

## The RHP Companion to Leaving Care

Edited by Ann Wheal

Russell House Publishing Ltd., Lyme Regis, UK, 2002

The RHP Companion to Leaving Care is one of the most comprehensive publications I have come across so far on the subject of young people leaving state care. It contains a total of 21 articles from 30 authors covering a wide range of aspects of leaving care in the UK. This book offers a clear overview of the recent developments in the leaving care sector, both in terms of legislative and program supports. Drawing on the successes of various programs, The RCH Companion to Leaving Care sets out in clear terms a range of examples of what is considered to be good practice.

Not only does the text highlight some of the achievements made in support of care leavers in the UK, particularly post the Children Act 1989, it also draws the reader's attention to some of the gaps in service provision. For example, in the chapter titled 'Risk, opportunity and leaving care', the author argues:

Yet, despite some excellent work within leaving care schemes, young people still face an uphill struggle to secure a job, decent housing, and develop the relationships which will provide all important social support (p.7).

I would rate this book as a highly valuable and timely contribution to leaving care programs for a number of reasons. Firstly, it draws upon the work of well known researchers and authors on the subject of leaving care, such as Mike Stein and Bob Broad. Secondly, it analyses the existing leaving care programs in terms of both their successes and limitations. Thirdly, most of the contributors of this book either have worked or are still working in various leaving care programs in the UK, including Carol Florris, who spent 18 years in the care system, and Polnacha O'Mairthini, a former foster carer. Finally, Mark Ellis in his 'Introduction' uses the stories told by four care leavers, aged between 19 and 21, about their experiences of being part of the care system. Hence, the contributions made by these authors and care leavers are primarily based on their direct experiences.

The experiences of these care leavers are both positive and negative, and range from being stigmatised by society to being well supported whilst in care. For example, in the 'Introduction', one care leaver says:

People think that the reason why you are in care is because you've got in trouble with the police or you've done something bad.

On the contrary, another care leaver states:

I don't think I would have got to this stage if I wasn't in care (p.2).

One of these four care leavers had the experience of growing up in an inner city area with all the associated difficulties of poverty, racism, poor academic performance and strong youth culture.

I particularly enjoyed reading the chapter titled 'Developing an international perspective on leaving care' by John Pinkerton. In this chapter the author argues that an International perspective on leaving care should be developed in order to successfully address the risk and vulnerability of care leavers. I believe this is one of the important prerequisites for improving the outcome of care leavers worldwide, at a time when 'globalisation' has become a widely used concept.

In the final chapter, 'Conclusions', the editor brings together the themes from the preceding chapters, along with some future directions towards further development in order to improve the outcome for care leavers.

Finally, I would like to point out one particular shortcoming of this book. It heavily relies on research and references within the UK with very little reference to other European countries. Despite this, I would highly recommend this book to those practitioners, researchers, academics, service providers and policy makers who are genuinely committed to making a difference in the lives of care leavers, who deserve far more attention than they presently receive.

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