support on the same site, informal contact could continue for much longer.

7.2.12 At the opposite end of the spectrum from a step-down approach, some young people had moved directly back home (9) or to residential units (10) where much less structure was in place. For some young people who returned home or to live with another relative, moving to where they had always wanted to be was a potential strength in itself. However others found an unchanged situation, for example parents still embroiled in the local drug culture and/or able to make little or no space to accommodate the young person's return. At least two young people had no bed in the parental home, yet this was their home base. Whether these situations could be sustained seemed to depend largely on how much the young person had become able to look after him or herself and whether they could rely on support from others outwith the family home.

7.2.13 Alongside placement and community support, the provision of suitable education or work experience was key to providing adequate structure and support when young people moved on. A number of difficulties meant this could often be the weakest link in the transition package. In a few instances the young person's assessment indicated that a particular residential school would be most suitable to cater for the young person's care and educational needs, but a place could not always be accessed or funded. In these circumstances a combination of a care placement and suitable education had to be put together. This was often a less structured arrangement than what was required. In addition, specialist day education provision seldom catered well for young people who were educationally able. Where young people had in fact moved on to a residential school, the transition had usually worked well.

7.2.14 Returning to their mainstream school was proposed for very few young people and where this was the case, appropriate additional support arrangements were set up in advance. This option potentially had the advantage of conferring a degree of continuity before and after the secure placement. However attendance at school had typically been disrupted in the months leading up to the secure placements. In addition, the young person returned with a reputation for having been in secure accommodation, which could be an added stress in itself. One young woman concluded within the first few days that she no longer fitted in at her local school and asked to be moved. It was easier for young people to return to specialist day provision, where some of the other young people would also have had experiences of being accommodated. However opportunities for completing Standard Grades were limited there. Three social workers believed that lack of a suitable educational placement had resulted in the young person not achieving his or her educational potential.

7.2.15 Given the age of the young people in the sample, another common option was to take up a college placement linked to work experience. Often these arrangements seemed well suited to the young person's abilities and interests, for example building trades or work with animals. Where these arrangements worked out well, they were a very positive element of the transition, providing structure for the day, a normalising experience, opportunities to meet new friends and a considerable boost to the young person's self-esteem. However in a number of instances the planned work experience did not materialise and in others the demands proved more than the young person could manage. Some of the work placements required considerable travel and/or an

early start, so young people had to be very self-motivated even to manage the basics. For a variety of reasons some of these work/ college arrangements did not always work out as planned and when this happened, other elements of the transition package could be seriously undermined.

3. CIRCUMSTANCES AND OUTCOMES AFTER TWO YEARS

7.3.1 Determining where the end point should be in this study was not straightforward because three key time-related variables differed widely across the sample. These were date of admission to secure accommodation, length of time in placement and length of time following placement for which information on the young person's progress was available. The length of time between admission to secure placement and the latest update on progress ranged from 24 to 30 months. Four young people had spent more than half of that period in a secure setting, whilst others had been back in the community for over two years.

7.3.2 In order to maximise the data which could be included in the study, for most purposes the end point had been set at the stage at which the most up to date information on the young person's progress was obtained. However data on where all were living two years after admission to the secure placement is also reported. This indicates that the living arrangements for young people had not changed greatly between the two-year point and the stage at which the latest update had been recorded. This relative lack of change supports the view that it is acceptable for the end point to be set at between 24 and 30 months after admission, rather than at a fixed point.

Rating Outcomes

7.3.3 Having taken a range of considerations into account, a rating was made in relation to each young person in terms of whether the outcome had been Good, Medium or Poor. Variables on which this rating was based were :

- whether the young person was in a safe and stable placement at the point when their progress was last updated
- whether the young person was in work or education at the point when their progress was last updated
- whether the behaviour which resulted in their admission had been modified
- social worker's rating of their general well-being compared with when they were admitted to secure accommodation.

7.3.4 Young people whose circumstances or rating were positive on all four dimensions were considered to have had a good outcome. Where at least one was negative the rating was medium and where no aspects were positive, the outcome was considered to be poor. This meant that the outcome would be considered medium if a

young person was living at home i.e. avoiding prison or homelessness, even if they continued some offending or other problematic behaviour. On this basis, ratings for the sample were

Good :14 (26%); Medium: 24 (45%); Poor: 15 (28%)

7.3.5 The spread of ratings was similar across age, gender, placing local authorities, units where young people were held and placement prior to the secure admission. This is not surprising since young people's situations were too individual, complex and fluid to expect that any broad factors of this kind would directly influence the end result. Instead, good or poor outcomes emerged from how several elements of the situation came together. The diversity of young people's experiences evidenced throughout this report continued up to the end point of the research. The aim in this and the following chapter is to distil what can be learned about the processes and experiences which promoted or undermined a positive result.

Where young people were living

7.3.6 The places where young people moved to after secure accommodation can be seen as offering evidence about such factors as stability, support and restrictiveness in their lives. However, as we shall see, type of residence and other moves were in themselves ambiguous as indicators of relative success, since the meaning of settings and moves were highly individualised and affected by the context of the living situation.

7.3.7 Table 9 outlines where young people were living at a point two years after admission to secure accommodation and at the point when information on young people's progress was last updated. It illustrates that, of the ten young people whose situation had changed within these six months, three had moved from home, either to independent living, prison or to become homeless. One young person had left prison and become homeless. More positively two young people had moved from being homeless or in an insecure living arrangement to supported accommodation. One young person had returned home from a residential school and three young people had left secure accommodation, two to return home and one to go to a residential resource offering intensive support. Thus most of the moves at this late stage involved exiting the care system or took place outwith it.

Table 9: Where young people were living two years after admission to secure accommodation and at the last update

Where young people were living	Two years after admission to secure accommodation	At the last update
With parent or other relative	22	21
Residential Unit or close support	10	13
Independent living	6	8
Prison/ Young Offenders	5	5
Secure accommodation	4	1
Homeless /hostel	3	4

Residential school	2	1
Foster care	1	1
Total	53	53

7.3.8 Throughout the entire period since leaving secure accommodation the number of places young people had lived in varied from one to fifteen. However eight young people had remained in the place they were discharged to, 32 (60%) had had no more than two placements and 43 (80%) no more than three. The eight young people who had settled in their first placement came from four local authorities and varied in terms of age, gender and from where they had been admitted to secure accommodation. However all either went to a residential unit (4) or home (4). Three of those who returned home had also been admitted from there, so a third of the nine admitted from home had returned there and had no other care placements.

7.3.9 None of the ten young people who had stayed in more than four places since leaving secure accommodation had been admitted from home, but four had gone home immediately following the secure placement. This group were drawn from five local authorities and included young men and women. In addition to the four who had gone home, two had moved to another secure unit at the end of their first secure placement, two had gone to a residential unit, one to a residential school and one to a hostel. Apart from one, all of the young people had been aged 14 or over at the point when they were first admitted to secure accommodation, so they were virtually all over 16 by the time the research ended. End point living arrangements were not good for most of this group. Three were homeless and one was living in each of the following: hostel, Young Offenders Institution, with a relative and supported accommodation. Two were still in care placements, one in foster care and one in intensive residential provision. There are evidently additional stresses for young people who leave secure accommodation at or over the age of sixteen, since at that age they have access to fewer highly supportive placements.

7.3.10 Stability and continuity are expected to promote good outcomes, yet it would be simplistic to expect a direct correspondence between number of moves and final outcome. Of the eight young people who had remained in the same placement from leaving secure accommodation to the end of the research, seven had had a medium outcome, but none had had a good outcome. One had had a poor outcome, primarily because the home situation to which he returned offered little stability and support. Of the fourteen young people who had had a good outcome, twelve had had two or three placements. The other two had had four or six moves. In the latter case it had taken some time to find the right placement, but once that point had been reached, the boy had progressed well.

7.3.11 Returning home is another outcome which can be seen as positive, but encompasses a range of circumstances. Social workers considered that only four of the young people were in what might be termed a stable family situation. More commonly the tensions and problems which had applied when the young person was admitted to secure accommodation were on-going to a greater or lesser extent. In some instances the young person was thought more able to accept and cope with the family limitations and where additional support workers were involved, they often provided alternative support and guidance.

7.3.12 Remaining in secure accommodation for more than a year, transferring from one secure unit to another or being readmitted following discharge all point to serious difficulties and/or questions about the effectiveness of the first secure placement. Of the four young people whose initial secure placement lasted more than a year, three were readmitted after being released or moved directly to another secure setting from the original setting. One of the four was a young woman who had made considerable progress, but received a sentence for a serious offence committed prior to the first admission to secure accommodation. A further six young people had been readmitted to secure accommodation before the end of the period covered by the research. Four were back in secure accommodation 2 years after their original admission, but only the young woman serving a sentence remained by the time the period covered by the research ended.

7.3.13 The patterns of moves and outcomes after secure placement shows that after the secure placement there was an on-going need to assess risk and protective factors and where possible boost the latter and reduce the former. Thus the risk management practice which had been prevalent prior to some admissions should apply equally during the after care period.

School or work

7.3.14 At the latest point on which information was available, thirteen young people were still in education, ten were in a supported work placement and four were in employment, though for one this was on a casual basis. Thus 27 had a work or education placement, which may be regarded as loosely positive. None of the remaining 22 young people, on whom information was available, were in any form of education or employment.

