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## RESEARCH UPDATES

### **Evaluations of Children's Social Care Innovation Programme**

The individual summaries of 18 project evaluations are now on the [Spring Consortium website](#). We highlight findings from evaluations of three projects below.

#### **Evaluation of the AdOpt Parenting Programme**

Run by the NIS (National Implementation Service), AdOpt targets adoptive parents of children aged 3-8 years, pre and post adoption. It aims to promote parenting techniques and to help parents respond to often complex needs of adoptive children.

AdOpt was evaluated by a team at the University of Sussex, using surveys before and after the programme with a sample of parents of 91 children, as well as interviews and focus groups with 36 parents. Key findings were:

- The AdOpt parenting programme was effective in reducing total problems and conduct problems as measured

by the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), but not emotional problems, hyperactivity problems, peer problems, or prosocial behaviour.

- Comparisons of survey results from before and after the programme demonstrated improvements in parenting, specifically parents' sense of competency, parental monitoring capacity and satisfaction.
- Parents said that the AdOpt programme had positive effects on child outcomes and parenting practices as well as parenting satisfaction. Adoptive parents also reported that they felt increasingly supported, more connected to others, less isolated, and reported their experiences as adoptive parents as being more 'normalised' and understood by themselves, as well as promoting continued programme participation and reducing adoption-based challenges.
- Focus groups with facilitators suggested that training in, and implementation of the AdOpt programme promoted a high sense of job satisfaction and highlighted that the skills gained from training were especially useful for working with adoptive families, and could be used in other areas of their work.

### **Evaluation of Match Fostercare – supporting long-term foster care placements in the independent sector**

Match Fostercare, a small independent fostering provider in the West Midlands, took on delegated statutory duties from local authorities and provided wrap around services including health, education and psychology to young people in long-term foster care. The Match supervising social worker took on the role of local authority child and family social worker, including statutory visits, looked after children reviews and PEP reviews, contact and work with birth family. Each young person also had an independent advocate.

Key findings from the evaluation (by University of East Anglia):

- The 8 long-term fostered young people recruited in this short project had a consistent social worker through the project which was not the case for all the 17 young people in the comparison sample.
- Across both the IP and comparison samples, there was a high level of professional satisfaction amongst the supervising social workers and the foster carers.
- Match social workers expressed additional satisfaction in working holistically with the whole foster family. However LA managers had some concerns about retaining corporate parenting responsibility without direct LA involvement with the child.
- Decision making (especially regarding contact) could be swifter when only the Match social worker needed to be involved. However, since the LA remained accountable as the corporate parent, key decisions (e.g. changes of school) were referred to the LA.
- The Match model did not reduce the number of professionals involved for long-term foster children, which was higher than in the comparison agency
- The advocacy service worked well for most young people and carers in this small sample, though there were some concerns regarding overlap with the social worker role.
- The costs of Match carrying out delegated statutory duties appeared similar to those estimated for LAs. Match was providing additional services and time, thus potentially offering value for money.

This evaluation study was carried out between April 2015 and April 2016 by Mary Beek, Gillian Schofield and Julie Young in the Centre for Research on Children and Families, University of East Anglia, Norwich.

### **Evaluation of Ealing Brighter Futures Intensive Engagement Model**

Working with adolescents in and on the edge of care, Ealing's Brighter Futures started in 2015 and is a multi-disciplinary intensive engagement model that provides enhanced services and support. Two new multi-disciplinary edge of care teams and a new in care team have been set up including social workers, clinical psychologists, connexions workers, education specialists, youth justice workers, family support workers, fostering support social workers, youth workers, and youth mentors. Caseloads are lower than in traditional social work teams, to allow more time to work intensively with young people and their parents or carers. They have also provided enhanced training for staff and foster carers, to help prevent placement breakdowns and support young people in out of authority residential care to move back to the local area to live with foster families.

Key findings from the evaluation by UCL/University of Bedfordshire:

- Nine young people moved from residential placements to foster placements during the pilot.
- Young people, parents and carers who participated in the research were overwhelmingly positive about the intensive and relational model of service provided.
- Young people said that they trusted youth mentors and youth workers and welcomed their involvement and support.
- Placement stability improved. Foster carers said that enhanced support from the team together with training to help them understand and manage behaviour had been important in preventing crises from escalating.
- The nine foster placements that replaced residential placements generated an associated cost avoidance of around £800,000.

