

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



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May 2016 Newsletter #18 CONTENTS

Research Updates

*Working with local authorities on findings from Educational Progress of Looked After Children report
Evaluation of the London Fostering Achievement Programme*

Rees Centre News

Visitors, guest blog posts and recent presentations

Foster Care in the News

Book Review

Trauma Is Really Strange

Young Voices

Aspire to More project in York

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RESEARCH UPDATES

Working with local authorities – what do findings from the Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England report mean for their work with young people in care?

Judy, Nikki, and David Berridge (Bristol) have travelled around the country talking to Virtual School heads, Directors of Children's Services, Ofsted inspectors, foster carers, social workers and other professionals, to talk about what the research findings mean for their work with young people in care.

Nikki is working with local authorities to identify how they compare to national averages on the factors identified as significant predictors of young people's educational progress in secondary school (see page 51 of Technical Report 2 at <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/educational-progress-of-looked-after-children/>). By showing the range

The Rees Centre, University of Oxford and the University of Bristol published a report on the educational progress of children in care in England in November 2015. Funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the study examined the attainment and progress of all young people in England who were eligible to sit GCSE examinations in 2013, by linking data from the National Pupil Database and the Children Looked After dataset (SSDA903). [Full report online](#). Free hard copies on request.

(minimum – maximum) and mean for each of the significant predictors at a national level, for a particular local authority, and for its statistical neighbours, we can identify how that authority compares on the factors that are significant predictors of educational progress. This work can help local authorities to identify whether there are particular risk factors in their local cohort (for example, relatively high numbers of placement changes or school exclusions) that they might choose to focus on in local policy and practice decisions.

Discussions also encourage local authority staff to identify factors that were not significant predictors for the national cohort (e.g. higher rates of placement with parents) but which might turn out to be significant for their group of young people. Ongoing changes in the local and national cohorts are also discussed.

Evaluation of the London Fostering Achievement (LFA) Programme

The LFA was delivered by The Fostering Network in partnership with Achievement for All. They developed a programme of activity designed to improve educational outcomes for fostered children in London with four main components: generic foster carer training focusing on education, masterclasses, direct work with schools and education champions.

Twenty-nine of London's 31 boroughs (Triborough treated as one) signed up for the programme: 19 for generic training only; four for direct work with schools, champions and training; five for direct work with schools and training; one for champions and training.

Generic foster carer training: Nov 2014 - March 2015 a one-day session was completed in 33 groups by 1265 foster carers, social workers, teachers, and other professionals working with children across 29 London Boroughs.

Masterclasses: Over 400 people attended the four half-day training sessions during the period of the evaluation to enable foster carers and others to explore one area e.g. attachment, in more depth.

Direct work with schools: Children in care on the roll at each of 25 schools (17 secondary, six primary, one special and one pupil referral unit) across nine boroughs were the target group for raising achievement. The school received support, over one year, from a coach who helped them to undertake a needs analysis (STEEP) and provided professional development for that school.

Education Champions: Two Education Champions, experienced foster carers often with education experience, in each of five Boroughs were employed part-time to work with foster carers on supporting educational needs by, for example, attending meetings with them, working with them and their foster child at home on reading or maths or helping them to navigate the educational system.

Findings from the mixed methods evaluation, undertaken by the Rees Centre and researchers from the Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University suggest that:

- The generic training was generally well received and the mix of people (e.g. foster carers, teachers, social workers) was seen as most valuable in enabling them to better understand each other's roles. It was too basic for the more experienced attendees and its relationship to established training offered was unclear.
- Examples were identified of carers challenging the allocation of Pupil Premium Plus and engaging young people in new activities as a direct impact of the Programme.
- The impact of the direct work with schools was mixed. Positive feedback was given on the value of the needs analysis, contribution of the coach and structured meetings of foster carer, teacher and child.
- The attainment of 45 pupils showed no greater progress in reading and maths for pupils in the schools involved

when compared to 652 children in care in other schools in the same boroughs. In writing however, pupils in schools involved with the direct work made more progress. Attendance and exclusion showed no significant differences between those pupils in the schools involved and the others.

- The Education Champions emerged most strongly in terms of impact. They provided foster carers with information, direct support and increased confidence. Their success is attributed to their experience in both education and foster care, being seen by foster carers as 'one of us'.

Selected Recommendations

- Education Champions should be implemented more widely. The cost of implementing the Education Champions in every borough in London or even every LA in England would be relatively low¹ and could be offset by savings from higher foster carer retention rates, less school exclusion and better progress.
- Give designated teachers the status needed (e.g. on senior leadership teams) to ensure appropriate priority is given to the needs of children in care.
- The timing and organisation of PEP meetings should be sensitive to the needs of young people and should neither identify their care status to their peers and school staff, nor require them to miss lessons.

