Article

Twenty-first century contact: the use of mobile communication devices and the internet by young people in care

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Abstract

This article contributes to the growing area of research appertaining to the use of mobile communication devices and the internet by children in care in order to maintain contact with family and friends. It is based on a triadic method of semi-structured interviews with 12 young people and their foster carers and social work practitioners. The study found that the young people were not passive recipients of their familial and friendship networks and did not deem their interactions as 'contact', perceiving them more as 'staying in touch'. The opportunities provided for this by the new technology enabled immediacy, reach and communication in real time and duration – all features that allowed them to control the 'who, how and when' of their relationships. But despite the potential of the new communication methods to bring cohesion between young people and their relatives, it was not utilised or supported by their foster carers or social work practitioners who tended to view this new channel of communication as a risk or a nuisance.

Introduction

The 2017 review of foster care in England by Baginsky, Gorin and Sands (2017) identified a number of new developments and challenges. Among these were issues associated with

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young people's contact with birth relatives and friends, noting its benefits and dangers in different situations. Interestingly, it also identified a difference between contact as defined by legislation and the practical interpretation and application by young people. The review suggested that new technologies, such as mobile communication devices and access to the internet, not only increase opportunities for contact but also change how contact is perceived by different people involved in the care process.

To the author's knowledge this is the first study that focuses on young people in care in their current placement and how they make use of mobile communication devices and the internet for contact. As such, attention will be focused on exactly how they carried out this form of contact and the format it took. Additionally, attention will be given to whether its use enhances or hinders communication between the young people and individuals in their familial and friendship networks.

Children in care

The Children Act 1989 emphasises that children are best served by their birth parent(s) unless it is absolutely essential for the state to intervene. Therefore, there is a presumption in social work practice in favour of contact and a predisposition towards children continuing to enjoy relations with members of their immediate birth family and others who are emotionally important to them. Consequently, government guidance states that local authorities have a duty to 'endeavour to promote contact between a child in care and his/her parents or others' unless it is not practicable to do so or not consistent with the child's welfare (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2010: 2). However, these intentions mask the practicalities of organising contact and the possible risks associated with it, not just for the children but also for their birth parents, foster carers and social work practitioners.

The demographic details for England show that 39% of children in care are aged between 10 and 15 years of age and 23% are over 16. Many of these young people enter care in mid-childhood, meaning they are likely to have significant and potentially long-standing relationships with relatives and friends that they will wish to continue, despite being separated from them. It is likely that the ability to remain in contact has been greatly eased in recent years by the use of mobile devices and the internet (Fursland, 2010; Sen, 2015; Simpson, 2013).

Forms of contact

Depending on the reasons why a child or young person comes into care and his or her developmental needs, contact – whether supervised, facilitated, supported or unsupported – can take a number of forms, such as face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, overnight stays and letters. The settings for meetings also vary and may include foster and birth family homes, residential units, children's centres, local authority offices and outside venues such as McDonalds. However, the research literature suggests that contact often takes place in an environment that is unfamiliar and this adversely affects the nature and quality of the experience (Cleaver, 1998: 35 and 140; Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009; 2012; Triseliotis, 2010). The Coram *Guide to Best Practice in Supervised Child Contact* (Slade, 2010: 27) suggests ways of easing the 'abnormality and artificiality of supervised contact', noting the importance of the 'psychology of environment' and the need for privacy and homeliness. But despite these efforts, the recent review of

fostering by Narey and Owers (2018: 88) found that many settings for contact were not 'conducive to a pleasant and successful experience for all parties'. The practical organisation and management of contact are often carried out by foster carers (Macaskill, 2002; Triseliotis, et al., 2000; Wade, et al., 2011). During contact visits children and young people may be subject to the repeated negative and rejecting behaviours that may have led to them being placed in the care of the local authority. Alternatively, they may be showered with gifts and promises of returning home within a short period contrary to the details denoted in the care plan (see Department for Education, 2012; James, et al., 2008; Wilson and Sinclair, 2004). Regarding the frequency of contact, this is dependent upon the care plan as devised by the social work practitioner and the wishes of the child in care at that time. These arrangements can change, particularly if any problems are identified. For example, a negative emotional response on the part of the young person in care may result in contact being reduced or stopped altogether (Neil, Beek and Schofield, 2003; Office of the Children's Rights Director, 2009).

