

## Distant placements... the things that aren't often mentioned...

- Some children are placed at a distance because it's right for them. They may need to be removed away from significant risk factors in their local area.
- Sometimes it's the child's choice. Over the past twenty years, I have met several children who have made an informed choice and have wanted to go to a particular area further afield.  
(We do not collect data on the above so we don't actually know how many of the distant placements aren't made in the child's best interests!)
- The way we collect data is extremely unhelpful. A good number of those 'distant' placements, may actually be a very short journey away!
- Distant placements have increased, but specifically distant placements made in an emergency. If local authorities want to reduce the use of distant placements, they need to look at improving the way they access local choice. (This will mean taking a proper look at the effectiveness of 'in-house' first policies and how well they truly meet children's needs).
- Local options may not be available because...
  - The local provider may not be on the local authority framework contract. This may be because the framework was designed in such a way that it was impossible / difficult for some providers to qualify. Or because it's a closed framework and new providers to the area may not be able to apply.
  - The provider has received a referral with very short notice (often due to the in-house first policy which restricts the search) and this affords the local provider little time to vet the accuracy of referral information, assess risk, plan and prepare. A lack of time to assess risk is a prime reason that providers do not offer placements.
  - It may be isolating for the child as well as unviable. For example, there are very few deaf children in care requiring residential care. Only a handful in the country at any one time. Providing residential care for deaf children is complex and specialist. You need specially trained carers and an adapted environment and expertise in deaf education and culture. If a local authority set up a home for an individual child it would likely be very isolating for the child. I work with a home supporting 3 deaf children all placed by local authorities at considerable distance. All children have recently told OFSTED they love their home, their carers, their peers. And they feel loved.
  - The provider may not wish to work with the local authority concerned. At a meeting of children's homes providers I attended, around half said they would not consider referrals from certain local authorities or if certain social workers were involved. This was due to their previous experiences of working with the LA. This is an unpopular message to share, but it's a real one.... and shows the critical importance of being a good partner. My advice to local authorities is to ensure that when looking at contract monitoring, there is a mechanism to monitor the performance of the local authority and not just the provider. In this way, grumbles and grievances can be picked up earlier and addressed. Positive relationships are critical.

Just a few Sunday morning thoughts.....

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