7.3.15 Distinctive patterns of service provision following the secure placement were associated with each form of positive education or work. All of the thirteen young people who remained in education had moved on to another care placement on leaving secure. Of the four who had gone to a residential school, three had moved home by the time the research ended. The rest remained in a residential unit. Six of those in education were also supported by at least one community support project which offered a high level of contact in relation to general life coping skills or a specific difficulty such as offending or drug use.

7.3.16 All of the ten young people who had a supported work placement still had a high level of community based support, often provided by an After care or Throughcare team. Six of the young people were living in supported accommodation, three at home and one in foster care. This group included five young men and five young women who came from eight different local authorities. Six out of ten of these young people were rated as having a good outcome, indicating that other aspects of their lives were going well too.

7.3.17 All of the four young people who were in work were living at home and work, sometimes casual, had usually been obtained through family members.

Additional Support Services

7.3.18 By the end-point social workers indicated that the majority of young people were still receiving support from at least one community-based support. Thirty nine (73%) still had at least one form of support of whom half had at least two. The range of supports and number of young people accessing them are outlined in Table 10:

Table 10: Additional supports services being provided at the last update

Nature of Service	Number of young people receiving it
Support to independent living: e.g. Throughcare teams, young people's support teams, voluntary sector projects	20
Intensive community based support	11
Youth Justice / Offending Projects	10
Drugs or Addiction support	10
Mental Health support	4

7.3.19 In addition some young people received additional support from a member of staff or outreach worker attached to their residential unit.

7.3.20 Social workers indicated that most young people had been offered additional supports, but that not all were willing to take them up or to engage with the particular workers allocated to them.

7.3.21 No particular forms of support were associated with better or worse outcomes. In addition, outcomes for the 14 young people who were not still in receipt of services had been similar to those for the sample as a whole i.e.: good (3), medium (8), poor (3).

7.3.22 Only ten young people were still subject to a children's hearing supervision requirement. A few others still had regular contact with a social worker from a Children and Families team, but more usually the main support was provided by a Throughcare or Youth Justice worker or both.

Changes in Behaviour and Well-being

7.3.23 In order to assess changes since the young person had been admitted to secure accommodation, social workers were asked to rate whether, since that time, there had been any modification in the behaviour which had prompted the secure placement and the young person's general well-being.

7.3.24 In terms of the problematic behaviour which had resulted in the secure placement, improvements were identified in relation to 23 young people (43%), there had been no change in relation to 16 (30%) and for 11 (20%) the behaviour had deteriorated. It was difficult to give a rating for three young people because their behaviour was erratic, so sometimes seemed to be improving and sometimes to be worse.

7.3.25 The group whose problematic behaviour had increased were typically involved in drug use, often with associated offending. Three were young women. Seven of the eleven, including the three young women, had been on remand and/or sentenced by the courts. A further six young people had also been involved in the criminal justice system, but these were not necessarily considered to have increased their offending or other problematic behaviour.

7.3.26 All of those whose problems were considered to have increased and were involved in the criminal justice system were rated as having had a poor outcome. However four of the six young people who had been remanded or sentenced, but whose level of problematic behaviour remained unchanged were assessed as having a medium outcome.

7.3.27 In terms of changes in well-being, half of the sample (n=52) were considered to be in a better (21) or much better (5) position than they had been when admitted to secure accommodation. The situation was thought to be worse for eleven young people and to be unchanged for the remaining 16. Not surprisingly there was a close correspondence between ratings of change in behaviour and change in well-being.

7.3.28 Amongst the five whose situation was considered to have greatly improved there was equal representation among girls and boys and the routes young people had taken into and out of secure accommodation. Three local authorities were responsible for one young person and a fourth for two young people.

4. EXPLANATIONS OF GOOD OR POOR OUTCOMES

7.4.1 Throughout the report it has been emphasised that good or poor outcomes are the result of a wide range of influences. This study has focused on the role of a placement in secure accommodation, but it is clear that the impact of these placements over a two-year period owed much to how the young person was supported after leaving the placement. In addition it might be expected that the nature and level of the young person's difficulties would shape how the young person fared. Working out the relationship between these two dimensions is not straightforward, but some indications of what the key factors were did emerge, both from social workers' accounts of young people's experiences and from examining in more detail some aspects of the background and post-placement support relating to young people who did well or poorly.

7.4.2 Social workers generally attributed a good outcome more to an appropriate placement and education being offered when the young person left secure accommodation rather than simply the placement itself. Nevertheless, it was considered highly beneficial if a young person was able to establish a good relationship with a key worker because this boosted self-esteem and could facilitate the establishment of good working relationships with care workers and other staff who would support the young person when he or she moved on. A good relationship with key worker staff was therefore viewed as a strong protective factor.

7.4.3 In terms of moving on, most social workers preferred that there could be a gradual 'step-down' approach from the structure and supervision of the secure setting. Outcome data from the study supported this view in that half of the young people with good outcomes (7 of 14) had clearly had a full step-down approach and for a further two some elements were incorporated, for example daily contact with an after care worker. None of the 17 young people for whom a full step-down approach applied had had a poor outcome.

7.4.4 Analysis was carried out to identify whether certain characteristics made it more or less likely that a step-down approach would be offered to a young person and/or whether any common elements could be identified amongst those whose outcomes had been particularly good. In most respects such as age when problems started, previous experience of care placements and reasons for admission young people who had been offered a step-down approach reflected the range and diversity of the whole sample. However two important distinguishing characteristics were that 13 of the 17 young people were from city authority A and 11 were female. Thus the examples of step-down practice within the sample largely reflects practice with young women in that area.

7.4.5 Several aspects of that practice promoted continuity. First that the secure placement was local and the close support to which the young person graduated was often on the same campus. Thus some contact with key staff in the secure unit could usually be maintained relatively easily. The local context also made it easier to make links with educational and work experience projects and other support services. Eight of the young people had moved on after only 3 months in the secure placement, suggesting that shorter secure placements can be effective if appropriate follow-on placements are available.

7.4.6 Another notable feature of placements in this authority was that, at the time when the placements ended, social workers considered that most had made a definite impact on young people's behaviour and well-being, with this applying to all of those who moved on to close support. The placements were described, by both social workers and young people, as providing a nurturing environment in which issues were identified and tackled, as far as was possible. Several young people talked about their key worker and teachers with genuine fondness and appreciation. This positive experience and view of placements can be expected to have boosted young people's self-esteem and confidence which in turn would constitute a protective factor as they moved on.

7.4.7 Though the step-down approach was most common in local authority A, there were examples elsewhere, some involving young people who had been placed very far from their home. Where these worked well, the same principles applied of ensuring a package was in place to cater for each element of the young person's needs, whilst at least one key professional, usually the social worker or Throughcare worker also provided on-going support.

7.4.8 If a step-down approach was associated with good outcomes, continuing drug and offending predominated amongst the nine young men and five young women who had the poorest outcomes. In terms of their family background and previous placements, the young people who had a poor outcome were no different from the

sample as a whole. However prior to the secure admission, problematic drug and alcohol use was more prevalent among this group, being an issue for 12 out of 14 of the young people and directly contributing to the need for a secure placement in relation to ten. Levels of offending were also higher than for the sample as a whole, with only two not having been charged with any offences.

7.4.9 Another notable feature of the group with poor outcomes was that their placements in secure accommodation had been viewed in a negative light from the point when they ended. For only three young people was the time in secure accommodation thought to have made any impact on the behaviour which prompted the admission and only two were thought to have had any emotional benefits. The most common reason given for the lack of progress was that the drug problems had not been effectively addressed. Some young people were thought to need a more therapeutic and specialised type of placement. Correspondingly, there was a view that the programmes which had been offered had not corresponded to the young person's needs. These led a number of social workers to say that the young person had simply been contained, rather than helped. This view was expressed more than once in relation to a unit which considered that its service had a therapeutic component. In a few instances the placement was viewed as detrimental. On being admitted to prison, one young woman had said to her social worker that it meant nothing to her because she had got used to being locked up while in secure accommodation. The social worker agreed that the placement had normalised living in a secure environment.

7.4.10 Three young people were identified as having had drug and alcohol difficulties and engaging in associated offending prior to admission, but rated as having a good outcome. However the problematic drug use was less salient in the reasons for the secure admission, so it may have been less severe. Otherwise, the three differed from peers with a poor outcome in three key respects. First, all had been in their teens before coming to the attention to social work service, so their difficulties had been of relatively short duration. For two of them, the secure placement was thought to have made an impact on their behaviour, though the third was considered to have remained disengaged throughout. Each had moved on to a close support, or a residential school placement, so had had more structured support when they moved on. One of the placements in secure accommodation had lasted over a year.

7.4.11 Approximately half of the young people who had poorest outcomes were aged 16 or over by the time they left the secure placement and six had moved home within a year of their admission. All were referred to at least one community-based support, in addition to the social worker, but this had evidently not been enough to promote a better outcome.

5 SUMMARY POINTS

7.5.1 Two years after admission, outcomes were mixed with just over a quarter having a good or poor outcomes and under half having outcomes rated as medium.

7.5.2 For most young people some level of difficulties continued. However the majority were still receiving support from at least one source of community-based support.

7.5.3 Better than average outcomes were achieved when arrangements for leaving the secure placement allowed a gradual reduction in the level of supervision and support the young people had become accustomed to in secure accommodation.

