

Children in care link to justice system

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New research has raised “particular concern” about significant links between a small group of young people and the youth justice system.

The study found that, based on the information available, children in residential care featured to a disproportionate extent at the serious end of the youth justice system (the courts and detention centre).



The Care and Justice report said many charges that young people accumulate relate directly to their behaviour while in care, such as destruction of property and assault of care staff.

It said use of private residential care has increased and is often used to accommodate children with the most difficulties, and that its cost has recently increased because of insurance costs.

The report said insurance companies were requesting to see the “profile of children” being accommodated before agreeing to provide insurance. Researchers were told that the rising insurance costs was on the back of significant payouts for assaults on staff.

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The research, conducted by Nicola Carr and Paula Mayock for the Irish Penal Reform Trust, said the crossover of young people from care to the justice system was of concern.

“There is evidence to indicate that, at the higher end of the youth justice system (ie within the courts system and the Children Detention Campus), there is a greater proportion of young people with care backgrounds.”

It said the Children’s Court in Dublin estimated about one third of its cases involved young people in care, while Oberstown Children Detention Campus said 40% of young people were either in care or had significant involvement with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency.

It said the linkage was “much less of an issue” for children in foster care than it is for those in residential care.

“It would seem that the issue of contact with the youth justice system is a particular concern for a small cohort of young people,” the researchers said, adding that for this group it was a “significant” issue.

The study said that of the 6,072 children in care, only 361 (6%) were in residential care in 2018.

Some 15 children were in special care and 20 were in placements abroad.

More than 90% of children go into foster care.

The researchers said that residential care is most often used when children have experienced previous placement breakdowns or for older children who enter the care system late.

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Of the 361 children in residential care, 222 (61%) are in private placements.

The report said there were 36 registered child care services and four Special Care units run by Tusla. There were 26 residential centres run by voluntary agencies and between 82 and 84 services run privately.

but feels conviction
is 'inevitable'

The shift to private services was the result of the staffing embargo in 2008 and the closure of some statutory residential services.

The report, published today, follows yesterday's special report in the Irish Examiner on Oberstown.

Eoin Carroll of the Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice said that notwithstanding the progress in Oberstown there should be a 20-year plan to end all detention for children.