Perspectives on contact

The literature in relation to contact outlines a variety of perspectives. Beginning with that of the birth family, Millham and colleagues (1986) noted a tendency for contact to decline the longer the child is in care and that the feelings experienced by birth parent(s) at the loss of their children can have a detrimental impact on parent–child interaction during contact. Birth parents often 'feel frozen out . . . but it also reflects their powerlessness to intervene, their lack of role and their feelings of guilt and inadequacy' (Millham, et al., 1986: 117). Subsequent studies have highlighted the significance of the young people's extended family and the importance of grandparents and step-siblings (Neil and Howe, 2004). These studies highlight that grandparents, like birth parents, experienced negative feelings of loss, guilt and shame, but the intensity of these feelings depended on the extent of participation that grandparents had in the daily care of the child. The literature in relation to fostering makes limited reference to other relatives, such as aunts, uncles or family friends, except when the children or young people in care repeatedly mention their desire for contact with individuals beyond the immediate birth family (Office of the Children's Rights Director for England, 2009; 2012).

Social work practitioners, in contrast, have mostly expressed more cautious views about the effects of contact and these probably reflect difficulties associated with managing it. A cross-national study by Boddy and colleagues (2013) revealed that children were often placed a long way from their birth family and members of their wider social network. It also suggested that social work practitioners were ambivalent about working with parents and gave little recognition to the fact that a child in care may have more than one family (Boddy, et al., 2013: 8). An important finding from this study is that although young people were living away from home in foster care, their family relationships remained 'psychologically present' (p.13) and could not be ignored. Although carers obviously want the best for their child, they often have to deal with the child's emotional turmoil before and after visits and the distress and anger when he or she is let down by the unreliability of their birth parent(s). Moreover, when foster carers are not present at the contact visit, it is often hard for them to know what went on and what was decided, but their involvement in the meeting is equally likely to create an artificial and possibly tense atmosphere. Consequently, there has to be

empathic and skilled management of a variety of needs and agendas if successful contact is to be achieved (Schofield and Stevenson, 2009: 198).

Contact, mobile communication devices and the internet

A number of studies (Greenhow, et al., 2017; MacDonald, et al., 2014; Wilson, 2016) have explored how children who are in care or have been adopted use mobile communication devices and the internet for contact with people they value, mostly members of their family. Greenhow studied 10 adoptive families and charted what she called 'virtual contact' and drew out the practice implications for adoptive parents and social work practitioners. A similar study focusing on looked after children (MacDonald, et al., 2014) charted how young people in both residential and foster placements use mobile phones for contact. Eight senior managers and 20 care home managers were interviewed and a survey of foster carers yielded 128 replies.

Greenhow and colleagues identified that virtual contact followed a pattern that began with regular exchanges but reduced over time to be replaced by infrequent communication and information gained from online updates on social media. However, despite this decline, virtual contact did allow for natural family-like communication and, importantly, provided positive opportunities for adopted children. The MacDonald study (2014) also noted that children and young people benefited from the immediacy that mobile communication devices allow (p. 834) and recognised that those who did not want direct contact with certain individuals could keep other lines of communication open through the use of the new technology.

Research by Sarah Wilson (2016: 285) focused on the sensory, material and spatial construction of (not) belonging among young people who were separated from their biological parents. Unsurprisingly, respondents stressed the importance of social networking sites they could access, leading her to conclude that young people in care could exercise considerable self-care through the use of new technologies. She thus emphasises the 'economy of dignity' that is grounded in the ability of mobile communication devices to sustain pre-existing relationships.

The response of foster carers and social work practitioners to the use of mobile communication devices

Although there has been limited research as to how foster carers and social work practitioners are responding to children's use of mobile communication devices, one survey, the *Online Safety Foster Carer Survey 2016* (Guardian Saints, 2017), was undertaken by a group of concerned parents and carers about the dangers of the online world for vulnerable young people. The authors obtained the views of 329 carers, 58% of whom were looking after young people between the ages of 11 and 17 years. Key findings highlight challenges in relation to mobile devices, such as mobile phones purchased by birth parents and the use of free Wi-Fi hotspots (Guardian Saints, 2017: 12). The survey report also notes that mobile phones were particularly difficult to manage as carers/parents were unable to apply controls to the devices in the same way as they could with computers and their own personal Wi-Fi. Another important finding concerns the age of foster carers and their confidence with technology, an issue identified by the Children's Commissioner (2017). The conclusion was that

in fostering placements, access to the internet depended on the carers' own digital skills and that a lack of such ability led to an alarmist and overly cautious approach.