This evaluation study was carried out between June 2015 and October 2016 by researchers from Thomas Coram Research Unit, Institute of Education, University College London and the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care at the University of Bedfordshire.

The Rees Centre is the Evaluation Co-ordinator for the Programme. Any questions, please contact [Judy Sebba](#).

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## What is known about the placement and outcomes of siblings in foster care?

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The Rees Centre has published the results of an international literature review in a new report now available in hard copy or on our [website](#).



The findings from this review support the legislation that requires local authorities to place siblings who enter care together where possible, subject to welfare considerations of the children.

However, in a significant minority of cases, this is not happening in practice. To meet this requirement, the following points should be considered:

### **Social workers**

- Involve young people more in placement decisions. Involving young people in their placement decision leads to better outcomes and this applies equally to sibling group placements.

### **Fostering providers**

- Recruit foster carers who are able and willing to foster sibling groups, such as those with greater housing capacity, and those with more experience in caring for multiple children with a range of needs. Foster carers should help facilitate contact between siblings placed apart where appropriate.
- Identify incentives for foster carers to take sibling groups. Consider financial benefits, training and adequate support.
- To help inform service planning, consider the developing body of evidence around the impact of intervention programmes designed to support siblings in foster care. The intervention studies in this review show promising early findings in relation to the greater frequency of sibling co-placements, but also improved quality of the sibling relationship for children in foster care.

[Read key messages in full](#)

## EVENTS

### Department of Education, University of Oxford, Public Seminar

Monday 15 May 2017, 5pm

Bright Spots Project – the subjective well-being of looked after children and survey development

*Speaker: Julie Selwyn, Professor of Child and Family Social Work, School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol*

Oxford University Department of Education

15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Drinks will be served after the event.

## REES CENTRE NEWS

### Teenagers in Foster Care Webinar

Thank you everyone who logged in and contributed to a very interesting webinar. If you missed it, the [recording is on the Rees Centre YouTube channel](#).

### Rees Centre blog

[What's it like to be a same-sex couple fostering a child?](#) *Guest post for LGBT Adoption and Fostering Week*

[Research planning and a duck roll the size of my hand](#) *guest post by Oliwia*

### Conferences/Presentations

Many presentations are available on the [Resources](#) page of our website.

Judy and Ellie presented to the Education Select Committee on use of research in policy on 10 January.

Judy presented a seminar at University College London, 25 Jan 2017, on 'The educational progress of children in care: findings from two research projects/evaluations'.

Nikki presented findings from the Rees Centre/NSPCC literature review, 'What works in preventing and treating poor mental health in looked after children?' at the Transforming Mental Health Services for Children and Young Adults Conference in London, 30 January 2017.

Judy presented on the work of the Rees Centre to the National meeting of the Principal Social Workers Network on 7 February.

Nikki gave a keynote address at the CELCIS Education Conference in Glasgow on 21 February 2017, 'Finding the links between educational attainment, individual characteristics, and experiences in care and education'.

Nikki gave a seminar to the Oxford Brookes University Children and Families Research Group on 'Supporting good mental health for children in care' on 1<sup>st</sup> March.

Judy presented findings from the Teenagers in Foster Care seminar series to the Coram BAAF Independent Fostering Providers Forum in London on 15 March.

Judy gave a keynote at the National Virtual School Heads Conference in Birmingham on 23 March.

# FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Key findings](#), State of the Nation Report, The Fostering Network, January 2017

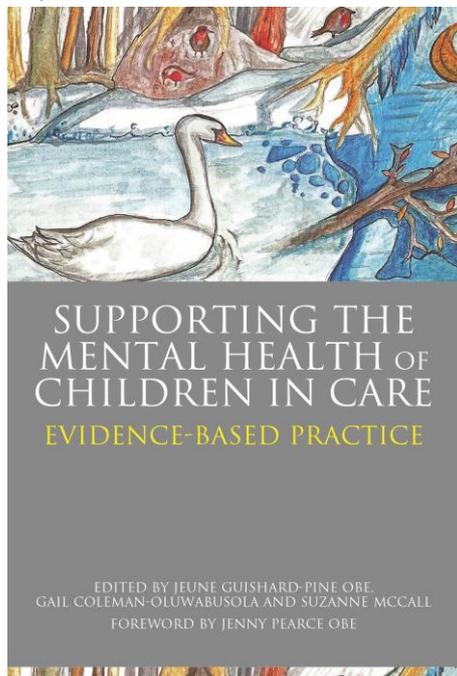
[Our lives, our care](#), Report on looked after children's views on their wellbeing (Bright Spots Project), Coram Voice and University of Bristol, February 2017

