

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AA-Sponsored Driving Lessons for Care Leavers: Monitoring Outcomes

Background

The AA Charitable Trust (AA) has been involved in funding driving lessons for young people in care (ie separated from their families and looked after by local authorities) since 2011. This has occurred in two stages: the first, a pilot stage between 2011-13 and the second 2015-17.

Young people in care have generally had a difficult start in life, experienced family breakdown, and sometimes been rejected by parents, neglected or abused. Due to these experiences, they often do not do as well at school as we would wish. Learning to drive can provide a boost to self-confidence, as well as learning a skill that can be essential to adult life, sometimes leading to employment. Many parents provide or help with driving lessons for their children. However, when the State acts as corporate parent, paying for driving lessons is not something that local authorities have traditionally done. The AA agreed to step-in for these reasons.

Stage 1: 2011-13

The initial pilot phase was based in Bristol City Council and involved six young people living in residential homes. In summary, this was considered successful and led to a number of benefits. However, during the initiative itself only one young person passed their driving test. Others enjoyed and did well with the driving but struggled with the theory test. Despite this, many advantages were perceived, falling into three categories. It was reported that there were *personal* benefits regarding the young people's pride, self-esteem/self-confidence and as a source of motivation. There were also *instrumental* benefits, leading to possible job opportunities. In addition, there were *social* benefits: young people accessed support from adults and it facilitated relationships with carers: this, especially, is important for young people's resilience by helping them to be open to adult support.

Stage 2: 2015-17

Lessons from the initial phase informed the second stage. This time it focused on young people who were older (18 years upwards) and not restricted to those with residential experience. As motivation was felt to be a key factor, linking the opportunity to drive with career, job training or other interests was prioritised. Better supports were offered with studying for the theory test. Four local authorities participated and up to 40 hours' tuition

was envisaged from the outset for each young person. Follow-up of the 13 care leavers involved indicated that: 3 passed their Test; 1 had their Test pending; and 3 others were steadily taking lessons and working towards the Test. A tuition break was being taken by 2. The progress of 4 others was more problematic: 3 cancelled and closed their accounts and 1 was uncontactable.

Overall, these are very encouraging results. Not everyone, young or old, finds learning to drive straightforward. Care leavers often have a range of special educational needs or mental health difficulties that can bring problems. Their lives, accommodation, relationships, education/training/work can be unstable.

Interestingly, all three young people from one local authority passed their Test. This Council held an open selection process with written applications required, accompanied by a letter of support from a carer/personal assistant/mentor. The three young people were highly motivated to learn to drive: one worked in car repairs and being able to drive advanced his career; the second was a young parent and being able to drive made a considerable difference to her child care arrangements; and the third wanted to join the armed forces and saw learning to drive as a key skill. These three also accessed high levels of support with their lives generally, including with learning to drive and passing the theory test.

Conclusion

Many lessons have been learned from this initiative. Learning to drive has been a very important part of the lives of the young people involved. Passing the Test has been the main objective but many other personal and social benefits have been accrued along the way, including benefits for self-esteem, self-confidence and developing supportive relationships with adults: these will benefit young people generally. One Council involved seems to have found the successful formula by having all three of its young people pass the Test: this can now be extended elsewhere. It also seems anomalous that the State as parent does not facilitate this service for older adolescents, whereas most other parents probably would. We should consider how these opportunities can be made more widely available.

David Berridge, Professor of Child and Family Welfare
4 December 2017

Further information

For further information please see:

<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/sps/research/projects/completed/2014/drivingoutcomes/>

[Berridge, D. \(2017\) 'Driving outcomes: learning to drive, resilience and young people living in residential care'. *Child & Family Social Work*, vol 22., pp. 77-85.](#)