

Revised responses to question posed by the Ministry of Education
With regard to the literature review by Parker and Wilson (2016)
And the Halswell Residential College Review 2016

Revised 22nd September 2016

Christine Wilson, Ph.D
SAMS Evaluate, Innovate, Educate
www.sams.org.nz

Contents

Linking known best practice guidelines with HRC.....	3
Providing a balanced perspective	8
Halswell Residential College's Responses to Recommendations 1 & 2 of the 2013 SAMS report	12
The views of the girls at Halswell Residential College.....	13
The views of the family/whanau/caregivers of their girls at Halswell Residential College	16
Conclusion	19
References.....	20

In mid-2016 Ministry of Education commissioned SAMS (Standards and Monitoring Services) to conduct a review of the safety of girls at Halswell Residential College (HRC) as a precursor to awarding the college co-educational status. SAMS was also commissioned to up-date a literature review it completed in 2013¹ to add any new research that may have occurred in the intervening period. Subsequent to this work SAMS has been asked link the HRC review with the 2016 literature review with the aim of establishing how closely HRC complies with current best practice guidelines. At the same time SAMS interviewed all four of the girls currently in residence, plus one girl who has left the college, and interviewed their primary caregivers with a focus on their views of safety at the school. Further, in this document we will provide a response to a number of questions raised regarding the 2016 review, many of which focused on the prevalence studies by Euser and colleagues² (2013, 2016) in the Netherlands. Responses to these questions will be balanced against the later discovery of a review of Special Residential Schools in England.

Linking known best practice guidelines with HRC

In the review of HRC the authors made the following statement:

The Evaluation Team believes Halswell Residential College provides an environment that minimizes risk for all of its students regardless of gender and on this basis believes the College would successfully support a coeducational roll³

The Evaluation Team formed this conclusion after close scrutiny of the documentation at HRC and interviews with a wide array of staff at the college staff (including specialist and residential staff college) and specialists who are independent of the college, telephone interviews with two family members of the girls at the college and two psychologists associated with the intensive wrap around service (IWS), and interviews with three independent advocates. The team also met with three student representatives and had lunch with students in one of the villas.

The conclusion was also drawn from an understanding of current best practice guidelines noted in the literature and from the Teams members experience in reviewing of residential settings for disabled people throughout New Zealand over many years.

¹ Parker, A. (2013). *Evaluation of the Safety of Children in Coeducational Residential Special School: A Literature Review*. April 2013, for the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

² Euser, S., Alink, L.R.A., Tharner, A., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., and Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2016). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care: Increased risk for children with mild intellectual disability. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disability*, 29, 83-92.

Euser, S., Alink, L.R.A., Tharner, A., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., and Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2013). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care: a comparison between abuse in residential and foster care. *Child Maltreatment*, 00(0), 1-11. (Published on-line) DOI: 10.1177/1077559513489848.

³ Pp 6. *Follow-up report on the suitability of Halswell Residential College as a coeducational special residential school*. Report to the Ministry of Education, July 2016

The best practice identified in the literature included the following:

- (1) A clear mission statement and vision that is known by all staff and accepted
- (2) High internal awareness of abuse and child safety issues^{4 5 6}
- (3) A carefully vetted multidisciplinary staff team^{7 8 9 10}
- (4) A high degree of staff training and multiple opportunities to train together^{11 12}
- (5) Opportunities to reflect on practice through peer and individual supervision^{13 14}
- (6) Explicit whistle-blowing procedures^{15 16}
- (7) Consistent, positive and fair practice by staff^{17 18}
- (8) Effective reporting procedures and follow-up around incidents¹⁹
- (9) Well defined and understood complaints process available to all stakeholders²⁰
- (10) Development of positive and trusting relationships with students^{21 22}
- (11) A clear staff code of conduct that is known and understood by all staff²³
- (12) On-going interaction with the community^{24 25}

⁴ Cross, M., Gordon, R., Kennedy, M., and Marchant, R., (1993). NSPCC, Way Ahead Disability Consultancy, National Deaf Children's Society, and Chailey Heritage Child Protection Working Group. *The ABCD Pack: Abuse and children who are disabled*. ABCD Consortium: Leicester

⁵ Marchant, R. and Cross, M. (1993). Places of safety? institutions, disabled children and abuse. In: *The ABCD Pack: Abuse and Children who are Disabled*. The ABCD Consortium. Leicester UK: NSP

⁶ National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Safeguarding in Education Service (2012). *The role of schools, colleges and academies in protecting children from grooming and entrapment*. [London]: NSPCC

⁷ Utting, W. (1997). *People Like Us: The Report of the Review of the Safeguards for Children Living Away from Home*. London: HMSO.

⁸ Paul, A., Cawson, P. and Paton, J. (2004). *Safeguarding Disabled Children in Residential Special Schools*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in association with the Council for Disabled Children

⁹ Colton, M. (2002). Factors associated with abuse in residential child care institutions. *Children & Society*, 16(1), 33-44.

¹⁰ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003). *It doesn't happen to disabled children*, report accessed www.nspcc.org.uk

¹¹ Paul et al (2004).

¹² Greger, K., Myhre, A.K., Lydersen, S. and Jozefiak, T. (2015). Previous maltreatment and present mental health in a high-risk adolescent population. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 45, 122-134.

¹³ Paul et al (2004).

