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**‘It’s about Me’:
Young people’s experiences of participating in
their Child in Care Reviews**

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Role of EPIC

- EPIC is a voluntary organisation that works throughout Ireland with:
 - children and young people in care
 - those with experience of being in care
 - professionals and carers
- Includes those in residential care, foster care, relative care, special care and detention.
- EPIC also works with young people preparing to leave care and in aftercare.



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What are Child in Care Reviews?

- Child in Care Reviews update the Care Plan on a regular basis – typically covers:
 - current placement
 - education
 - health
 - family contact
- Formal meeting involving professionals, the child, their family and carers



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Aims of the EPIC study

- Explore young people's experiences of taking part in their care review meetings
 - Preparation before the meeting
 - During the meeting
 - Feedback after the meeting
- Address gaps in research
 - One other Irish study, McGree et al (2006)
HSE Dublin Mid-Leinster
- Concerns in recent Ombudsman for Children's Report (2013)



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Aims of the EPIC study

“While there were some indications that children and young people were invited to express their views for their ‘Child in Care’ reviews this was not carried out on a systematic basis and their participation in reviews was irregular.”

(Ombudsman for Children, 2013)

A Meta-analysis of repetitive root cause issues regarding the provision of services for children in care (p.13)



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Participatory research methods

- Doing research *with* young people rather than *on* them (Kirby, 2000)
- Young people with care experience are involved in carrying out the research – goes beyond being a participant
- Acknowledges that young people are experts in their own lives and experiences
- Therefore, they should help to define the research questions and be involved in interpreting the findings



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Methodology

Participatory research approach

Peer researchers (young adults with care experience, aged 20+) involved in 3 stages of the research:

(1) Research design

- 2 focus groups with 5 young people & external facilitator
- informed questions, method (semi-structured interviews), peer researchers' involvement, dissemination

(2) Data collection

- 3 training sessions with 4 young people & external facilitator
- identified 2 peer researchers, one of whom did interviews

(3) Data analysis

- focus group with 3 young people on emerging themes
- clarification and highlight areas of agreement/disagreement



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Data collection

- **Study population**
 - 10 young people aged 15-17 (HSE Dublin North East) (4 interviews done by a peer researcher)
 - 7 professionals: 2 Social Workers, 2 Monitors, 2 EPIC Advocates and 1 HIQA Inspector (all interviews done by EPIC Research Officer)
- **Ethical considerations**
 - voluntary informed consent
 - anonymity and confidentiality
 - minimising harm
- **Study limitations**
 - small scale sample
 - access to participants through Social Workers

Important considerations

- Garda clearance for peer researchers
- Safety protocol for peer researchers – system of checking in before, during and after interviews
- Safety protocol for research participants – steps to take in light of a disclosure, what to do in case a young person gets upset
- Young people need on-going support and supervision, de-briefing
- Devise a training programme for peer researchers
- Ensure peer researchers do not know research participants
- Consider young people's maturity level, skills and their interests
- Acknowledge time and contribution by peer researchers – payment?



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Implications for the research: Opportunities and challenges

- Positive impact on data quality
 - young people with care experience had an input into the research design and data findings
 - young people taking part were more likely to build a trusting relationship with a care leaver, more open and honest
- Build in more time in research plan – research design, research training, on-going support/supervision
- Keep peer researchers engaged and involved
- Challenge to traditional role of an adult researcher and shift in power relations

Access to research participants

- Target of 20 interviews with young people, 10 achieved
- Recruitment strategy – more complex for foster care
- Key challenge – how to get information leaflets and consent forms to young people?
- Revised study population to include professionals

Key learning:

- Need for a research protocol with Tusla – identify a nominated liaison person, steering committee
- Allow time to build relationships with practitioners



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Some findings

- 9 young people attended last care review meeting
- Meeting with social worker/keyworker? Yes: 4, No: 5
- Link between preparation and positive experience: felt listened to and had an input into decision making
- Format of meetings – too formal: language, location
- Some questions on the review form were not relevant or seen as ‘childish’
- Decisions made before meeting – 2 young people



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Recommendations

- **Preparation:** Better preparation before the meeting
- **Consultation:** Involve young people in planning the meeting, i.e. location, time/date and who should attend
- **Attend:** Invite all young people to their care review (take account of age and maturity) and encourage them to be present for the entire meeting where appropriate
- **Separate professionals' meeting** – less intimidating
- **Training:** More guidance for Social Workers to encourage yp's participation and seek views outside of review meetings
- **Feedback:** Verbal and written feedback to young people after the meeting



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And finally...

Link to EPIC research:

<http://www.epiconline.ie/its-about-me-report-on-care-reviews/>

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