7.5.4 Worst outcomes were reported for young people who had significant problems with drug misuse prior to admission.

7.5.5 This section has tried to unpack the myriad of influences which influence outcomes. It suggests that, though post-placement support is key, the experience in secure accommodation is an equally important element. No particular approach can guarantee success, but the most salient theme is that young people respond well when offered continuity and the opportunity to develop relationships with one or more reliable adults who can help with problems as they arise. Some young people needed more specialised help than secure units were able to offer during the period covered by the study. Sustaining improvement after secure care normally required a graduated transition, which kept in place some of the close support provided in the secure setting.

CHAPTER 8: CHARACTERISTICS AND EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO FORMED THE ALTERNATIVE SAMPLE

1 INTRODUCTION

8.1.1. As noted in chapter one, the role of the alternative sample changed in the course of the study. The original intention had been that its inclusion would facilitate direct comparison with young people admitted to secure accommodation, so that the respective benefits of a secure and alternative route might be identified, both in financial and welfare terms. For reasons explained in chapter one, this kind of quasi-experimental comparison proved not to be feasible or appropriate. However including the alternative sample remains useful as it offers illustrations of parallel routes through services taken by young people who came close to being admitted to secure accommodation, but managed to be sustained in an open residential or community based setting. This chapter describes the young people, their journeys and the role of non secure services in supporting them.

8.1.2 Twenty-three young people were recruited from three main sources: projects offering intensive support to young people at risk of being placed in secure accommodation or residential school; residential schools; the survey of all young people made subject to secure authorisation between 1st July and 31st December 2003. Recruitment continued for 2 ½ years and at different points targeted several major voluntary organisations offering ‘alternatives to secure accommodation’ and all residential schools.

8.1.3 Criteria for inclusion were that the young person had been formally considered for secure authorisation, but subsequently sustained in an open residential or community setting for at least six months.

8.1.4 Information was obtained retrospectively in one interview with a project worker, residential key worker or social worker. Where appropriate consents had been obtained, background information was also obtained from social work records.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

Age and Gender

8.2.1 The age range in the alternative sample, at the point when they had been considered for admission, was 10-15. Whilst girls were over represented in the secure sample, they were in the minority in the alternative sample. This in part reflects that most of the sample was recruited through residential schools and projects working with young people involved in offending, both of which cater primarily for boys. Details of age and gender are outlined in Table 11.

Table 11: Age when first considered for secure accommodation by gender

Age when first¹² considered for secure authorisation	Male	Female	Total
10-11	1	1	2
12	3	0	3
13	2	1	3
14	6	2	8
15	4	3	7
Total	16	7	23

Background

8.2.2 As with the secure sample, the main carer for most young people was a single mother. Details are outlined in Table 12:

Table 12: Main Carers for Young People in the Alternative Sample

Main Carer	Number	%
Mother	14	61
Local authority has parental rights	3	12
Both parents	2	9
No main carer	2	9
Father	2	9
Total	23	100%

8.2.3 Four young people, two girls and two boys, had experienced the death of one parent.

8.2.4 The families of fourteen young people (60%) had first been known to social work services when the young person was aged 10 or younger. Length of social work involvement ranged from less than a year to 11 years, with half having been in touch with social work services for five years or more. A third of the families were affected by parental drug or alcohol misuse and needed additional support with parenting. Family violence was mentioned in relation to six of the families.

8.2.5 For two girls and one boy the difficulties which resulted in consideration for secure accommodation had started at the ages of 8-10. The remainder had been between 11 and 15 years old when their problems began. For eight young people, the onset of difficulties had started at age 12-13, so this was the most common age at which problems had first been identified.

¹² Three young people had subsequently been considered for secure accommodation once and one twice.

8.2.6 All but three of the young people had been accommodated at some point in their life. Time spent in care had been: under 2 years (9); 2-5 years (7); 5 years or more (4)¹³.

8.2.7 The number of previous placements ranged from 1-7, with seven young people having been in three placements or more. Eleven had had at least one placement in a residential unit, nine had been in at least one foster placement and five had been in at least one residential school.

8.2.8 In terms of these aspects of their background, there were few notable differences between the young people in the alternative sample and those who had been admitted to secure accommodation.

3. THE YEAR PRIOR TO CONSIDERATION FOR SECURE PLACEMENT

8.3.1 At the time when they were considered for secure accommodation, nine young people were living in a children's unit, five were in a residential school and nine were living at home. In order to mirror the pathways approach developed in relation to young people admitted to secure accommodation, the young people were grouped according to their placement when considered for secure, then patterns of routes through services in the previous year were identified for each group.

Pathway 1 : Young People in a Residential Unit (n=9)

8.3.2 Of these nine young people five were boys and four girls. Three were younger than fourteen years old and six aged 14+. They came from four local authorities, but seven were from the two main cities.

8.3.3 In the previous year, three had spent at least three months at home prior to being placed in residential accommodation. Two had been in foster care and one in close support before moving to the unit, but none had spent time in a residential school or secure accommodation. Three had been in the same unit for six months and two for the entire year.

8.3.4 In terms of education, six young people were in mainstream education and the remainder in a form of specialist provision. However only three were attending regularly at the point when they were considered for secure placement. In relation to community supports, all but two had some form of additional help. The range of services offered were similar to those made available to young people in secure accommodation, that is primarily offering intensive social support and help related to offending or addictions. Only two had been referred to a team offering mental health support. Reluctance to engage with at least one service was mentioned in relation to six of the nine young people.

¹³ Information missing on three young people

Pathway 2: Young people in a residential school (n=5)

8.3.5 This small group included four boys and one girl. Two were aged 13 and three were aged 14 -15.

8.3.6 One had been resident in the school for the entire year, one had been there for only a month, having spent the rest of the year at home, and the remaining three had divided the year between a residential unit and residential school.

8.3.7 Education was provided within the school and four young people had been referred to more than one additional community resource, which specifically catered for young people at risk of being admitted to secure accommodation.

Pathway 3: Young people at home (n=9)

8.3.8 Of the nine young people living at home, two were 15 year old girls and seven were boys. Three of the boys were aged 13 or younger.

8.3.9 Only two of them had spent any part of the previous year in a care placement.

8.3.10 In terms of education, four were still on the roll of a mainstream school, with two receiving additional support within the school. The remainder had a place in specialist educational provision, either in a day centre or as a day pupil in a residential school. However only two were attending regularly when considered for secure placement. Two young people had not been offered any social supports in addition to the statutory social worker, but for some others a quite intensive package had been put in place, typically involving intensive community-based support and contact with a specialist addiction service.

REASONS FOR BEING CONSIDERED FOR SECURE ACCOMMODATION

8.3.10 Young people were being considered for secure accommodation because of behaviours similar to those which had promoted the admission of those in the secure sample. That is they were placing themselves or others at risk and offending. Some of the behaviour involved a high level of risk, for example alcohol and/or solvent misuse, joy-riding, playing 'chicken' on railway lines, gang fighting and engaging in activities involving potential sexual exploitation. However compared with those in the secure sample, a far lower proportion were running away (32% compared with 73%). Another difference was that offending and creating trouble in the community was a more prevalent issue among this sample than for most young people who had been admitted. As with the young people in secure accommodation, school and family, difficulties were usually problematic too, but for some the situation was less volatile than was typically the case for young people who had been admitted.

8.3.11 Formal reasons for consideration for secure accommodation are listed in Table 13:

Table 13: Reasons for young people being considered for secure accommodation

Reasons for Admission	Male	Female	Total
Danger to self	13	5	18
Likely to abscond	5	2	7
Danger to others	11	4	15
Persistent offending	9	0	9
Serious offence(s)	0	1	1
Outwith the control of current carer	3	1	4

REASONS WHY YOUNG PEOPLE WERE NOT ADMITTED TO SECURE ACCOMMODATION

8.3.12 The most common reason why the young person had not been admitted to secure accommodation was that no place had been available. This reason was given in relation to 11 young people. In addition, the risk in relation to one young woman was thought to have reduced by the time a place became available. Thus twelve young people, over half the sample, would have been admitted, if a place had been available on the day that the secure authorisation was made. Ten of the young people stayed in the placement they were currently living in, four in a residential school, four at home and two in a residential unit. The remaining two either moved home from their current placement or moved into a residential unit.

8.3.13 One young person was considered by social work managers not to meet the secure criteria and another's appeal against secure authorisation was upheld by the sheriff court.

8.3.14 The remaining nine young people avoided secure placement because an alternative package was put together to support them. Six of the nine moved to a new placement, either a residential school, close support or a residential unit. The remaining three stayed at home. Most of these were not made subject to secure authorisation because the alternative arrangements had been put in place to avoid this.

4. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SERVICE OFFERED BY THE ALTERNATIVE SERVICES.

8.4.1 A wide range of services were drawn on to keep young people in the community, but three main types of service predominated: intensive community based support, offending based projects and residential units or schools.

8.4.2 Includem staff were working with a third of the young people, so their service merits a brief description. Its key characteristics were that staff had frequent contact with the young person, often daily, were available out of usual core hours, and in most instances worked with the whole family, rather than just the young person. They typically engaged in a mix of structured activities which encouraged young people to

develop more understanding of their life situation and behaviour and introduced the young person to leisure activities and sport. They were also available to offer advice and support to parents and sometimes took the whole family on outings to encourage positive, enjoyable interaction among them. Crucially the worker got to know the young person and family very well, so had a good idea of what the risks and strengths in each family were. This level of understanding, together with a capacity to diffuse family crises before they became out of control, enabled them to sustain some very volatile situations. In addition they worked with other local agencies such as police and schools to create the best possible package for young people, but also to help diffuse local antagonism towards young people who were viewed as prolific offenders.