¹⁴ Soenen, B., D'Oosterlinck, F., and Broekaert, E. (2013). The voice of troubled youth: Children and adolescents' ideas on helpful elements of care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 1297-1304.

¹⁵ Paul et al (2004).

¹⁶ NSPCC. Safeguarding in Education Service (2012). *The role of schools, colleges and academies in protecting children from grooming and entrapment*. [London]: NSPCC

¹⁷ Soenen, et al., (2013).

¹⁸ Harder, A.T., Knorth, E.J., and Kalverboer, M.E. (2013). A secure base? The adolescent-staff relationship in secure residential youth care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 18, pp 305-317.

¹⁹ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003).

²⁰ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

²¹ Soenen, et al (2013).

²² Khoury-Kassabri, M and Attar-schwartz, S. (2014). Adolescents' reports of physical violence by peers in residential care settings: An ecological examination. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(4), 659-682.

²³ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003).

²⁴ *Support Force for Children's Residential Care (1995) Final report*.

- (13) On-going interaction with outside professionals (e.g advocates, specialist services)²⁶
- (14) Highly promoted and on-going communication with families²⁷
- (15) A clear set of school rules / boundaries / student code of conduct that is known and understood^{28 29}
- (16) Appropriate and professional personal and behaviour support plans where required³⁰
- (17) Education aimed at understanding rights and identifying and responding to actual and potential physical and sexual abuse^{31 32 33 34 35}
- (18) Appropriate sex education with a focus on positive relationships^{36 37 38 39 40}
- (19) Clear and positive procedures for disclosures^{41 42 43 44 45}
- (20) Providing pleasant living environments, single rooms, and opportunities for privacy⁴⁶
- (21) Treating students with dignity and respect in all life areas, including cultural and religious affiliations⁴⁷

²⁵ Cross, et al (1993).

²⁶ *Support Force for Children's Residential Care (1995) Final report.*

²⁷ Cross, et al (1993).

²⁸ Soenen, et al (2013).

²⁹ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003).

³⁰ Paul et al (2004).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wissink, I.B., van Vugt, E., Moonen, X., Stams, G-J,J.M, and Hendriks, J. (2015). Sexual abuse involving children with an intellectual disability (ID): A narrative review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 36, 20-35.

³³ Rosen, D.B. (2006). Violence and exploitation against women and girls, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1087, 170-177.

³⁴ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003).

³⁵ UK Department of Education (2013). *Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards*, accessed at: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-00125-2012.pdf>

³⁶ Wissink, et al (2015).

³⁷ Rosen (2006).

³⁸ UK Department of Education (2013).

³⁹ Bambara, L.M., and Brantlinger, E. (2002). Toward a healthy sexual life: An introduction to the special series on issues of sexuality for people with developmental disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 27(1)

⁴⁰ Barron, I. and Topping, K. (2010). School-based child sexual abuse prevention programs: implications for practitioners. *APSAC Advisor*, 22 (2 & 3), 11-19.

⁴¹ Briggs and Hawkins (1991).

⁴² Reiter, S., Bryen, D.N. and Shachar, I. (2007). Adolescents with disabilities as victims of abuse. *Journal of Intellectual Disability*, 11, 371-387

⁴³ Brown, H. (2010). Sexual abuse of children with disabilities, In *Council of Europe, Protecting children from sexual Violence*. Strasburg: Council of Europe Publishing, Ch 7, pp 104-105

⁴⁴ Andrews, A.B. and Veronen, L. J. (1993). Sexual assault and people with disabilities, Special issue: Sexuality and disabilities: A guide for human service practitioners. *Journal of Social Work and Human Sexuality*, 8(2), 137-159.

⁴⁵ NSPCC Safeguarding in Education Service (2012).

National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003).

⁴⁶ Soenen, et al (2013).

⁴⁷ Marchant and Cross (1993)

- (22) Providing key support staff who are readily available for each student and based on the preferences of the student^{48 49}
- (23) Ongoing supervision and support of all students with built in safety protocols^{50 51}

Halswell Residential College has demonstrated that it has implemented each of these identified safeguards procedurally and in practice, through:

- 1. Policies and procedure documents (including NAGs). (Points 1, 2, 8, 9).
- 2. Staff training and development. (Points 3, 4, 5).
- 3. Education programmes targeting at healthy relationships and bullying. (Points 16, 17, 18).
- 4. A staff and student code of conduct that is known and understood. (Points 11, 15).
- 5. Accessible and trusted avenues to lodge a complaint or disclose abuse. (Points 6, 9, 19).

In practice the school provides:

- 1. Living environments that are pleasant, spacious and promote privacy wherever possible (for example single bedrooms and another lounge/reading area), and that are soon to be replaced with even more pleasant purpose build units designed for small groups. (Point 20).
- 2. Each student is assigned an Individual Education Plan (IEP) Coordinator who is the key staff member associated with the student and his/her family/whanau or guardian. The IEP Coordinator also oversees individual plans and goals build around adaptive behaviour (social, personal, living skills, positive behaviour etc). Building positive and trusting relationships with IEP Coordinators is a focal point of practice at Halswell Residential College. (Points 7, 10, 16, 21, 22).
- 3. On-going opportunities for professional and peer supervision and reflection through three weekly group meetings with a psychologist, weekly team meetings and through personal supervision as required/desired by front line staff. (Points 4, 5, 8).
- 4. Reflection is a method of team building and provides a focus on practice that is multi-layered. Among other things it is a powerful safeguard against the possibility of abuse by staff members. It also provides opportunities for staff to discuss interactions between students as a method of reviewing the individualised support provided to each person. It was noted that reflection was used in team/staff meetings and when providing incident reports. In incident reports staff were able to provide a self-reflection on their own or other people's their involvement (if any) in the incident so as to inform practice. (Point 5, 8).
- 5. Families/whanau and/or guardians are kept informed and have ongoing contact with their student at the school. (Point 14)
- 6. The students have access to a range of community groups and events such as Rangers, Scouts, church/youth groups and sports clubs. (Point 12).
- 7. Each student has access to either the school or external psychologists, speech therapists and advocates. (Point 13)