In relation to social work practitioners' experiences of young people's use of mobile communication devices and the internet, the literature is primarily concerned with how it affects safeguarding (Boddy and Dominelli, 2016; Breyette and Hill, 2015; Mishna, et al., 2012; Reamer, 2013; Sage and Sage, 2016). While Fursland (2010) refers to the risks in relation to children in care making use of the internet, thereby reinforcing the narrative of risk, Simpson (2013) focuses on why such children pursue unregulated contact and in so doing, draws attention to the possible impact of this on the neural and cognitive development of adolescents and the associated effect on attachment (2013: 382). Simpson (2016) also suggests that a divergence of opinion about the use of mobile devices by young people in care is taking place in child and family social work, which is influencing how practitioners respond to the risks and opportunities afforded by the use of this technology. In a similar vein, both Ballantyne and colleagues (2010) and Willoughby (2018) emphasise the necessity for practitioners to have a greater knowledge and understanding of mobile devices and social media not only to reduce risks but also to promote opportunities for the young people concerned.

Currently, the literature in relation to contact is concerned with the effects of it being unmediated, but little evidence is available as to how it takes place, with whom and how it is subsequently managed. As a review of the literature reveals the complexities and difficulties associated with the format and type of contact organised by social work practitioners, it would seem that children and young people in care are using mobile communication devices and the internet as a credible means by which to stay in touch with members of their familial and friendship networks. Consequently, the study reported here sought to answer the following two research questions:

- Do looked after young people make use of mobile communication devices and the internet for contact with their family and friendship networks and, if so, how?
- Does the use of this technology enhance or hinder communication between young people in care and individuals from their familial and friendship networks?

Methodology

Research design

In order to answer the research questions, it was decided to include elements of inductive and deductive approaches. The project design was influenced by a view that young people are social actors in their own right (James and Prout, 1996: 49), able to exercise agency in a way that enables them to decide which family and friends they wish to maintain a connection with and are free to choose the way they do it.

The study was undertaken in an English local authority and involved young people in care, their foster carers and their allocated social work practitioners. It concentrated on young people who had been in a stable placement for a period of nine months or more. The methodology comprised semi-structured interviews with and completion of an Ecomap by the young person and interviews with his or her foster carer and social worker. This approach acknowledges that there is not just one reality for all participants (Rubin and

Rubin, 1995). Ethical approval for the study was provided by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Edinburgh.

Sample

The small sample comprised 12 triads of young people, foster carers and social work practitioners. Table 1 gives the background details of the young people participating.

Procedure and data analysis

The young people first completed the Ecomap, a visual assessment tool that identified each one's significant relatives and friends. This was followed by a semi-structured interview that explored their use of mobile communication devices and the internet for the purpose of contact. Foster carers and social work practitioners were interviewed about the same issues. The emerging information was analysed using the Framework Method, which allowed the researcher to capture both commonalities and differences within the responses through the use of matrices that summarise the results in rows (cases) and columns (codes), thereby producing 'cells' of summarised data (Gale, et al., 2013).

Findings

Staying in touch with family

All the participating young people had lived in their foster placement for nine months or more. Six of them had contact arrangements in place at the time of the interviews (Nora, Kaitlin, Justine, Leo, Kayne and Darrell). The direct contact was often with birth parents and siblings and was limited to a specific period of time. In each case, the foster carers played a central role in transporting them to and from the meetings. Contact for three others (Bradley, Leighton and Leo) was organised by their foster carers, particularly when it

Table 1. Details of participants by triad.