8.4.3 In some instances the Includem staff took the view that an admission to secure accommodation would achieve very little for the young person because their problems could not be dealt with in isolation from what was going on in the rest of the family. This strong emphasis on viewing and working with the young person in his or her family context is quite different from the emphasis on focusing on the young person as an individual within the secure setting. Correspondingly, whilst the Includem input aimed to support families in ways which would enhance their lives as far as possible, staff also recognised that their usual role was to enable very stressed and burdened families to cope rather than effect significant change.

8.4.4 Projects focusing on offending also engaged with parents where appropriate, though their focus was more directly on the young person and his or her offending and associated difficulties. It was often because structured work on offending could be offered that a children's hearing had agreed to a young person remaining at home. However the young person was viewed holistically and supported with a range of issues including relationships with family members, drug and alcohol use and preparation for work. Ideally the projects offered the kind of programme which might be offered in secure accommodation, but in an open setting. In some instances, the risk of going to secure accommodation had been enough to encourage initially reluctant young people to engage.

8.4.5 Residential units and schools were also in the forefront of sustaining young people in the community. Sometimes additional support for the young person from a community support project had helped ease the situation, but where young people had been sustained in an open setting, staff had usually stayed with a fraught situation until it improved. In some instances a number of difficulties continued, but the crisis element had subsided and some young people had become much more settled.

5. PATHWAYS THROUGH SERVICES IN THE YEAR FOLLOWING BEING CONSIDERED FOR SECURE ACCOMMODATION

Living situation following consideration for secure placement

8.5.1 Immediately following being considered for a secure placement, the living situations of the 23 young people in the alternative sample were as follows:

Remaining at home	7
Recently moved home or to live with another relative	2
Remaining in a residential school	4
Recently moved to a residential school or close support	5
Remaining in a residential unit	3
Recently moved to a residential unit	2

8.5.2 Thus 14 were still in the same placement: seven remained at home, four in a residential school and three in a residential unit. Of the nine who moved, five transferred to a more restricted environment i.e. from a residential unit to close support (2) or residential school (2) and from home to a residential school (1). One young person moved from a residential school to a unit and one from a unit to live with a relative. One young person who had been at home moved to live with another relative.

8.5.3 Moves made within this admittedly small sample lend support to the view that developing existing supports in the community, sustaining existing residential placements and moving to more structured and resource intensive residential care are the key ways of avoiding admission to secure placement.

Pathways in the year following consideration for secure placement

Young people who stayed or moved home (n=9)

8.5.4 Six boys and three girls were in this subgroup. Two boys were under the age of 14, but the remainder were aged fourteen or older.

8.5.5 Five of the young people who stayed or returned home after the residential placement remained at home for all of the following year and one moved to live with a relative. Three moved into residential care, two to a residential school and one (part-time) to a children's unit. One young man was admitted to a Young Offenders Institution in the course of the year. None were admitted to secure accommodation, close support or foster care.

8.5.6 All of the young people received specialist education, though two still attended mainstream school with additional supports. All had at least one form of community support and three were in contact with a total of five resources, including intensive community-based support.

Young people who remained in or recently moved to a residential school or close support (n=9)

8.5.7 Of the nine young people in this sub-group seven were boys and two girls. Five were under the age of 14 and four aged 14 or older.

8.5.8 Of the four boys who remained in residential, two had stayed there for all of the following year and one for 10 months. Only one of the four had been admitted to secure accommodation and had remained there for eight months.

8.5.9 There had also been reasonable stability for the three young people who moved into residential school after being considered for secure accommodation. Two had remained for the entire year and one had moved on to supported accommodation after 10 months in the school. Both young people who moved into close support had also stayed there for the whole year.

8.5.10 One of the young people admitted to close support still attended mainstream school, but all of the others in this sub-group received specialist education.

8.5.11 Each person also received at least one community-based support and one young person was in contact with five. Relevant services included intensive support (i.e. daily contact), support towards independent living and a range of addiction services.

Young people who remained in or moved to a residential unit (n=5)

8.5.12 Five young people, three male and two female and all but one aged 14 or older had remained in or moved to a residential unit after being considered for admission to secure accommodation.

8.5.13 All five had remained in residential care for the following 12 months, but only one had stayed in the same unit. Three had moved to a second unit and one had had two subsequent placements. Two young people had moved to residential school and one to supported accommodation. None had moved into secure accommodation, close support or foster care.

8.5.14 None of the four were in mainstream school and three were moving on to college. In terms of community supports, a high number (2-5) and wide range were offered. As with other groups, these included support towards independent living, help with crises as they arose on a day to day basis and addiction services.

8.5.15 At the time the research interviews were carried out, the young person had been engaging with the supports put in place after consideration for secure admission for at least six months. For some young people the possibility of being admitted to secure accommodation remained a live issue because the behaviours which caused concern continued to some extent. For some, key workers thought that wanting to avoid secure accommodation helped moderate their behaviour and keep them engaged with services.

6. SUMMARY POINTS

8.6.1 In terms of their family background and previous history, the young people in the alternative sample were similar to those who formed the secure sample.

8.6.2 The young people had been considered for secure placement for reasons similar to those which had resulted in an admission for those in the secure sample. However offending was more of an issue for young people in the alternative sample and fewer of them were absconding. Most had remained engaged with at least one support service.

8.6.3 Half of the sample had not been admitted to secure accommodation because no bed was available. Yet all of them had remained in an open setting for at least six months thereafter, usually without moving to live somewhere else. A move of placement was more likely when a package had been put together as a positive option to avoid admission to secure accommodation.

8.6.4 Three main types of service had continued to support young people in the community: intensive community based support; projects focusing on offending and residential units and schools. Each offered a distinctive type of support, sometimes in collaboration.

8.6.5 Though in many instances some level of difficulty continued, most young people had reasonable continuity and stability in terms of placements in the following year being considered for secure accommodation.

CHAPTER 9 : COMPARING ROUTES THROUGH AND AROUND SECURE ACCOMMODATION

1 INTRODUCTION

9.1.1. Understanding the relationship between the use of secure accommodation and ‘alternatives’ has been a central issue for this study. Early appreciation that open residential or community-based services seldom offered a ‘direct’ alternative to secure accommodation meant that the study’s design shifted from comparing the effectiveness of each to understanding: a) how young people came to take one route or another and b) how these parallel experiences impacted on them. This chapter highlights key points to emerge on both these issues, while also showing that in some respects and for certain young people the ‘alternative’ services complemented secure provision, rather than diverted from it.

9.1.2 One of the key messages from the study is that whether certain young people are admitted to secure accommodation is shaped as much by the service provision context around them as the needs and behaviour of the young people themselves. Through the process of recruiting the alternative sample, interviews with key stakeholders and a survey of placements following all secure authorisations made by a children’s hearing during a six month period, it became evident that use of secure accommodation and ‘alternatives’ varied across local authorities. Key considerations which shaped patterns of use were: accessibility of secure places; views and attitudes about the role and value of a secure placement; capacity and willingness to manage risk in an open setting; availability of open and community based alternatives, i.e. well resourced open residential provision and intensive community based supports. Taken together these considerations shaped what thresholds of risk came to be tolerated in an open setting or considered to merit secure accommodation. In this chapter we draw on the data obtained in relation to the young people in each sample to further highlight how these structural differences operated in practice.

9.1.3 The second key concern of this study has been to identify the kinds of services and practice which would produce best outcomes for young people. The complexity and diversity of experience reported in the preceding four chapters meant it was not possible to identify specific services which would in themselves produce a better or worse outcome. What mattered was the context in which services were offered, whether rapport could be established between the young person and whoever was offering the service and whatever else was going on in a young person’s life at the time. Thus certain approaches to service delivery and features of practice were identified as more or less likely to produce good outcomes and this chapter highlights these.

2 SECURE AND ALTERNATIVE SAMPLES – COMPARABLE GROUPS?

9.2.1 It has been emphasised throughout the report that direct comparisons cannot be made between the two samples because of differences in sample size and how they were recruited. Nevertheless some comments about the nature of samples and how they came to be recruited are merited.

9.2.2. The backgrounds of the young people were broadly similar, as was their previous experience of local authority care. However there were also some differences. Compared with the young people admitted to secure accommodation, those in the alternative sample had had fewer moves in the year prior to being considered for secure accommodation. This indicates that their route to secure accommodation was stopped, at least partly, because, unlike the young people who reached secure accommodation, they arrived at a placement (and that might be their family home) from which they could be adequately supported.

9.2.3 The characteristics of the two samples are different in that girls predominate in the secure sample and boys in the alternative. The alternative sample also includes more young people aged less than 14 years old and more young people for whom offending was a primary concern.

9.2.4 Taken together, these differences mean that whereas a significant proportion of the secure sample were young women who were putting themselves at risk, often through drug use, running away and risky sexual activity, this group is not represented in the sample. One of the sites through which the research team tried to recruit appropriate young women to the alternative sample was city authority B, focusing on the secure screening group and a young women's support project. Neither source yielded any recruits for the alternative sample, primarily it seemed, because the project usually engaged with young women at risk before admission to secure accommodation was seriously considered. Thus many young women in this authority also seemed to have found suitable support at an early enough stage to prevent them reaching secure accommodation¹⁴. However since the latter option had not been seriously considered for young people, they could not be included in this study.