⁴⁸ Paul et, al (2004).

⁴⁹ Soenen, et al (2013).

⁵⁰ Greger, et al (2015).

⁵¹ Soenen, et al (2013).

8. The school utilises restorative practices when reviewing incidents that involved other students or staff with a student; using incidents as a learning device aimed toward improving interpersonal interactions. Restorative practice is part of the Positive Behaviour for Learning (PB4L) approach utilised at the college. (Points 8, 15, 16).
9. PB4L was adapted jointly by the Ministry of Education and the College, and underpin the behaviour management programme. Central to PB4L is a focus on learning positive behaviours and 'unlearning' disruptive or negative behaviours. The school teaches positive behaviours in helping students relate to others and in the individual goals students set for themselves with the assistance of the IEP Coordinators. (Points 15, 16, 17, 18).
10. A focus on culture is provided that the college through observing key dates on the Māori calendar, learning Te Reo (both in the school and in Tauawa villa), and (for boys) having the opportunity to live in a Kaupapa Māori Tauawa Villa and involvement in the Pasifika caucus. (Point 21).
11. Providing continuous supervision of each and every student. (Point 23).

Providing a balanced perspective

The literature review by Parker and Wilson (2016)⁵² built on a review from 2013 with a brief to include any new literature in the intervening period. A literature search was conducted using the Otago University search engines and extended searches were conducted from the citation lists of key articles. Since this work was completed the authors found another pivotal article that was not accessible using the main search engines. This article was commissioned by the Children's Commissioner of England and provided a focused review of 17 Special Residential Schools in England⁵³. This review is the closest approximation we have of Special Residential Schools in New Zealand and is important in terms of providing a balanced perspective with the prevalence studies in Europe and the United States.

The key issues raised from the prevalence studies in Europe and United States is the unmistakable rate of abuse experienced by disabled children and youth in school situations generally⁵⁴, in state sponsored residential and foster care situations in the Netherlands⁵⁵ and in life generally⁵⁶. These prevalence studies indicate that *without appropriate safeguards* emotional, physical and sexual abuse will impact on vulnerable people at a much higher rate than the general population. The prevalence studies generally did not report on specific types of environments, or if they did so, provided little or no information about how people were supported in such environments. This lack of detail makes it difficult, if not impossible, to generalise to residential special schools. It does, however, add context to the lives of young disabled people who may be accessing residential special schools either in New Zealand or abroad.

What these studies show *as a general observation* is the following:

- People with learning and intellectual disabilities are at a much higher risk of all types of abuse, including sexual abuse, than the general population.
- People with behavioural or emotional disabilities are even more likely to suffer abuse than any other group.
- Girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys.
- Boys are more likely to engage in sexually abusive behaviours than girls.
- Girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse from *any* male living or working in the same setting, including age peers.

As stated these conclusions are general since the authors of the prevalence studies provide very little detail. The studies in the Netherlands for example do make comparisons between

⁵² Parker, A. and Wilson, C. (2016). Evaluation of the Safety of Children in Coeducational Residential Special Schools: A Literature Review. Completed on behalf of the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.

⁵³ Pellicano, E., Hill, V., Croydon, A., Greathead, S., Kenny, L., and Yates, R. (2014) *My life at school: understanding the experiences of children and young people with special educational needs in residential special schools*. A report provided on behalf of the Children's Commissioner for England.

http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/My_Life_at_School.pdf

⁵⁴ Sullivan, P. and Knutson, J. (2000a). Maltreatment and disability: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 24, 1257-1273; Sullivan, P.M. and Knutson, J. F. (2000b). The prevalence of disabilities and maltreatment among runaway children, *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 24(10), 1275-1288.

⁵⁵ Euser et al (2013, 2016).

⁵⁶ Spencer, N., Devereus, E., Wallace, A., Sundrm, R., shevov, M., Bacchus, C., and Logan, S. (2005). Disabling conditions and registration for child abuse and neglect: A population-based study. *Pediatrics*, 116, 609-613.

foster care settings and residential settings but do not draw any other comparisons. They report that young people are at risk in any type of out-of-home setting and more so in residential settings. However, the studies do not report on:

- The size and quality of the residential environment (ie number of children, room sharing, general quality etc)
- The number of staff (and therefore the staffing ratios)
- The training staff have received
- The type of support (eg social welfare, youth justice, mental health, behavioural etc)
- The history of the children prior to placement, including family and/or school
- The association the residence has, if any, to schools and to special schools
- The safeguards (if any) put in place to limit abuse
- The degree of integration / community involvement the children have with people outside the residence
- The degree of contact with families, specialists etc