London Schools Excellence Fund – Children in Care: Evaluation of The London Fostering Achievement Programme Final Report. London: GLA

https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/london_fostering_achievement_evaluation_final_report.pdf

Judy Sebba, Nikki Luke, Alun Rees, Gillian Plumridge, Luke Rodgers, Khatija Hafesji and Clare Rowsome-Smith, The Rees Centre, University of Oxford and Samantha McDermid and Helen Trivedi, Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University.

EVENTS

Monday 13 June 2016 Public Seminar

Department of Education, University of Oxford

4.30-6pm, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY (Seminar room A)

The findings of an RCT evaluation of the effectiveness of the Letterbox Club in improving reading and number skills of foster children ages 7-11 years old.

Dr Karen Winter, Queen's University Belfast

The poor educational outcomes of children in care are a significant concern internationally. Whilst there have been many interventions developed to address this problem, very few have been rigorously evaluated. This seminar presents the findings of a randomised controlled trial that sought to measure the effectiveness of a book gifting programme (the Letterbox Club) that aims to improve literacy skills amongst children aged 7–11 years in foster care.

Dr Sara McLean's webinar (20 April 2016) - **Helping Looked After Children to Manage Their Behaviour** - was recorded and you can watch the slides and session here on [YouTube](#). If you are a foster carer and would like to receive copies of resources related to the vulnerabilities talked about in Sara's slides, please email her directly:

sara.mclean@unisa.edu.au

Sara's work is supported by the Eureka Benevolent Foundation, Australia.

¹ Education Champions were paid £15/hour and were employed for four hours a week

REES CENTRE NEWS

Visitors

Dr Sara McLean, Visiting Fellow (Association of Commonwealth Universities) to Linacre College, University of Oxford, joined us for a research visit during April. Sara is currently working on resources for foster carers around behaviour management of children in care.

AJ Hickey, doctoral student at the University of Ottawa, is researching the educational outcomes of children in care and is on a research visit to the Rees Centre between April and June.

From the Rees Centre Blog

[Can Singing Help Looked After Children Settle Into School?](#) A foster carer shares her experience of a pilot singing project in Leicester.

[SATs no longer a four letter word](#) Foster carers, Amanda and Libby, write about their experiences of supporting children's education, particularly around tests, from a social pedagogy perspective.

Presentations

Findings from *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England* study have been presented by Nikki to the Staffordshire Virtual School Conference, 15 March 2016; by Nikki and Judy who both presented workshops at the National Virtual School Heads Conference, 22 March 2016; by Judy who spoke at Ofsted's East Midlands regional meeting and by David Berridge who gave a keynote at the National Ofsted Social Care Conference 19 April 2016. David also presented to the South West Virtual School Heads Conference 19 May 2016.

Nikki will be presenting a seminar on the *Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England* study at the LSE on 1 June 2016 at 4.30pm. This is a free event, open to the public. [Further details in this flier.](#)

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

["A lot of people are waiting for it to fail". Inside the first independent children's trust](#), Community Care, 3 March 2016

[Scotland to offer University places to all children in care](#), Children and Young People Now, 22 March 2016

[How social workers can boost the happiness of looked-after Children](#), Community Care, 22 March 2016

[Children in foster care aren't waiting for a loving home – they are already in one](#), Guardian Social Care, 31 March 2016

[£200 million to transform life chances of vulnerable young people](#), Department for Education, 3 April 2016

[Attachment aware schools improve outcomes for children in care](#), Children and Young People Now, 13 April 2016

[It is essential that children in care have access to the humanizing and socialising aspects of arts and culture](#), TES, 3 April 2016

[Mental health and wellbeing of looked after children](#), House of Commons Education Select Committee, 28 April 2016

[Can the mockingbird model of foster care fly in the UK?](#) Guardian Social Care, 28 April 2016

[Children in care denied mental health services because of placement uncertainty](#), Community Care, 28 April 2016

[For young people in care, learning to look after themselves is as important as a home](#), Community Care, 4 May 2016

[Children Looked After placements as at 31 March 2015](#), OFSTED

[Dave Hill: You've got to look after fewer children](#), Guardian Society, 11 May 2016

BOOK REVIEW

Trauma is Really Strange

Steve Haines (with art by Sophie Standing).