9.2.5 With city authority A responsible for a high proportion of young women in the secure sample, it is evident that, at the time the samples were recruited, practice in relation to young women at risk was different in these two authorities. Factors identified as likely to contribute to the differences were:

1. availability of open and community based alternatives: city authority A had no residential school provision for girls or dedicated community support;
2. accessibility of secure places: each authority had access to their own unit, but in city authority B, but not A, a high number of places were reserved for use by other authorities. In addition, local authority A's provision was local.
3. attitudes to the use of secure accommodation: staff in city authority A typically referred to secure accommodation as a potentially positive option, whereas the potential negatives were emphasised by staff in city authority B.

9.2.6 Increased availability of open residential and community based supports in authority B meant that some young women there were able to modify their behaviour before requiring secure accommodation. In authority A, there was relatively ready access to local secure accommodation and confidence in the potential benefits of placements. Together these considerations meant that a lower level of risk would be

¹⁴ This authority admits relatively few young women to secure accommodation. None were included in the secure sample, though one young woman who met the criteria refused to participate and another was not asked because her personal circumstances were particularly distressing at the time.

tolerated and worked with in an open setting in authority A, compared with authority B. Thus decision making was influenced by several aspects of the local context.

3. WHAT HAD THE SECURE PLACEMENT AND ‘ALTERNATIVES’ PROVIDED?

9.3.1 The experiences of the young people in each of the samples also shed light on the respective roles of secure accommodation and other forms of residential care or community-based support services which are commonly referred to as ‘alternatives’.

9.3.2 At the point when they left the secure placement, all young people were considered to have benefited from being there. For some the benefits were considerable, including, in certain cases, managing to keep the young person alive. Two-three years later, half of the sample were still thought to be in a better position than had been the case when the secure placement was authorised, but for about half of the young people, the gains had not been long-term, whilst the behaviour which had resulted in secure accommodation remained problematic for well over a third (37%).

9.3.3. Because of differences in the two study samples, it is not possible or meaningful to give comparable outcomes for young people who were considered for secure accommodation but not admitted. However from information on the services they had been offered, it is possible to identify the role alternative services had played in relation to the key elements of a secure placement and which might be developed a) in order to allow more young people to be sustained in the community or b) to augment what secure placements are able to offer.

Intensive community-based support

9.3.4 Managing risk and keeping the young person safe were evidently key elements of each alternative service, with this aspect of the work being particularly important with young people still living at home or spending a lot of time in the community while accommodated. Some alternative services clearly managed a high level of risk. One of the reasons they were able to do this was that workers were in frequent contact with the young person and his or her family, were available out of hours and engaged in a range of different activities with the young person and key people in his or her life. Through this they developed an understanding of what made the young person tick and what was going on in his or her life which facilitated reliable risk assessment and management. With this level of contact, an incremental approach could be adopted whereby risk factors were constantly being assessed, the service altered to address them and its adequacy monitored.

9.3.5 This kind of approach to risk management was similar to that described by a number of social work managers as a means of actively preventing admission to secure accommodation and/or knowing when a secure placement was needed. Alternative support services had adopted this approach with young people living at home or in an open residential setting. Where young people were in the latter, close working with residential staff was evidently key.

9.3.6 One of the advantages of secure accommodation was that young people could be reintroduced to education and other services from which they had become disengaged. Where community support workers had established a good rapport with young people, there were examples of workers being able sustain links with young people, even when in crisis, and so be able to facilitate access to school and other services. The latter was sometimes an on-going part of the contact. Thus high intensive community support services could be a means of promoting young people's engagement with other services, without the restrictions imposed by a secure placement.

9.3.7 Perhaps one of the key distinctions between what secure placements and community based intensive support offered was that the latter worked closely with parents and other family members, whereas admission to secure accommodation could potentially cut the young person off. In the final interview with unit managers they stressed that work with parents was being developed, so this seems to be an aspect of practice which has changed since the young people in the secure sample were in placement. Yet, irrespective of the work undertaken, admission to secure accommodation potentially isolates a young person and locates the problem within him or her, where as some of the community based approaches the research encountered made it clear that the problems were family based. At the end of the research period, the family situation for most young people in the secure sample remained uncertain or unstable. This was also the case for many young people in the alternative sample. However where workers had got to know the family well and were flexible in their availability, crises could sometimes be resolved without resorting to the young person having to leave the family home.

9.3.8 Another important feature of community-based support was that it could last for several years. Some of the projects, worked on the basis that certain families with multiple problems would need high levels of on-going support for as long as there were children growing up within them. For young people and families who needed this, a secure placement for one child was not expected to make much of an impact on the level and complexity of their difficulties.

9.3.9 Key elements of intensive community-based support thus potentially have a role in sustaining young people and so avoiding secure placement, but can be equally beneficial in compensating for the drawbacks of secure accommodation and supporting young people when they leave. Most of the young people in the secure sample were in contact with a form of community based support after they left the secure placement. When asked about which services had had the most positive impact on young people, social workers were more likely to attribute success to the support provide on leaving secure accommodation, rather than the secure placement itself. However in many instances this work was building on and sustaining the benefits of the placement.

Residential Provision

9.3.10 Residential schools had provided an open alternative for a number of young people who were considered for secure accommodation or made subject to a secure authorisation. This provision had also been the placement of choice for a number of young people on leaving secure accommodation. The key advantages over secure

accommodation are evidently that this option avoids restriction of liberty, whilst still providing a safe, structured environment and education. In addition the placement is not time-limited so young people can have longer to address any difficulties and make educational progress, whilst weekend leave can facilitate limited contact with their family. However, with secure provision, residential schools share to some extent the disadvantages of being cut off from local communities and expensive.

9.3.11 Among young people in the secure sample, outcomes for those who had been in a residential school were better than for the sample as a whole in that three of the seven had had a good outcome and only one a poor outcome.

9.3.12 Close support or more intensively resourced residential provision was also a potential alternative to secure accommodation. In interviews with key stakeholders there was strong support for developing better resourced and more structured residential services which would have the capacity to manage young people at risk and stop them becoming out of control. Amongst young people in the secure sample it was evident that these resources were seldom accessed before young people reached secure. Correspondingly, none of the young people in the alternative sample or survey of placements following a secure authorisation had been sustained in this kind of setting, though a number had been able to remain in an ordinary residential unit.

9.3.13 Thirteen young people had moved on to close support on leaving the secure unit and for them outcomes had been rated as better than for the sample as a whole, with three being rated as good, ten as medium and none as poor.

9.3.14 Evidence from both samples, the survey of placements following authorisation and the interviews with key stakeholders indicates that residential units are a key resource on the route to secure accommodation, so that strengthening what they can offer would seem to be a key plank in an strategy trying to ensure that young people will only be placed in secure accommodation if they would present an unacceptably high risk to themselves and others within any other setting.

4 COSTS OF SECURE PROVISION

9.4.1 Secure care is obviously one of the most expensive forms of intervention with children and young people. We have seen that while some panel members considered that the reluctance of social work staff to recommend secure care was motivated by keeping down costs, neither reporters nor social work managers thought that cost considerations would stop a local authority from requesting secure authorisation if it was required. We have also seen that patterns of individual need, pathways through services and definitions of outcome are complex, and therefore, it is not possible to come to a straightforward conclusion about whether secure placements or 'alternatives' are ultimately more cost effective.

9.4.2 The changes in the design of the research have also meant that the detailed costing of services which had been envisaged at the start of the project was not possible. Information was gathered on typical packages of care for key subgroups within both secure and alternative samples.

9.4.3 On the basis of the pathways through secure care and open services, costs were linked to placement types and to other aspects of care packages. This information on costs was collated from a number of different sources: service providers; previous research; and costing studies. In the context of the study as a whole, it has not been possible to apply costs of certain types of provision to individual cases. Therefore, what follows is indicative of comparative costs across different care pathways. Previous research on persistent young offenders has shown that residential care is the most significant cost; it could account for as much as four-fifths of local authority expenditure on services (Hill et al, 2005). The Fast Track research also highlighted that expenditure on community services could be highly variable, but was much lower than residential costs. The research shows that even with involvement of intensive community support, “the maximum weekly cost for community based services was normally under £200” (Hill et al, 2005, p. 65) and only three young people received community based services that cost more than £500 per week. The Local Authority Social Services Children in Need Survey 2003 also showed the wide range of average costs for children supported in the family or independently. For example, to take children aged 10 – 15, cases involving ‘abuse or neglect’ or ‘family dysfunction’ cost between £100-150 while ‘socially unacceptable behaviour’ cost between £150-200. The groups of children which cost the most per week to support were boys aged 10 – 15 and 16 and over involving ‘absent parenting’; the average cost was just under £300 per week and just over £300 per week respectively (Knapp et al., 2004, p. 383)

9.4.4 For present purposes, average costs were calculated for a range of placement types: local authority residential unit; residential school; close support unit; secure care; foster care; community support. These are detailed in Table 14 below. It is acknowledged that there are major limitations in that the wide variation in the way in which services are provided to children and young people is masked in these calculations. They do, however, provide indicative costs across the different pathways.

Table 14: Average costs of placements

Type of placement	Cost per week	Source
LA residential unit	£1,400	6 local authorities
Residential School	£2,100	11 residential schools
Close Support Unit	£2,775	4 close support units
Secure Care	£3,725	5 secure units
Foster Care	£250	Fostering Organisation
Community Support	£200	Fast Track costings

9.4.5 Full information on the pattern and duration of placements in the year prior to secure authorisation and the year after were available for 42 of the secure care sample and 18 of the non-secure sample. Another factor in interpreting the figures below is the assumption we have made in attributing costs for community-based services. We have not been able to identify the level of community-based services provided to children and young people when they are in residential or foster care. From the evidence in this research, and the evidence from the Fast Track Hearings research, community-based services can be used extensively when children and young people are in residential care: “some young people in residential care required just as much support from community based workers as those living in the community” (Hill et al.,

2005, p. 64). Thus, the costs for young people in residential care will be an underestimate of the expenditure on global services received.