There have been some limited studies that have specifically focused on residential special schools and even fewer that have raised the issue of the relative risk to girls in co-educational residential special schools. One such review was undertaken by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand in 2013 (no author). This review highlighted the scant research conducted in this area but did provide case study reviews from a number of residential special schools, including the unique special school at Hohepa in Hawkes Bay that also provides a boarding option funded by the Ministry of Health. Citing a 2012 Education Review Office (ERO) report the author(s) of the review note there were “no issues within the school ... [and the] high staff to student ratios allows close supervision and contributes to a calm, secure atmosphere for learning”⁵⁷. The Ministry of Education review also commented that ERO found no issue relating to sexual abuse of students with intellectual impairments in all 28 day special schools (all of which are co-educational) and 73 of the 77 secondary special needs units across the country.

One pivotal study that came to light after the Parker and Wilson (2016) review was a report commissioned by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner of England⁵⁸ which focused on 17 residential special schools. The paper highlighted the range of children and young people supported in each school. They included children with moderate to severe learning disabilities (the English equivalent to intellectual disability in New Zealand), behaviour and social disabilities, autism, speech and language impairment, vision impairment, profound and multiple disabilities and children with physical disabilities. The main groupings were children with learning disabilities, autism and behavioural issues. The researchers interviewed 83 children, including 33 girls, in these mostly coeducational schools using semi-structured interviews, focus groups and in some cases utilising augmented methods of communication. They also interviewed 114 staff, 32 family members and provided 31 hours

⁵⁷ Pp. 8 Ministry of Education (2013). *Potential increased risk in a residential co-educational setting to girls with an intellectual impairment*. <http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Information-releases/Residential-Special-Schools-information-release/MinistryLiteratureReviewApp1.pdf>.

⁵⁸ Pellicano et al., (2014).

of direct observation. The report is primarily qualitative although some quantitative information is provided. One section of the report focuses on safety; “feeling and keeping safe”. The main issue in the residential schools was the stress caused by peers who are in crisis. In their summary the authors state:

Many young people reported feeling concerned about other children’s often challenging behaviours, although they felt that school staff protected them from harm. (pp. 64).

The paper also indicates other research which suggests:

Young people with SEN [special educational needs] and disabilities are at greater risk of peer group difficulties – even in both mainstream and special educational settings. Previous reports have identified bullying as a significant concern in residential special schools. Bullying was mentioned during several of the interviews but was rarely a major focus. (pp. 61).

In fact, most students report issues with needing more privacy since the school and residential staff were a constant presence. The issue of sexual safety was raised by only one student and this situation was dealt with by the school, albeit not at the needed pace. The authors note:

Despite being extremely troubling it is important to highlight here that this was the only incident of its kind to be raised by the students we worked with during this project. (pp. 60).

The feature of these schools was the need to provide intensive staff supervision of students at all times. Built into this was the need to treat the students with respect and dignity.

Young people generally reported feeling like their current school treats them well and keeps them safe, ensuring they had the privacy they needed... Young people also identified various members of staff who they could go and speak to if something was wrong.

The key for most work completed in special residential special schools was an awareness of the need to focus on potential sources of abuse, and understanding that young people had probably experienced multiple forms of abuse in the past. It seems clear from the scant research available that the most prevalent form of abuse in special residential schools is from bullying (in most cases verbal, but in some cases physical). A major paper commissioned by the Children’s Rights Director for England highlighted that the most prevalent issue raised by children in a variety of educational and living settings in England (including residential special schools) was bullying⁵⁹. Thirty nine percent of children in special residential schools report being bullied (sometimes, often, or always) compared with 29 percent of all children sampled. Children with disabilities likewise had close to the same

⁵⁹ Manson, R. (2014). *Children’s Care Monitor 2013/2014: Children on the State of Social Care in England*. <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19818/1/Children's%20care%20monitor%20201314.pdf>

ratio of bullying; 38 percent (regardless of where they lived). In cases of bullying boys were more likely to experience physical assault while girls tended to experience verbal or cyber bullying. This research also found that 27 percent of children in special residential settings who reported being bullied were by people younger than themselves. The report notes that children were often reported to be bullied simply because they were in care, indicating that bullying was not always internal or involving peers. The research also indicates that bullying is not gender specific.

In conclusion, it is correct to say that girls with intellectual impairments have a higher risk of sexual abuse than boys, and that young people with intellectual, behaviour and emotional disabilities experience a higher rate of abuse of all kinds than children without these issues. It is also correct to conclude that the main perpetrators of sexual abuse are males who are known to the victims of such abuse, and this may include male peers. However, it is incorrect to then say that girls in co-educational residential special schools are at the same risk as those in uncontrolled settings. As a general rule residential special schools, whether in New Zealand or in the United Kingdom have put into place a number of best practice guidelines that essentially minimise the risk of sexual abuse. The limited number of recent research papers we have on co-educational residential special schools in either the United Kingdom or New Zealand indicate that sexual abuse has not been an area of concern. Furthermore, if we were to include Halswell Residential School as a case study, there is little or no grounds to conclude that the girls in that environment are at risk of sexual abuse.