Young person in care	Age	Duration in care	Foster carer	Allocated social worker
Jane	17	9 months	Betty	Nadia
Nora	14	9 months	Toni	Cath
Kaitlin	14	7 years	Perry	Camlyn
Matt	15	5 years	Bev	Margaret
Lamar	17	10 years	Mary	Zayla
Justine	14*	2 years	Laura	Verone
Leo	14	2 years	Nanci	Carissa
Leighton	15	3 years	Todd	Candice
Jaiden	18	15 years	Madaline and Rex	Bernice
Bradley	17	6 years	Rose	Casey
Kayne	16	3 years	Piers	Candice
Darrell	13	3 years	Rayanna	Elaine

*Justine withdrew 15 minutes into the interview but the foster carer and social worker continued until completion.

involved seeing siblings. Two young people (Matt and Jane) had no contact of any kind with their birth family. Matt's social worker had tried hard to organise meetings but had been unsuccessful, and Jane's family had ostracised her. Nora, Kaitlin, Justine, Leo and Jaiden also made indirect contact via regular telephone calls and this was accepted as part of their care plan. Justine's and Leo's birth parents or relatives would call the foster carer first before the phone was handed over.

In addition to the texting and phoning capabilities of their mobile phones and social networking sites, young people made use of a range of applications. A total of 12 different social networking sites and apps were regularly used (Table 2).

An immediate finding was that the use of mobile communication devices is an intrinsic part of the lives of the young people, with smartphones being the most common:

> It's easy, you don't have to travel, like, for ages to go and see her [mum]. Even if she is busy, you know at some point you will get to talk. Sometimes I initiate the conversation. Sometimes she initiates it and just . . . it's just about everyday life and stuff like that. (Kayne, aged 16)

Also noticeable was that during all the interviews, none of the young people mentioned the word 'contact' to describe their communications. Instead, they simply spoke about 'staying in touch' and the actual activities involved in doing this, such as texting, calling or using WhatsApp, video-calling and sending pictures.

A further finding highlighted the way in which the young people chose to instigate communication with particular members of their family and social networks. As Nora explained:

> You just wanna show things off, like, what are you in, or what are you doing, or who are you meeting. Just like when we went to Heavenly Desserts, we eat something, I just take a picture, put it on Snapchat. They comment on it like, 'Y'alright' and everything, or they send me a text on Facebook.

Table 2. Social media platforms used by young people in care.

Name of young person in care	Social media and apps used for contact with members of familial and friendship networks
Jane	Facebook, WhatsApp and Snapchat
Nora	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Tango, Facetime, Twitter, Skype and Instagram
Kaitlin	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Kik, Skype, Flickr, Instagram and FriendLife
Matt	Facebook, WhatsApp and Snapchat
Lamar	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and Gmail
Justine	None used
Leo	Facebook
Leighton	WhatsApp and Facebook
Jaiden	Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram
Bradley	Facebook and Gmail
Kayne	Facebook, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram, FriendLife
Darrell	WhatsApp

In addition to all of this, the young people were also able to monitor and even see what was going on in their wider family. This was important even when a young person's feelings were not reciprocated; there was still a mechanism to maintain a connection. Thus, even in difficult circumstances, the new technology gave more scope for negotiating the complexities of their relationships, so avoiding the withering of family links noted in the earlier studies:

> I have two sisters, they're my half-sisters. Like, the relationship's broke down in a way. But then like, I do talk to 'em sometimes online, see how they are. I always check if they're okay and stuff. But I don't really talk to them much. (Lamar, aged 17)

> I have … three older sisters on my mum's side. I stay in touch with only one of 'em by Facebook. We used to see them all the time. I get in touch with her about once a week. (Kayne, aged 16)

But as noted earlier, contact arrangements are fraught with difficulty when relationships are abusive or when a birth parent displays difficult behaviours associated with mental ill health or substance abuse. In such circumstances, the young people managed their communication in various ways; this included ignoring their mobile phone, blocking the birth parent on social media accounts and asking their foster carer to manage phone calls. An example of this was Kaitlin whose birth mother contacted her unexpectedly on social media after years of silence. Her response to this new-found contact was less than positive:

> Well, she got Facebook. And um – she tried to add me so I added her. So, I started talking to her and she was like, 'When do you wanna meet up?', an' all that. And I was like, I don't want to meet up with you. Cos like, I'm not ready. And so – like – she started texting me all the time. Through lessons and that, so I blocked her. (Kaitlin, aged 14)

As to whether or not the use of mobile communication devices helped or hindered contact by the young people in care, this is a matter of interpretation. The findings suggest that these tools offered immediacy and ease by which communication with members of the familial network could be achieved. However, it was also evident that they were not so helpful in that these same characteristics applied in cases of unwanted contact.