9.4.6 Another issue which needs to be taken into account concerns the costs of education. Secure accommodation services and residential schools include education in their costs as these are provided on site. In relation to other placements, however, we were unable to attribute costs to education provided for the children and young people. This does mean that the costs for children and young people who were placed in residential schools and secure accommodation will be artificially higher because of the inclusion of education costs. To give an indication of the scale of the differences, education in a secondary school costs approximately £5,000 per pupil per year (Scottish Executive, 2005). Few of the young people, however, were in mainstream education without additional educational support. Audit Scotland (2003) found that costs for services to support pupils with special educational needs was approximately £7,800 per year. There was wide variation across local authorities, however, ranging from £3,000 per pupil to £17,500 per pupil.

9.4.7 With these major provisos, the cost figures in the table above were attributed to each of these young people.

9.4.8 The total cost of services for the 42 young people in the secure sample over two years – 1 year before and 1 year after the time of placement into secure - came to over £7.8 million, giving an average (i.e. mean) cost of just over £185,000 for each young person. In contrast, the total cost of services for the 18 young people in the non-secure sample, was £2.1 million, giving an average cost of just under £117,000. Obviously, one of the significant costs in relation to the secure sample will be the cost of secure provision itself. For the 42 young people in the secure sample, the cost of secure provision over the 2 years totalled £4.5 million (58 per cent of total costs). Only one of the young people in the non-secure sample had experienced secure placement

9.4.9 If we break this down to look at the year before the point at which young people were placed in or considered for secure, we find that there is still a significant difference between the two samples. The cost of services for the secure sample (42 young people) totalled approximately £2.6 million with an average cost of just over £61,200 per young person. The costs for services for the non-secure sample (18 young people) totalled £0.72 million with an average cost of just under £40,000 per young person.

9.4.10 In the year after placement commenced, the cost for services for the secure sample was £5.2 million with an average cost of £124,000 per young person. For the non-secure sample, the costs were £1.4 million with an average cost of £77,100 per young person (equivalent to 62% of the average cost for the secure sample).

9.4.11 In looking at the pathways across the two samples, three main routes were identified: entering secure or alternative from children's homes; from residential school; and from home. In the case of the 42 children and young people in the secure sample for whom we have details, the majority (26) entered secure from children's homes; 11 entered from residential schools; and 5 entered from home. For the 18 young people in the non-secure sample; 8 entered alternatives from children's homes;

3 from residential schools and 7 from home. We will look at each of these three main routes in turn.

Table 15: Pathway costs

Sample n=60	Pathway	Mean (£)	Median (£)	Range (£)
Secure	Children's unit (26)	182,100	160,800	66,800-354,400
	Residential school (11)	216,100	211,250	144,100-271,700
	Home (5)	136,600	127,600	112,400-166,400
	Total (42)	185,650	172,000	66,800-354,400
Alternative	Children's unit (8)	145,700	139,550	58,200-217,000
	Residential school (3)	169,400	182,000	121,000-205,200
	Home (7)	61,700	52,000	20,800-148,200
	Total (18)	117,000	119,200	20,800-217,100

9.4.12 For those young people who entered secure or alternatives from children's home, the average cost of services over the two years was £182,100 for the secure sample (26 young people) and £145,700 for the non-secure sample (8 young people). The range of costs in this route is exemplified by the following cases. One young person in the secure sample who was in residential care for the full year prior to placement in secure (4 months in secure and 8 months in close support unit) and was in secure accommodation (2 separate units) for the whole of the follow-up year giving a total cost of £354,400 for provision of services. At the other end of the range, one young person was at home for most of the year prior to placement in secure but had moved into a children's unit for one night prior to placement in secure. After a period of 3 months in secure, the young person returned home, giving a total cost of £66,800. One of the young people in the non-secure sample had total costs of just under £217,000. This young person was placed in a children's unit for the whole of the previous year and was placed in a close support unit for the following 12 months. Another young person in the non-secure sample had costs of £58,200 made up of placements in a children's unit for 7 months and foster care for 5 months and was at home for the following 12 months.

9.4.13 As might be anticipated, the costs of the residential school route tended to be higher than the children's unit route. The average cost of services over the two years was £216,100 for the secure sample (11 young people) and £169,400 for the non-secure sample (3 young people). One young person in the secure sample was placed for 5 months in a residential school, for three months in secure care and for 3 months in foster care in the year prior to placement in secure. In the following year, the young person was in secure care for 7 months and placed in a residential school for 5 months. Costs for services totalled £271,700 for the two years. At the other end of the range for the secure sample, was a young person who was at home for six months of the year and then had a placement of 4 months in secure and 2 months in a residential school. This young person was then in secure for a further 3 months before returning home. This package of care totalled £144,100 for the 2 years. In the non-secure sample, the

most expensive package of care for the two years was £205,200. This young person was in residential care for the full year prior to secure authorisation/consideration; 9 months in a children's unit and 3 months in a residential school. The young person continued placement in a residential school for 10 months (therefore, meeting the study criteria for inclusion in the non-secure sample) but was then placed in secure for remaining 2 months of the year. At the other end of the range, one young person was at home for all but 1 week of the first year and was then placed in a residential school where the young person remained for following year. This came to a total of £121,000 for the two year period.

9.4.14 Finally, the route into secure care and alternatives from home tended to be the least costly. The average cost of services over the two years was £136,600 for the secure sample (5 young people) and £61,700 for the non-secure sample (7 young people). One young person in the secure sample had been in secure for 6 months of the previous year and at home for the remainder. In the year following, the young person was in secure for 3 months, moved to a residential school for 1 month and then moved on to supported accommodation. This came to a total of £166,400 for the two years. Another young person was at home for the first year and then placed in secure for 6 months. This came to a total of £112,400. In relation to the non-secure sample, one young person was in a children's unit for just over 6 months of the first year and for almost the full year following was in residential school. This totalled £148,200 for the two years. Finally, the least expensive package of care was for 3 young people who were at home throughout the two year period and we have estimated this to cost £20,800.

9.4.15 We can see then that while across the different routes we have identified, there is a tendency for the non-secure sample to be less expensive than the secure sample, there is wide variation in cost within the two samples and overlap across the two samples.

5 SUMMARY POINTS

9.5.1 Admission to secure accommodation is shaped as much by the service provision context as the needs and behaviour of the young people themselves. Key considerations which shaped patterns of use were: accessibility of secure places; views and attitudes about the role and value of a secure placement; capacity and willingness to manage risk in an open setting; availability open and community-based alternatives, i.e. well resourced open residential provision and intensive community-based supports.

9.5.2 The backgrounds of the two samples of young people were broadly similar. However, those in the alternative sample had had fewer moves in the year prior to being considered for secure accommodation. The alternative sample also included a greater proportion of boys; more young people aged less than 14 years old; and more young people for whom offending is a primary concern.

9.5.3 At the point when they left the secure placement, all young people were considered to have benefited from being there. Two-three years later, half were still thought to be in a better position; for over a third, however, the behaviour which had resulted in secure accommodation remained problematic.

9.5.4 Some intensive community-based support services clearly managed a high level of risk. They did this through frequent contact with the young person, were available out of hours and engaged in a range of activities. Risk factors were constantly assessed and services altered to address them. Intensive community support services could also promote young people's engagement with other services, such as education. They also worked closely with parents and other family members, whereas admission to secure accommodation could potentially cut the young person off. Another important feature of community-based support was that it could be long term.

9.5.5 Open residential provision was a key resource following placement in secure accommodation and outcomes for young people who moved on to residential school or close support provision were better than the sample as a whole. Residential units are a key resource on the route to secure accommodation and strengthening what they can offer to young people is important.

9.5.6 Secure accommodation is an expensive resource and indicative costs for 42 young people over a two-year period showed that secure care made up a significant proportion of costs of services. While there is a tendency for the alternative sample to be less expensive than the secure sample, there is a wide variation in cost within the two samples and overlap across the two samples.

CHAPTER 10: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

1. INTRODUCTION

10.1 This study has reviewed the use and effectiveness of secure accommodation in Scotland. Its aims were to inform decision-making by identifying the circumstances in which placement in secure accommodation was likely to be both necessary and/or effective. The research addressed these questions, but has approached them in a different way from what was originally planned.

2. DECISION-MAKING

10.2.1 In terms of decision-making, the study has demonstrated that decision-making about admission to secure accommodation is already quite sophisticated, especially among social work managers. Deciding whether and when a secure placement was required always involved weighing up a range of often competing considerations. The study concluded that these decisions were very context specific, reflecting certain elements of the situation which applied in each local authority. Access to secure places, attitudes towards the role and value of secure accommodation, capacity to manage risk and commitment to developing alternatives together shaped decisions about individual young people's need for secure accommodation in each authority. It follows that changes in decision-making practice would require a shift in one or all of these dimensions. A number of social work managers and panel members thought it would be helpful to introduce a nationally agreed system to determine which young people should be given priority for admission to secure accommodation, but any such system would need to build in a means of taking account of the local context.