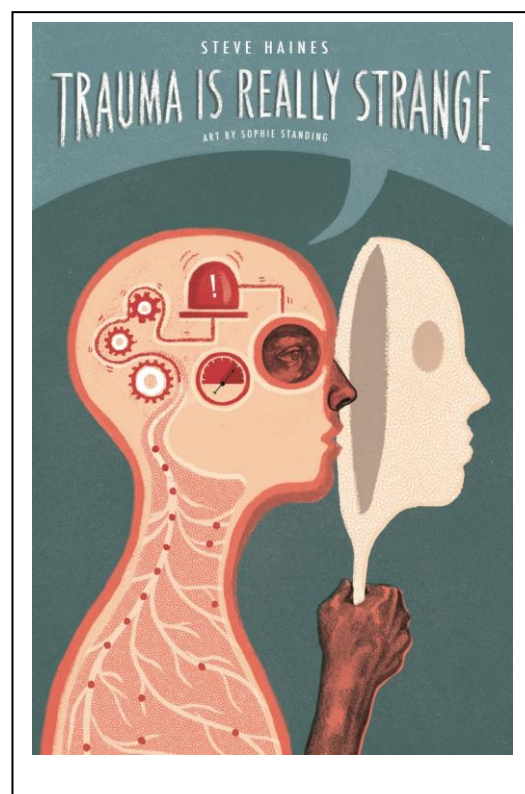
Published by Singing Dragon ISBN: 978-1-84819-293-5

Reviewed by Nikki Luke, Research Fellow, Rees Centre

This comic explores the topic of trauma: what it is, what effects it can have, and how those who have experienced trauma can work with their own bodies to promote recovery. At 32 pages and a handy A5 size, the book is a manageable and fascinating read. Steve Haines does a great job of translating theoretical perspectives and neuroscientific research into concrete, easy-to-grasp metaphors. This is particularly effective where the physiological responses to trauma are being described. There is a focus on resilience, providing a positive message for trauma survivors, and the potential for 'post-traumatic growth' is stressed throughout. Suggested exercises aim to develop self-regulation as a way of addressing physiological responses to trauma.

The comic book format uses illustrations in an original way, to represent experiences that many readers will recognise. Sophie Standing's artwork is clear and effective at getting across the key messages. Although the target audience appears to be adult survivors of trauma, I can also see potential for the comic to be used by professionals (such as foster carers, teachers and social workers) who are working with young people recovering from trauma. Many will recognise the descriptions of fight-or-flight and dissociation responses in the young people they work with, and the explanation of the long-term effects of trauma would be especially useful for these groups. Because the book also includes suggestions for working with trauma, it provides practical steps that can be taken to promote recovery – though it should be acknowledged that some young people (and, indeed, adults) will require therapeutic work that goes beyond the exercises recommended here.

There are lessons in this book for researchers, too: the illustrated panels are accompanied by footnotes that cite the research on which much of the content is based, and the list of references are tucked away behind a flap at the back of the book. This makes the author's message more accessible than the usual 'academic' format of journal articles or text-heavy reports.



The book is not without limitations. The list of references on trauma does not represent a comprehensive review: the author's preferred approaches to understanding and working with trauma are represented as facts, and there is some danger that the inclusion of references might be misconstrued as evidence that this represents 'the truth' about how to overcome trauma. The order in which information is presented also feels a little jumbled – 'trauma' is not defined until several pages in, and there is no clear statement of who the book is aimed at. A clearer structure might have been to use Berceles's three statements about trauma, which the author explores in some detail, as a framework for the whole comic.

These minor criticisms aside, I'd recommend this comic to anyone who has experienced trauma or who is working with someone who has. It provides clear and relatable ways of understanding and talking about the effects of trauma, and some sensible suggestions for taking the first steps towards recovery.

By Nikki Luke

YOUNG VOICES

Jade Ward works with young people in care and is a role model for the Aspire to More project in York...

Aspire To More: Raising the aspirations of a group of care experienced young people

["Aspire To More"](#) is a creative project in partnership with the Children's Rights and Advocacy Service which is part of CSES (Children's services Education and Skills).

Working in close partnership with a group of care experienced young people who form York's Children in Care Council "Show Me That I Matter" (SMTIM), Aspire To More will embark on a journey to meet care leavers that have gone on in their lives to become a success. By discovering what challenges these role models faced and how they overcame them, young people can both learn and share key messages with the wider community. The aim of the project will be to raise the group's aspirations, by utilising the learning and insight they gain.

The engaging journey will lead to the creation of a powerful poster series promoting 'raising aspirations' specifically aimed at care experienced young people. It will be an opportunity for young people to raise and discuss challenges that care experienced young people face in terms of aspirations, confidence and futures. It will be designed to inspire care experienced young people by presenting them with positive and inspirational role models, people who have faced similar challenges who they can learn from and be inspired by!

Here are the interviews so far. There will be 6 physical meetings between young people and role models and after that we would encourage other care leavers to contribute remotely by answering the same questions and sharing their experiences.

<https://aspiretomore.wordpress.com/interviews/jade-ward/>

<https://aspiretomore.wordpress.com/interviews/luke-rodgers/>

<https://aspiretomore.wordpress.com/interviews/paolo-hewitt/>