Staying in touch with friends

The findings revealed that the smartphone is particularly important for young people to engage in friendships outside of the immediate control of their carers; it enables them to plan social events, share information and check availability with their peers, like any other adolescent:

> Just occasionally, like, I do skating every weekend, so it's like, 'Are you going…?' either on Facebook or Snapchat … 'Are you going skating or not?' That's about it. (Matt, aged 15)

Equally important was how this facility allowed the young people to create boundaries between their friends and their carers, even though this can create problems for looked

after children if the state is in loco parentis. In general, however, the study found that the difficulties and complexities which the young people experienced in maintaining and managing peer relationships were very much the same as for other adolescents making use of mobile communication devices. They were often involved in arguments online and one young person, in particular, was a victim of bullying:

> I've been bullied loads; that's why I deactivated it. But I've started a new one and got friends that I know won't bully me. Yeah, cos I'm in care, they was like saying things about my mum and things about my dad and all that. (Kaitlin, aged 14)

The friendship networks for many of the participants clearly mirror normal teenage development, with a growing level of independence for the younger adolescents and greater independence for older ones, both facilitated through the use of mobile communication devices. Such findings reinforce the fact that the practice of contact is dominated by an adult perspective and not necessarily by that of the young people most affected. This, in turn, leaves little room for the ebb and flow that often characterise human relationships that are at best complex and made more so with the use of mobile communication devices and the internet.

Response of foster carers and social work practitioners

While it was evident that young people involved in the study primarily used their mobile phones as a device of choice for a variety of activities, this was not necessarily welcomed by their foster carers. It was often associated with a reduction in face-to-face communication and a drain on time. There was no recognition by foster carers or social workers that the use of mobile devices had the potential to support familial relationships. Instead, they tended to see such tools as a risk or a nuisance, sometimes describing the young people as being 'addicted' to their devices:

> My view of it is – and I'm obviously called an old fuddy duddy – is that there's far too much time spent on mobile phones. And I can only see it getting worse really. Because of technology improving, which is great in some respects, but on the negative side, they lose that face-to-face contact, that social element of communicating. (Toni, foster carer)

Reference was also made to risks associated with unsupervised communications, such as grooming, cyber-bullying or other inappropriate activity:

> It's negative. If you want to get hold of a young person and find out where they are and what they're up to. Or if there's any criminal activity involved, but the negative is, obviously they've got online access which isn't always in the child's best interests. (Camlyn, social worker)

The outstanding message from the study was, therefore, that for the young people, communication via mobile devices with relatives and friends was a natural part of daily living but that this view was not shared by either foster carers or social work practitioners because they did not recognise staying in touch in this way as a legitimate form of communication. They preferred methods that reflected the current understanding of contact:

> I don't think they should be allowed on Facebook until they're an adult cos I just think it's misused...as children a lot of the time, it's just misused and it causes – well, it has caused breakdown in our placements here. (Perry, foster carer)

Of course, it could be argued that this preoccupation with risk about new methods of communication is no different from general adult concern about the young people's use of mobile communication devices but for children in care, there are always additional underlying concerns about the effects of separation and risks of harm that cannot be ignored.

Discussion

While the sample is small, the research results indicate that mobile communication devices and the internet are the means by which young people in care conduct and maintain their familial and friendship relationships in an informal and impromptu manner. Furthermore, the young people particularly emphasised the opportunity that new technology offers to stay in touch and the variety of ways to do it. What was also noticeable is that they had strong connections with selected relatives and friends and worked hard to maintain them. It was equally clear that their notion of 'staying in touch' differed from the more traditional perceptions of 'contact' in that it was not bound by people, places and time, and did not need to rely on an adult to organise it. The immediacy and day-to-day engagement were valued, echoing Turkle's (2008) notion of the 'always-on' that is a characteristic of mobile communication devices; they are 'ready to mind and hand' (p. 122).

These benefits applied even when family members were no longer engaging with the young people or when ties were completely fractured. The early work of Walsh and colleagues (2008) in Australia focused on how mobile phone use related to belongingness and social identification. They started from the premise that a sense of belonging is one of five emotions that motivate certain social behaviours, meaning that individuals will actively seek out frequent contacts and enhance relationships to maintain social bonds. These feelings of belonging mean that the psychological presence of kin is not lost and they have a sense of being valued. Even when relationships had completely broken down, a sense of connection was often maintained through sending a Facebook message or viewing the notifications of relatives on Facebook.

