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ALTERNATIVES TO RESIDENTIAL CARE: RESEARCH INTO DEVELOPMENTS IN ENGLAND

There is currently a crisis of confidence in residential child care in England. This has largely been prompted by a series of media revelations of malpractice - including the sexual abuse of some children - in certain institutions of various types. There have also been instances of major problems of control of young people's behaviour. On the one hand, residents have been felt to be beyond control and residential facilities offering few boundaries; on the other inappropriate, coercive regimes and techniques of control have been discovered in specific settings.

In this context, one English local authority - Warwickshire - took the radical and unprecedented step of closing the last of its children's homes: it thus has no residential childcare facilities of its own whatsoever. The National Children's Bureau has recently concluded a major research study, which has evaluated the impacts of these changes. The conference paper will summarise the results from this research and put them into the context of other recent developments in residential and childcare services in England.

The paper, therefore will focus on the extent to which Warwickshire was successful in achieving its aims; the process by which homes were closed; the effects on other professionals; and, most importantly, its impact on children and families. This major study has international relevance as residential care is being questioned in many other countries. Those concerned need to be fully informed of both any advantages as well as disadvantages of moving away from group care services.

*Zur Zeit befindet sich die Heimerziehung in England in einer Krise. Presseberichte über unhaltbare Zustände bis hin zum sexuellen Mißbrauch von Kindern, Mangel an Kontrolle einerseits, zu strenge Kontrolle andererseits haben das Vertrauen in diese Form ausserfamiliärer Erziehung schwinden lassen. Im Warwickshire wurde das letzte Kinderheim geschlossen. Das National Children's Bureau untersuchte die Auswirkungen dieser Politik auf andere Berufsgruppen und auf die betroffenen Kinder und ihre Familien. Ferner wurde der Prozeß der Schließung sowie die Frage untersucht, ob die gesteckten Ziele auch erreicht wurden.*

*En Grande- Bretagne, la politique du placement des enfants dans des centres d'accueil est en crise: Des reportages dans les médias sur des situations intenable allant jusqu'à l'abus sexuel, un manque de contrôle d'un côté, des méthodes trop sévères de l'autre... Au Warwickshire, le dernier foyer pour enfants vient de fermer ses portes. Le National Children's Bureau a fait l'analyse de la situation: Quels sont les effets de cette politique sur les autres professions du secteur, sur les enfants concernés et leur familles. Comment s'est déroulé le processus de fermeture? Est-ce-que les objectifs définis ont-ils été atteints?*