Halswell Residential College's Responses to Recommendations 1 & 2 of the 2013 SAMS report

Recommendation 1 of the 2013 evaluation indicated that the College could be “put at risk by admission of children with severe behavioural problems without intellectual impairment or children with severe attachment disorders.” Recommendation 2 suggested the school consider a “three month trial to prevent the need for expulsion of students who don't fit”.

The 2016 follow up found that HRC reported having “taken students without intellectual impairment” and having “successfully managed more complex and challenging students than before”. The evaluation team identified the need for HRC to “continue to monitor the proposed enrolments from IWS with a view to the overall safety requirements of other students in the school and the long term safety of the proposed students in terms of their psychosocial wellbeing and academic record”.

SAMS was asked to consider the following:

- whether the cohort of students are more challenging than in 2013?
- Whether the cohort would continue to become more challenging and, if this were the case,
- what the impact would be with an increasing the College roll?

During the 2016 review of the HRC the college indicated that it had not enrolled many students with significant behaviour or conduct issues (sufficient to cause serious disruption within the student body). Of the few more difficult cases over the previous three years, only one resulted in an exclusion. There were therefore no serious concerns raised about any future trends toward the school being required to take students with severe issues. Furthermore, it is IWS policy to only refer students to HRC who have an intellectual impairment or significant learning difficulties many of these students also experience behaviour challenges associated with their individual needs.

IWS policy has not changed since 2013 but as students with lower level needs have been successfully managed in their local school, it is possible the level of complexity of students attending HRC has increased. If IWS continue to manage the admissions within its stated criteria SAMS believe is unlikely that the level of challenging behaviour will increase further. Halswell Residential College was not at full capacity when the Evaluation Team visited in 2016 (with roll of 14 out of a possible 40). However, the College appeared capable of managing an increase in the roll, even with students with behavioural disturbances, without compromising quality. The key will be continuing to develop personalised safeguards for each person and to work in a positive partnership with the IWS.

The views of the girls at Halswell Residential College

When SAMS reviewed Halswell Residential College in July 2016 three of the four girls who were currently in residence at the school were off campus at a sporting event. The Evaluation Team met briefly with the one girl who was present at the school and had the opportunity to speak to two parents (of the girls) and the IWS psychologists who referred girls to the school. However, the Ministry of Education decided it would be important to include the opinion of all of the girls and their caregiver representatives as an adjunct to the original review.

SAMS returned to Halswell Residential College (HRC) late in August 2016 to interview the four girls and also one girl who has now left the school. The reviewer also telephoned a representative from each of the girls' families/caregivers. The central focus of these interviews was to gain first impressions of how safe girls felt in their time at the college. The interviewer first focused on the girls' experiences in their previous school and then their views and experiences while at HRC.

The girls range in age from 12 to 17 years old. All were in co-educational state schools prior to coming to HRC. Three of the girls described their experiences at these schools as "okay", "cool", "good", or "exciting" although the following comments were also made:

It was very good except when boys kept saying "do you want to go out for lunch or for dinner" but I didn't mind about that.

It was cool I guess, I got bullied a little bit but who doesn't when they're at school?

The fifth girl indicated she did not enjoy her time at her previous school and this was a theme in both her and her parent's observations throughout the interviews.

The interviewer then asked if there were boys in their previous school, and as noted previously, all of the girls were from coeducational schools. She then asked "what was that like?" Three of the girls stated it was fine, and one more had this to say:

It was alright. It was kind of just like what you would normally think at a school – I've never been to a school where there was only girls. We're going to have to interact with boys in the real world – might as well practice in high school! I can understand why boys might be a distraction to girls, but the same thing goes for boys!

The fifth girl indicated there were too many boys in her previous school, "more boys than girls. I didn't pay any attention to them."

When asked the same question about the other girls at their previous school three of the girls indicated that they were friendly or they had friends amongst the girls at their previous school and they missed them. However, two indicated that the girls at their previous school could also be mean.

When asked how they got on with the boys at HRC the responses ranged from “they’re annoying” to a unanimous, ‘but we get on with them okay’. One past student indicated she ‘had a boyfriend’ at HRC but also had this to say,

I had a boyfriend there. Yeah they were pretty much all my mates – I was the only girl they invited to go and see a rugby game – they see me as a tomboy but I don’t even know how that game works! It’s a good experience with the guys. I was usually the person who would break up the fights if I was there and the boys got into a fight. Since I was friends with all of them – as soon as I would step in, they would stop because they were afraid they would hurt me – so they would like, back up.

Another girl had this to say about the boys:

Don’t like (boy’s name). He said he’s going to hit me. [We’re] not allowed boyfriends. We’re allowed friends though. Some of them hug me sometimes. It’s a bit weird – we’re only allowed side hugs. They’re a bit loud. They bang the mop on the windows – they come and steal stuff. Their staff come and get them and sort it out. But they’re still cool.

In general the girls have experienced these boys as silly, annoying, a little weird at times, slightly troublesome, but still ‘cool’ or ‘okay’. The rule concerning no boyfriends, just friends, popped up in two of the statements, as did the rule/guidance that safe hugs are side hugs. Later in the conversations the girls were asked about the rules at the schools. One or two of the girls were more forthcoming in their responses:

You couldn’t have boyfriends but I didn’t care about that I thought that was stupid. You couldn’t be in another room with a male, even a male staff.

Keep your hands to yourself. Put a cushion between you on the couch (not sure if it’s a rule but I usually do that). Not allowed to give people the eye. No boyfriends or girlfriends, just friends. Boys aren’t allowed in the girls’ toilets.