10.2.2 This study had difficulty in identifying and recruiting young people who had been considered for secure accommodation but sustained in an open residential or community setting, since far fewer young people than had been expected fitted the criterion. However practice in 'creating' alternatives was developing as the study progressed. Whilst 'creating' alternatives might involve starting a new resource, more often it meant putting together a package of services, built around the young person's needs. Some social work managers described in detail a proactive, incremental approach which involved flexibly adjusting service provision in an attempt to support changes in the young person's behaviour and so reduce the risk and the need for secure placement.

10.2.3 Working in this way meant managing a high level of risk, so required considerable skill and experience and a sound understanding of both what was going on in the young person's life and how he or she was likely to react. Some of the services offering intensive community-based support worked in this way and so did some social workers, but high turnover of area team staff, shortage of time and a high proportion of inexperienced social workers reduced capacity for working safely in this way.

10.2.4 Panel members' lower tolerance for risk was cited by social work managers as an obstacle to developing this kind of flexible practice. In interviews panel chairs also expressed a preference for using specific alternative resources, rather than packages

put together for an individual young person. When asked to make decisions in hypothetical vignettes, only a minority of panel chairs interviewed were able to weigh up competing needs and risks with the skill and understanding shown by social work managers, understandably given the differences in their roles, experience and training. They also tended to expect more positive outcomes from secure placements than are justified by this research.

10.2.5 Taken together these findings do not support the view that secure requirements made by a children's hearing should be automatically implemented. In the one authority which had already adopted this approach, the number of young people admitted to secure accommodation had significantly increased.

3. ACCESS TO SECURE PLACES

10.3.1 Among key stakeholders, a broad consensus existed that it was difficult to access secure placements when they were needed, but differing opinions were expressed on how that difficulty could be remedied. A national system for prioritising access to places, opening smaller local secure units, shortening the length of stays and developing the capacity of open residential care were all suggested as means of making places available when they were needed. Only a minority of panel members thought that the number of secure places should be increased.

10.3.2 As noted above, any national system for prioritising places would not be unproblematic because of the need to take account of local capacity to manage risk. In relation to the preference for local provision, it was difficult to provide education and a full range of services in very small units. Shortening the length of stay would in some respects be supported by the findings of this study in that, among young people whose placement had lasted less than three months, none had outcomes rated as poor and none had been readmitted to secure accommodation (though possibly those with the greatest difficulties were less easy to move on quickly). The study highlighted the crucial nature of transition arrangements following a secure placement, with planned and graduated lessening of support as a key requirement for good progress. It was evident that most young people continued to access support services on leaving secure accommodation and to still be in touch with them approximately two years later. In addition, social workers tended to attribute better outcomes to the availability of good post placement support rather than what had been offered during the secure placement.

10.3.3 However a degree of caution in advocating shorter stays would also be needed. For some young people it took time to fully assess their needs then arrange for resources to be accessed and funded. This applied particularly if the young person required a place in a residential school. Thus, unless the process of finding the subsequent placement can be made quicker, pressure to end placements sooner could result in fewer young people moving on to their placement of choice.

10.3.4 There was evidence from this study to support the view that some secure admissions could be avoided by developing the capacity of open residential care to manage more challenging behaviour and respond to young people in crisis. The survey of placements following secure authorisations indicated that a number of

young people had been sustained in ordinary residential care. Indeed sustaining young people in their existing residential unit was the main alternative used in the survey. Yet the experience of a number of young people in the secure sample, especially young women, had been that admission to a residential unit hastened rather than halted the momentum towards secure accommodation. The study findings support the view that secure accommodation is used when no other kind of resource can keep the young person safe. Since residential units are a key resource on the route towards and out of secure accommodation, increasing their capacity can be expected to reduce the need for secure placements.

4. THE ROLE OF SECURE ACCOMMODATION AND ALTERNATIVES

10.4.1 The relationship between secure accommodation and alternative services was considered in some detail in chapter nine. One of the key messages from this study is that these are complementary rather than separate options. For the young people included in this study the most relevant ‘alternatives’ were residential accommodation and intensive community-based support. There were clear indications that in order to avoid the need for secure placement altogether, appropriately skilled residential care and community support services had to be introduced when difficulties were developing and well before the young person was in crisis.

10.4.2 It is very clear that secure accommodation is able to hold young people safely and provide an environment in which there can be significant short term gains in their health and well-being. There is also increasing capacity to assess the multiple problems underpinning the behaviours which result in secure accommodation and growing understanding of how these might best be addressed. Yet questions remain about which difficulties can be effectively addressed in a secure setting and what needs to be in place if any benefits are to be sustained when young people move on.

10.4.3 For young people in the secure sample the common underlying difficulties were identified as including attachment and relationship difficulties, faulty social learning and stress resulting from earlier traumatic experiences. Inevitably these combine to impact on individual young people in different ways, so that relationship difficulties or low self-esteem might predominate for some and reckless behaviour for others.

10.4.4 Whilst each unit attempted to take a holistic approach, there were also differences in emphasis. For some units secure accommodation was viewed as an opportunity to learn about consistent and reliable relationships, whilst for others the main aim was to increase young people’s capacity to understand and control their behaviour. With the former approach, there was a strong emphasis on addressing issues through the key worker relationship, whereas the latter was associated with use of evidence based programmes and interventions. This study is not able to declare one approach as preferable to another, but in light of the diversity of young people’s needs, it emerged as important that each unit encompasses elements of both or that young people are placed where the predominant approach corresponds to their needs. The study findings did support the view that relationships with reliable adults were key means through which any benefits from the secure placement might be sustained,

as previous research has underlined in relation to both offending behaviour (McNeil and Batchelor, 2004) and personal welfare difficulties (Walker et al. 2002).

10.4.5 Whatever the approach, it is clear from this study that in most instances a secure placement can begin to address the serious issues young people face, but not complete the process. There were indications in this study that some young people had come to feel valued and able to manage difficulties which had been overwhelming prior to admission. However this was only the start and unless a high level of support continued, young people began to founder. Outcomes were better for young people who had had a 'step-down' approach and so had people around to get them back on track when their confidence or behaviour began to slide. As with practice prior to admission, an incremental approach which addressed difficulties as soon as they arose helped young people keep out of trouble. As far as this study could ascertain, this follow-up provision was most effectively provided within residential care which offered a higher than usual level of structure and support or by providing intensive community based support. Such facilities are cheaper on a per week basis than secure accommodation, though the need to provide after care over an extended period means they are not cheap overall. Against this must be weighed the costs to individuals and society of prolonged mental health problems or offending behaviour when improvements made in secure accommodation are not sustained.

10.4.6 Irrespective of the nature of the after-care service, the key was that the young person had someone on whom they could rely for help and guidance when the inevitable difficulties arose. For young people who had begun to establish close relationships with staff in the secure setting, it was especially important that they were helped to transfer the trust and confidence they had built in relationships there to new support staff.

10.4.7 The group for whom outcomes were worst were young people who continued to use drugs and offend. Thus the experience of young people seemed to bear out stakeholder views that drug problems were not effectively addressed within the secure setting. The low number of young people in education or employment also suggested that work experience options on offer at the time did not correspond to what young people could manage. These outcomes indicate the need for a different approach with young people using drugs and that further developments in college and work opportunities if they are to be accessible to young people with significant support needs.

5.THE ROLE OF THE SOCIAL WORKER

10.5.1 Though social workers were important informants for this study, it might be argued that their role has been neglected in its reporting. This may mirror what happens in practice, so that the part they play can be overlooked. The case social worker played a key role at each stage of the secure placement, in terms of contributing to the decision to admit to secure accommodation, linking with the young person, family and other services during the placement, ensuring resources were in place to facilitate the young person's release and supporting the young person when they moved on. It is implicit in carrying out these tasks that, for the young person, the social work role provides continuity over time as well as bridging different aspects of

the young person's life, though personal continuity is provided only if the same individual occupies that role throughout.

10.5.2 In practice there was a high turnover of social work staff during the period covered by the research, so in many cases the same person did not always accompany the young person on the entire journey through secure accommodation. In addition social workers often lacked time for frequent visits to the young person, especially if this required a full day trip. Thus the potential benefits of effective social work were not realised for many young people.

10.5.3 This study indicated that effective social work intervention could be especially important in at least three aspects of the service. First their experience and confidence in safely managing risk could enable some young people to be sustained outwith a secure setting. The second potential role relates to effective work with parents and with whole families, though in only a few instances was systematic work being done to help young people and parents manage tensions or change their view of each other. Nominally social workers were often expected to link and 'work' with parents, but in the present climate very limited time could be devoted to this. The third key role is to be a reliable person whom young people can come to trust.

10.5.4 The social workers who took part in the study included several who worked in this way, but this was sometimes against the odds. Their role is not nurtured in the present climate, partly due to staff shortages, but also because the expectation is that intensive support will be offered by a range of independent service providers. This study found that their role was crucial and could potentially be developed further.

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

10.6.1 This study has highlighted that secure accommodation continues to have an important role in keeping some very vulnerable young people safe. For some it also provides an opportunity to see themselves in a different light and learn to tackle their difficulties in less destructive ways. Developments which have taken place since the study fieldwork was carried out indicate that the capacity to assess and help young people with complex difficulties is increasing.

10.6.2 However taking away a young person's liberty is not to be done lightly and there are aspects of the secure experience which are potentially unhelpful, notably the young person's removal from their family and community. Developments in managing risk in an open setting are therefore also to be welcomed. This study's findings lent support to the view that, with appropriately intensive support, some young people admitted to a secure setting could be sustained in an open residential unit or community-based setting.

