Respite care and short breaks for young adults aged 18–40 with complex health-care needs: mixed-methods systematic review and conceptual framework development

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Declared competing interests of authors: Katherine Knighting was lead researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report. Jane Noyes was lead researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report. In addition, Jane Noyes is a member of the joint research group of Together for Short Lives (Bristol, UK) and the Association for Paediatric Palliative Care Medicine (2011–present), which lobbies for evidence-informed research prioritisation and well-conducted research to be undertaken with the target population. Jane Noyes was also a member of the NIHR Dissemination Centre Advisory Group (2015–19). Lucy Bray was a researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report. Barbara Jack was a researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report. Mary O’Brien was a researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report. Julia Downing was a researcher and co-author on some of the work quoted in the report.

Published February 2021
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr09060

Plain English summary

Respite care for young adults with complex health-care needs

Health Services and Delivery Research 2021; Vol. 9: No. 6
DOI: 10.3310/hsdr09060

NIHR Journals Library www.journalslibrary.nihr.ac.uk
Plain English summary

Young adults with life-limiting conditions or complex physical disabilities have complex health-care needs. As more children with complex conditions now survive into adulthood, the number of young adults needing care has risen significantly. Respite care provides essential support for young adults and a break for their families. Lack of respite has a negative impact on the length and quality of life of these young adults, including early death, and physical and emotional strain on ageing parents. Information about what respite care is available after transition to adult services has, to the best of our knowledge, not been gathered nationally.

We looked for evidence about respite care services for young adults aged 18–40 years with complex health-care needs to find out what types of services are available and how well they work for families. We worked with young adults, parents and professionals to identify evidence and understand the findings.

We gathered evidence from lots of sources, including academic papers, reports from organisations and policy documents. We created a 'knowledge map' that describes six different categories of respite care currently available: (1) residential, (2) home based, (3) day care, (4) community, leisure and social activities, (5) holidays and (6) emergency respite. None of the documents we found included ratings of how well the services worked or the costs of providing the service, showing that these are areas where future research is needed.

UK government policy had clear intentions on how to provide respite care, including early planning for transition and making respite care available to all those who need it. Young adults, parents and professionals reported that safe, age-appropriate respite care has many benefits for the physical and emotional well-being of all. The biggest barrier to respite after transition to adult services is the lack of appropriate respite services and trained staff. This has a negative effect on the health and well-being of the whole family at a time when they had increasing need for respite care.
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This report
The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HS&DR programme or one of its preceding programmes as project number 16/115/17. The contractual start date was in February 2018. The final report began editorial review in March 2020 and was accepted for publication in October 2020. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HS&DR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HS&DR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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