One of these girls also stated:

I think I brought the new rule up – me and my best friend guy mate – we used to hug good bye – now they have a rule you can’t hug – I’m not a rule breaker I’m a rule starter. You couldn’t touch a boy without getting in trouble – it was annoying when we played basketball and you’d accidentally touch someone – it was overreacting but I guess they were just looking out for us.

From the perspective of the students the rules about boyfriends and close physical contact with males had mixed reviews. However, most of the girls stated the rules were there to keep them safe. When asked if they ever felt uncomfortable around the boys only one student indicated one incident when she first came to the school:

When I first went there a boy asked me out and we were alone together at one point and he touched my leg – I was thirteen at the time and I overreacted. Not much

happened – he touched my leg and I felt uncomfortable. I was freaking out in my head and I kind of froze. I got over it but it took me a while. I told the staff at Halswell. They bought us both into a room. The principal came in and asked us what happened.

The statements from the students indicate that on occasion there can be times when girls and boys create moments alone together, however, the students also realise they can report to staff whenever they have problem and they will be taken seriously. In the situation described above the student believed the school, like herself, overreacted to the situation and she was ultimately somewhat embarrassed by the whole event. However, the girls were also keenly aware that they were at Halswell College because many of them (including the girls) had issues they needed to address. Perhaps some of the most difficult situations they experienced were when one or more of their peers (girls or boys) experience behaviour issues that required direct staff intervention.

The interviewer asked the girls who they went to when they did feel uncomfortable, staff figured highly in these responses. In fact the staff were regarded favourably in many of the comments:

- I would have gone to the principal. She is actually quite a cool lady.
- [They] teach us about health – whole lot of girl business stuff. Calm you down. Look after you. Give you food.
- It was just really cool – they looked after us like parents. (Name of staff) – she looked after me so well and I hope they look after her. She was wonderful to me.
- Some of the staff were quite old – I felt sorry for them... Crazy things can happen anywhere – and they (the staff) do handle it quite well.

The general thrust of the comments from the girls was a sense that they felt safe at the school and the staff were there to help. Most of the more serious issues at the school where the girls felt less safe or uncomfortable involved behavioural incidents, some of them perpetrated by other girls.

The views of the family/whanau/caregivers of their girls at Halswell Residential College

The families/whanau or caregivers of the girls at Halswell confirmed the same impressions expressed by the girls of the previous school they attended prior to coming to Halswell. Three had positive experiences, one was bullied and another had significant behaviour issues while at the school. When asked if their coeducational experience at the schools were an issue all of the families indicated that there were no problems, except that one girl could not cope with crowds and another was bullied by the girls at the school. When asked how they transitioned to the new school the caregivers replied:

- Fantastic – inclusive environment, they provided specialist teaching she needed, she was amongst similar children, there was not an issue.
- Excellent. She doesn't get homesick. She loves it there, they're great with her. I haven't been to the college we'll see it in December when we pick her up – they keep in contact with me and she's fitted in great. They make sure she does outside activities –e.g. Rangers, so she's not just stuck in that environment, she's out doing more independent stuff with them as well. If she's in a good environment she feels she's in a safe environment.
- She struggled at first. She was crying, her sister took her down – she didn't want me (mum) to take her, but then she came right, she settled in but it took them a while to settle her in there. Very shy – but they managed to get her in, they've done remarkably well with her – you wouldn't have been able to talk to her – she wouldn't talk to anyone. Now totally different girl!
- Really well – she just fitted in really well, she didn't feel under any pressure and relaxed into it.
- I've got no idea. From what they tell me she's doing very well. I have to take what the school says and I believe what they said would be right – that she's doing very well. She's the sort of person who will settle into anywhere pretty quick – she'll settle down and find her bearings.

The next question was “what have been her best experiences from your perspective?” The Caregivers responded (responses are in random order):

- I've got no idea because I work shift work – when I can ring her I do ring her – there's probably quite a lot because she's never experienced the things that they're doing – probably all the things – they've been and done this and that and been to the ski fields and here and there. Keep her active and keep her doing things and giving her a chance at things she'd never experience in her life before, it's a whole new learning for her.
- Youth group, RDA, and she's loving all of it. She needs to be in an environment socialising with “normal” kids – they (the staff) see that need in her and develop her as an individual not as a group.
- She's learnt to live away from home, that she has to contribute to the daily living and do chores, doing on-site work experience in the laundry. It's the whole, complete experience – everything that is there is suitable for her.
- She always comes home and talks about (IEP coordinator) – she just adores her. It's like I (mum) don't exist – it's like she's her mum. “I'm leaving here, I'm going back to

Christchurch – I'm going to live with (IEP coordinator)". Going to work experience has been a big thing for her – getting her out of that shyness. At first she started with the coffee shop and now she goes to the bakery.

- More 1:1 teaching, I think she benefited really well from having to be a bit more independent – not having everything done for her.