## BOOK REVIEW

### 'Supporting the Mental Health of Children in Care' (JKP, 2017)

Reviewed by Kate Cairns

When I read the background notes on the contributors to this book I expected it to be interesting, challenging and an important contribution to the literature on recognising and responding to the needs of children in care. On reading the



book these expectations were met and exceeded. It presents the reader with a range of insights into the troubled inner world of children who have lived through adversity, and how such understanding can be applied to meet the recovery needs of children and young people in care. Taken together these accounts provide compelling evidence that assessing and addressing the mental health needs of these children is essential not optional. And the book also sets out the social and cultural context in which research can provide the evidence base to support this endeavour.

More unexpected, but wholly welcome, was the discovery that reading this book felt like taking part in an inclusive and stimulating seminar. This suggests very skilful editing to draw together such disparate voices and produce a sense of participation in a lively debate. The book engages the reader in exactly the type of co-creative process that the Harvard Center on the Developing Child ('From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts', May 2016) suggests is required in order to build the community resilience which is vital if outcomes for vulnerable children are to improve.

The strength of the book is that the voices in it are both disparate and authoritative, and that this diversity is recognised and celebrated. This "kaleidoscope" of integrated working, so ably described and validated in chapter 11, is at the very heart of co-creation of services. Adversity fractures the inner world of children and disrupts their mental health. It is essential that the adults around those children can get together and provide the integrated network of support within which recovery is possible. This book illustrates what such networks might look like, and how the network must support not just the child but also the adults who support the child.

If I had still been a foster carer or a practising social worker I would have carried this book around with me as a source of inspiration and comfort at those moments when secondary trauma or compassion fatigue threatened to overwhelm me. Others may be less in need of a talisman, but in my opinion, this book is not just an important contribution to the literature, it is essential reading for anyone involved in supporting the mental health of children in care.

*Kate Cairns*

[See book reviews on Rees Centre website](#)

## YOUNG VOICES

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of January I was given the amazing opportunity of taking over the research planning at the Rees Centre for a Takeover Day. This gave me a chance to flaunt the knowledge gained during my A level in Sociology. I got to work with two awesome individuals - Nikki Luke and Sally Winiarski - at the Director's office. I was updated on current research done by the centre and the variety of different types of research that are used to interview young people, their foster carers, teachers and social workers. All this was done whilst we sipped tea and stuffed our faces with tasty flapjacks.

I enjoyed the tasty snacks, but I also learned there were other young people with experiences similar to my own; One of these was the feeling of exclusion during respite. I'm a care leaver now, so I don't dread going to a stranger's house once a month, but it felt reassuring (and a bit worrying) that others out there still feel the way I felt about it. Furthermore, I found out that as part of the PGCE there is an optional module about children in care, which I thought should be made compulsory due to the increasing demand for foster places. Some teachers do not know how to deal with people in the position I was in. I was glad to hear Rees Centre ensures that all the new teachers complete this module. I gave some ideas on how more work could be done to help the voices of young people to be heard far and wide. Hopefully some of them will be implemented!

My lunch was spent at the Lady Margaret Hall college, where I got to eat a duck roll the size of my hand. I was taken on a tour with a Junior Dean, Vania Pinto, who previously interviewed me for one of her projects. It was great fun, especially when one of the principals looked like they were holding a doughnut, which was actually a very old fossil. I never knew that a fossilized doughnut has been discovered.

Back at the Rees Centre, I got to work with Dr Ellie Ott, who is setting up a studying the matching process in foster care to see how it could be improved. She had drawn up some interview questions for young people and I commented on them.

At the end day, I was given another tour, this time around the library, where all magic of thinking happens. There I got to witness University students who were working on top secret educational research and studying to be teachers.

Overall, It was an enlightening day, where I got to meet an old friend and learn so many new facts. I feel like the information I gained will enable me to address the education section on the pledge for the children in care council better.