10.6.3 The study also shows that thresholds for admission to secure accommodation cannot be objectively determined, but rather reflect what alternative resources are available. At the moment there is considerable variation across authorities in how secure and accommodation and 'alternatives' are used. Developing more strategic links between them is likely to increase the chance of young people spending as short

a time as is necessary in secure accommodation and being helped to make sustainable changes in behaviours which harm themselves and others.

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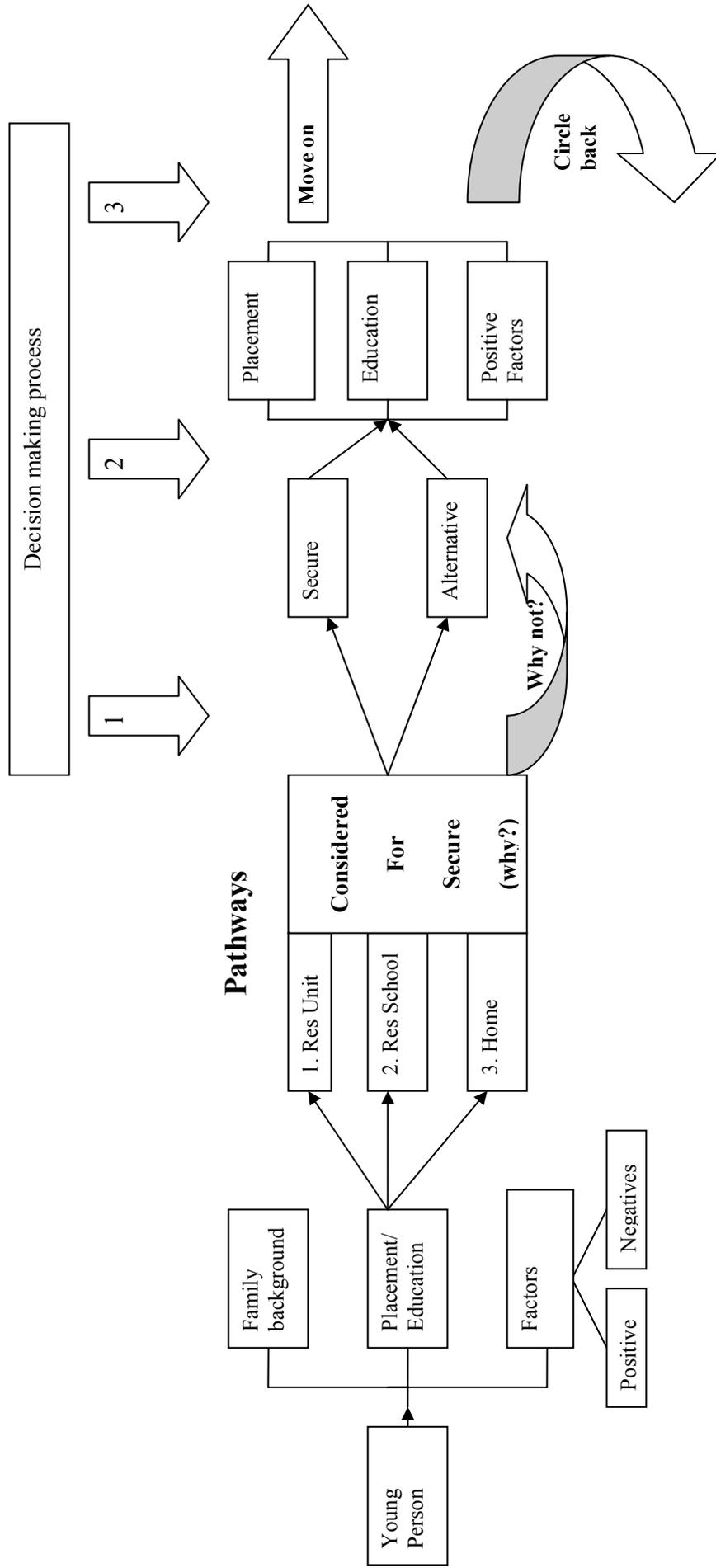
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APPENDIX ONE: TRANSITION THROUGH CARE DIAGRAM



APPENDIX TWO: VIGNETTES FOR SOCIAL WORK MANAGERS AND PANEL MEMBERS

Vignettes

- 1) Julie is 14 years old. She lives with her mother. Her parents separated when she was eight. Her father lives with his new wife and two children of that marriage, aged 5 and 3. For several years Julie visited her father and his new family every second weekend, but she has seen less of them in recent months. Until she went to secondary school, Julie had been a quiet but apparently content child. Her mother said she and Julie had been particularly close. Julie's mother and father are both in full-time employment.

Six months ago, Julie's mother contacted Social Work Services. She was worried because Julie was sometimes staying out at nights and was truanting from school. Julie would give her mother very little information about where she spent her time when missing. When she came home, she often seemed under the influence of drugs. A social worker was allocated and Julie was referred to a local project offering drugs advice and counselling. She saw the social worker and attended the project a few times, but there was little change in her behaviour.

After three months Julie's mother asked for her to be accommodated. This followed an episode when she had been missing for three days and it came to light that she had virtually stopped attending school. Her mother felt she could no longer cope and feared that Julie was at risk, because she had found out that she spent time in the home of a family known to deal in drugs. Her father and his wife were asked if she could go to live with them, but they were not willing to consider this.

Julie was placed in a children's unit. The plan was to work intensively with Julie, her mother and her school, so that she could return home and to school within a few weeks. However, after a few days in the unit she began to go missing more frequently, sometimes in the company of other residents. She was often away for several days at a time. On one occasion the police found her lying unconscious in a close. When taken to hospital she was found to have taken a number of drugs.

A case review is arranged:

- 2) Tom is 13 years old. He currently lives in a children's unit. He was first accommodated when aged four following the death of his mother. His mother died following a drugs overdose. Prior to this there had been concern about her capacity to care for Tom and his two older siblings. When accommodated, Tom was malnourished, had very little speech and was prone to severe temper tantrums. No members of the extended family offered to care for Tom or his brother and sister, nor have any kept in touch with them.

After a short period with temporary carers, the three children were placed with a long term foster family. After a year the foster carers decided that they could not

manage all three, so Tom was moved. He had become increasingly aggressive to other people and would throw anything which came to hand when angry. He spent some time with another two foster families before being admitted to the residential unit where he had now been living for 2 years.

Tom still finds relationships with adults and peers difficult, and has very little capacity for tolerating frustration. This means he still loses his temper on several occasions has assaulted staff and/or other young people. However he has developed a close relationship with his female key worker, who uses all means available to show she cares about him, help develop his self esteem and teach him how to relate to other people. Tom attends a residential school on a daily basis. He has very little concentration and requires virtually one to one teaching.

Over the last three months Tom has been involved in a number of offences with some boys from his school. These have included stealing a hand bag from and knocking down an old woman, stealing a car (in which Tom was a passenger), vandalising a bus and assaulting a 15 year old boy whose injuries required hospital treatment.

A case review has been arranged:

- 3) John is 15 years old. He lives with his mother and her partner. He has had no contact with his birth father since he left his mother when John was three years old. John's mother and her current partner have each served several prison sentences, his mother for drug related offences and her partner for a wider range of crimes, including theft and robbery. Most members of the extended family have also been in prison.

Though John has been disruptive in school and has been excluded on several occasions, he is still enrolled at mainstream school. He is described as a bright pupil and is a particularly talented artist.

John was first referred to the reporter to the children's panel when aged 10 for shop-lifting. He has been on statutory home supervision since aged 12 and, in addition to social work involvement, has taken part in a number of group activities. However he continued to offend and in the last year has become involved in more serious offending, including taking and driving cars. John was recently referred to the Youth Justice Team where he was offered a standard programme to challenge attitudes to offending. He was a lively group member, but made it clear that he expected that crime would be part of his future life.

John is due to appear at a hearing charged with six car related offences, including driving a stolen car while under the influence of drugs.

A case review has been arranged:

- 4) Jane is 15. She and her older sister were accommodated 10 years ago, after her sister disclosed that she had been sexually abused by their mother's partner. Prior to this there had often been concerns about the girls' welfare. Their mother had a history of drug and alcohol misuse and both girls had been on the child protection

register under the category neglect. Since being accommodated Jane and her sister have had three sets of foster carers. Jane moved to her current foster family three years ago, following breakdown of a placement which had lasted five years. Her sister remained in that placement, but has now moved to her own flat. Jane appears to get on well with her current foster family, which comprises a couple and two children, aged 8 and 10.

With learning and behaviour support Jane has managed to continue to attend mainstream school. She finds it difficult to cope in large classes, but has established good relationships with some teachers and responded well to small group teaching. She is keen on sport.

In the last year, Jane has started to take one or two days off school each week and on these occasions she will say very little about where she spends her days. She has also started to harm herself, both by cutting her arms and by overdosing. The frequency of self-harming has gradually increased, with three incidents requiring hospitalisation in the last month. On each of these occasions she harmed herself while away from the foster home, perhaps because the foster parents are now supervising her very closely. The foster carers find this very stressful and have said that they are unable to guarantee her safety.

Jane has been referred to a mental health project and has been seeing a psychologist for six months. She says she finds this useful, but sometimes misses appointments.

A case review has been arranged.

ISSN 0950 2254
ISBN 0 7559 6235 4
web only publication

www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

Astron B48354 08/06