The obvious next question concerned areas where the caregivers perceived issues or problems at the school. All of the caregivers stated there were none with regard to the school. When asked what they would do if there were any issues the caregivers responded (in random order):

- N/A – if they do have an issue we talk about it among us – we communicate so we have a plan – we keep in touch with each other when she comes home for the holidays – e.g. she does her washing at home like she does at school and the communication's been good – e.g. have a big glass of water (not a panadol) we use that strategy at home and at school.
- If there was anything that came up they always contacted (mum) or myself.
- Anything that has cropped up has been communicated to me, and the staff have addressed it appropriately, professionally, smartly and it hasn't been an issue.
- They've got a room there for time out which is a good thing because I don't have that here – there's no time out room in my house. So she's learnt not to go in there. She has been in there quite a lot of times though. They give me a ring and let me know what's going on – they inform me what's happening and I give her a growling on the phone. If there have been problems – They advise me that they have a meeting.
- N/A – to be honest I think the school would deal with it rationally and quickly and it'd be sorted out in no time at all – from what I see of the school – I'm very impressed with the school. Very impressed.

When asked directly about their impressions of safety at the school all of the caregivers indicated they had no concerns (responses are in random order):

- No concerns or issues – they're all kept an eye on pretty good.
- Safety is great.
- No we've had no concerns whatsoever. From what they've shown us in the way of security and how they operate with caregivers surrounding them all the time there'd be no worries whatsoever with security.
- No – none at all.
- If Halswell wasn't safe, she wouldn't be there. Safety is not negotiable. There has never been an issue with Safety. HRC has processes in place that assures the safety of the girls (and the boys) and safety has never been a concern to us – if there was she wouldn't be there.

All of the caregivers believed that boys were not a safety concern at the school. The same sentiments were expressed with regard the girls. On caregiver summed up her view of the school in the following statement:

I think they're doing a fantastic job. They seem to care for the kids and have the kids welfare at heart – they're just brilliant with them as far as I'm concerned. They couldn't make us more welcome when we went down there – absolutely brilliant. They are honest and straight up and that included that included the principal – total confidence in them. From what we've seen the school's doing a fantastic job. We went down there and I was overwhelmed with the welcome and how they were so friendly and the girls that I saw – how much time was spent with them and how the carers spoke to them – they treated them like ordinary people and it was really brilliant. We don't know what the background of a lot of those children they've probably had a harsh background, when you see them in that environment and enjoying themselves, credit has to go to the staff and the whole school really.

The caregivers were also very positive with regard the level of communication they had with the school (in random order):

- Excellent. Absolutely Brilliant. They keep in touch, they ask and they're always in communication about things that are happening. I've got no worries with that at all. Absolutely brilliant.
- It's been great. Everything. If she's in trouble, they let me know or if there are excursions they let me know. I speak to her every Sunday and I get an update from the workers before I speak to her. (IEP Coordinator) will let me know what's going on during the week.
- This is all pretty new... They seem great though – really good... communication is working really well.
- Fantastic. Our main communication is through the IEP coordinator and communication is fantastic. They can contact me at any time and they can contact me at any time if needed – no problems.
- Really good. I had no problems – if I rang the school I never had any problems with contacting anybody or getting answers that I wanted – communication was really good. They also contacted me – (mum) and I flew down with her when she first arrived and when we picked her up – they would contact me about flights etc.

Like the girls all of the caregivers could provide information about how they would make a complaint if one needed to be made, although they were a little vague on the process once a complaint was laid.

- I'm hoping they would investigate the situation and get back to me (written or verbal) on what they think.
- I don't know what the guidelines are but I hope they would follow up on it pretty quickly, find out the source of the problem and solve it quickly as so there was no more of that sort of issue again.
- I'm assuming that as with everything else they'd follow the correct procedure – I don't know- I haven't had one!

Overall, the families were very impressed with the communication they had with the school and they have very positive views regarding safety. The issue of boys at the school did not

figure in any of the conversations with the families and was only referred to when they were asked directly; in which case the very short responses were a unanimous 'unconcerned'.

Conclusion

The research literature has a lot to say about the prevalence of sexual abuse toward people with intellectual disabilities. This literature points to what can only be described as "an appalling" record. However, the indictment rest solely on the shoulders of society and our relative indifference to the rate of abuse (generally) perpetrated against disabled people. In the controlled environment of a coeducational residential special school, with noted safeguards in place that conform with best practice in the field we get a different picture. Even if it were the case that other young people in that setting had issues with regard to sexuality, there is little or no opportunity for abuse to occur. Rather, our experience at Halswell Residential College was one where the school constantly focused on the positive aspect of relationships between peers through their 24/7 learning model.

The descriptions of life at Halswell Residential College by our small sample of girls suggest that the most troubling aspect of their interaction with peers is when one of them experiences a significant behavioural event. This was the same conclusion drawn from the Children's Commissioner of England's review of 17 residential special schools. In that case the rate of known sexual abuse incidents was extremely low (one recorded incident) but the students concern for individuals who experienced behavioural events was significant. Special residential schools either in New Zealand or in the United Kingdom will attract students with learning experiences in other settings had failed and closely monitored intervention programmes were needed. Bringing this unique group of students together in one place will result in behavioural issues from time-to-time that require an experienced staff team and very close supervision of the students. These issues however, are not gender specific and, in the case of Halswell Residential College, have not impacted on the sense of safety and security at the school.