Characteristics of staying in touch

An obvious characteristic of staying in touch based on the results of the study was the immediacy and reach made available through platforms such as video-calling apps like Tango, texting and Facebook Messenger, all of which were used by the young people interviewed. On top of the privacy and control offered by this activity, there was the added pleasure of the emotionally rewarding effects of being able to share joyful moments and achievements. Linked to this immediacy is the aspect of duration, i.e. the time involved in communication that can range from a matter of seconds to continual dialogue over a longer period, and can take the form of pictures and texts. Licoppe's (2004: 144) concept of 'connected presence' is typified by this continuous connection. This sense of connected presence is exactly the opposite of contact at a specified time, location and duration, and so displays a level of spontaneity noticeably absent from formal arrangements.

The responses of foster carers and social work practitioners participating in the study indicate that there is a generation who may not be able to appreciate the connectedness that is available to young people as a result of mobile communication devices and access to the internet. Both groups tended to emphasise the risks and potential harm posed by the new technologies rather than the benefits for the children and families. It can be argued that even if there are contact arrangements that include telephone calls, these tend to take place at specific times and are often supervised by the foster carer. In contrast, the use of mobile communication devices provides a level of spontaneity that might not be truly achieved by the nature of formal contact arrangements.

Implications for social work practice

This study supports an argument for change in terms of an ideological shift from 'contact' to 'ongoing connection and relationships' for children and young people in care. This will require social work practitioners to enter a meaningful debate that recognises the strength of the relationships that children and young people have, despite being separated from their family. Central to this will be the views of the young people as they now have greater control over their communication, a fact not fully appreciated in perspectives dominated by concepts of 'best interests' and safeguarding. A recent study undertaken by Porter (2019), which examined 160 records related to Scottish children's and young people's involvement in decision-making about contact, reinforces this point. It found that the clear wishes of young people were recorded in only 12% of contact decisions. Inevitably, radical technological change raises new issues in relation to children's rights, corporate parenting, the rights of parents, safeguarding and well-being; but this does not mean that nothing can be done to reduce potential damage (Eekelaar, 1994; Porter, 2019; Woodhead, 2005).

Given the risks emphasised by carers and social work practitioners, it is suggested that local authorities should have a practitioner who specialises in the use of mobile communication devices and social media. This would ensure that important questions are raised at the outset with fellow practitioners and foster carers about the use and management of technology and children's rights with regard to its use. The training of social work practitioners and foster carers will also be required to encourage a more nuanced and child-centred approach to safeguarding that inevitably follows.

A final implication for practice comes in the form of the theoretical frameworks that practitioners rely on when considering contact. Given the findings from this study, it may now be appropriate to consider the value of socio-genealogical connectedness that stresses the importance of charting and taking account of children's broader social network, incorporating extended family and home community. Owusu-Bempah and Howitt (1997) state that socio-genealogical connectedness is not a replacement for attachment theory but rather seeks to build on it in a way that takes account of the child's wider ecological networks.

Limitations

One limitation of the study that might have affected the findings concerns the data captured from both foster carers and social work practitioners. It was noted that both groups mentioned other children when sharing details of their experiences. While this provided a broader understanding of the issue under investigation, it proved necessary to remind respondents of the need to focus on the young people included in the study.

A second limitation reflects the purposive sampling technique used. The young people who took part were recommended by social workers and possibly were experiencing few difficulties relating to family contact, hence they may not be representative of all those in care.

Conclusion

The study findings indicate that the use of mobile communication devices and the internet provides young people in care with a degree of independence, control and freedom from scrutiny that are not traditional features of life in the care system. In more than one instance, they had stopped or started staying in touch with members of their familial network *at will*. In other words, the interaction that took place was part of an ongoing informal communication pattern, unlike the formulaic nature of contact for children in care that can appear static and out of sync with their natural rhythm and life routine. There is also the need to consider what Licoppe (2004: 139) has described as the shared history of expectation, routines and understanding of the world that takes place through a continuous conversation within an interpersonal relationship. For young people in care, this means that they carry on having conversations with specific family members by choice and are unhindered in doing so, thereby leading to the reaffirmation of their existing relationships. Consequently, even when a young person has been removed from the family home there is still a continuing psychological connection to the familial and friendship networks that is not easily lost or erased by entering the care system.

Funding

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