References

- Andrews, A.B. and Veronen, L. J. (1993). Sexual assault and people with disabilities, Special issue: Sexuality and disabilities: A guide for human service practitioners. *Journal of Social Work and Human Sexuality*, 8(2), 137-159.
- Bambara, L.M., and Brantlinger, E. (2002). Toward a healthy sexual life: An introduction to the special series on issues of sexuality for people with developmental disabilities. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 27(1)
- Barron, I. and Topping, K. (2010). School-based child sexual abuse prevention programs: implications for practitioners. *APSAC Advisor*, 22 (2 & 3), 11-19.
- Brown, H. (2010). Sexual abuse of children with disabilities, In *Council of Europe, Protecting children from sexual Violence*. Strasburg: Council of Europe Publishing, Ch 7, pp 104-105.
- Colton, M. (2002). Factors associated with abuse in residential child care institutions. *Children & Society*, 16(1), 33–44.
- Cross, M., Gordon, R., Kennedy, M., and Marchant, R., (1993). NSPCC, Way Ahead Disability Consultancy, National Deaf Children's Society, and Chailey Heritage Child Protection Working Group. *The ABCD Pack: Abuse and children who are disabled*. ABCD Consortium: Leicester
- Euser, S., Alink, L.R.A., Tharner, A., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., and Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2016). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care: Increased risk for children with mild intellectual disability. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disability*, 29, 83-92.
- Euser, S., Alink, L.R.A., Tharner, A., van Ijzendoorn, M.H., and Bakermans-Kranenburg, M.J. (2013). The prevalence of child sexual abuse in out-of-home care: a comparison between abuse in residential and foster care. *Child Maltreatment*, 00(0), 1-11. (Published on-line) DOI: 10.1177/1077559513489848
- Greger, K., Myhre, A.K., Lydersen, S. and Jozefiak, T. (2015). Previous maltreatment and present mental health in a high-risk adolescent population. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 45, 122-134.
- Harder, A.T., Knorth, E.J., and Kalverboer, M.E. (2013). A secure base? The adolescent-staff relationship in secure residential youth care. *Child and Family Social Work*, 18, pp 305-317.

- Khoury-Kassabri, M and Attar-schwartz, S. (2014). Adolescents' reports of physical violence by peers in residential care settings: An ecological examination. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 29(4), 659-682.
- Manson, R. (2014). *Children's Care Monitor 2013/2014: Children on the State of Social Care in England*.
<http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/19818/1/Children's%20care%20monitor%20201314.pdf>
- Marchant, R. and Cross, M. (1993). Places of safety? institutions, disabled children and abuse. In: *The ABCD Pack: Abuse and Children who are Disabled*. The ABCD Consortium. Leicester UK: NSP.
- Ministry of Education (2013). *Potential increased risk in a residential co-educational setting to girls with an intellectual impairment*.
<http://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Ministry/Information-releases/Residential-Special-Schools-information-release/MinistryLiteratureReviewApp1.pdf>
- National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Safeguarding in Education Service (2012). *The role of schools, colleges and academies in protecting children from grooming and entrapment*. [London]: NSPCC.
- National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2003). *It doesn't happen to disabled children*, report accessed www.nspcc.org.uk
- Parker, A. (2013). *Evaluation of the Safety of Children in Coeducational Residential Special School: A Literature Review*. April 2013, for the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
- Parker, A. and Wilson, C. (2016). *Evaluation of the Safety of Children in Coeducational Residential Special Schools: A Literature Review*. Completed on behalf of the Ministry of Education, New Zealand.
- Paul, A., Cawson, P. and Paton, J. (2004). *Safeguarding Disabled Children in Residential Special Schools*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children in association with the Council for Disabled Children.
- Pellicano, E., Hill, V., Croydon, A., Greathead, S., Kenny, L., and Yates, R. (2014) *My life at school: understanding the experiences of children and young people with special educational needs in residential special schools*. A report provided on behalf of the Children's Commissioner for England.

http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/My_Life_at_School.pdf

- Reiter, S., Bryen, D.N. and Shachar, I. (2007). Adolescents with disabilities as victims of abuse. *Journal of Intellectual Disability*, 11, 371-387.
- Rosen, D.B. (2006). Violence and exploitation against women and girls, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1087, 170-177.
- SAMS (2016) *Follow-up report on the suitability of Halswell Residential College as a coeducational special residential school*. Report to the Ministry of Education, July 2016.
- Soenen, B., D'Oosterlinck, F., and Broekaert, E. (2013). The voice of troubled youth: Children and adolescents' ideas on helpful elements of care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 35, 1297-1304.
- Spencer, N., Devereus, E., Wallace, A., Sundrm, R., shevov, M., Bacchus, C., and Logan, S. (2005). Disabling conditions and registration for child abuse and neglect: A population-based study. *Pediatrics*, 116, 609-613.
- Sullivan, P. and Knutson, J. (2000a). Maltreatment and disability: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 24, 1257-1273.
- Sullivan, P.M. and Knutson, J. F. (2000b). The prevalence of disabilities and maltreatment among runaway children, *Child Abuse and Neglect*. 24(10), 1275-1288.
- Support Force for Children's Residential Care (1995) Final report*
- UK Department of Education (2013). *Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards*, accessed at:
<https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-00125-2012.pdf>
- Utting, W. (1997). *People Like Us: The Report of the Review of the Safeguards for Children Living Away from Home*. London: HMSO
- Wissink, I.B., van Vugt, E., Moonen, X., Stams, G-J,J.M, and Hendriks, J. (2015). Sexual abuse involving children with an intellectual disability (ID): A narrative review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 36, 20-35