

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
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Rees Centre Newsletter #5 September 2013

CONTENTS

[Research Updates](#)

Investigating People's Motivation to Foster – study update

Increasing the Benefits of Foster Carer Peer Support – study update

How are Foster Carers Selected? – international literature review published

[Events](#)

[Rees Centre News](#)

Teenagers in Fostering Seminar series announced

Rees Centre blog

Conference presentations

[Foster Care in the News](#)

[Young Voices](#)

What makes a good foster carer?

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RESEARCH UPDATES

Investigating People's Motivation to Foster - research study update

Ten fostering providers have now forwarded details of over 200 people who inquired about fostering during May-July and are willing to be interviewed. Our wonderful team of foster carer consultants are working hard to complete as many interviews as possible though some people have been hard to contact or changed their mind about participating once contacted. These 15 foster carers have been undertaking telephone interviews to find out what made them inquire, whether they have inquired before, what made them inquire to this particular provider, what the influence was if any, of *Foster Care Fortnight*, what their expectations are of fostering, the qualities they think are needed by foster carers, what they think will be the challenges and concerns, their expectations of possible impact on their own children (if relevant), the expectations or reactions from family & friends and whether they have any preferences for the age or type of child (e.g. disability) they wish to foster.

See 'Young voices' at the end of this newsletter for Ian's views of what makes a good foster carer.



Increasing the Benefits of Foster Carer Peer Support – research study update

Data collection has now begun on our project investigating fostering service providers' use of foster carer peer support schemes. Three local authorities and one independent provider have met with us to design new or modify existing contact schemes, informed by the messages from [our peer support review](#). The providers have now used these messages to develop local support groups and buddying/mentoring schemes, which will be evaluated over a 6-month period in terms of their link to carers' attitudes to fostering, stress and relationships with foster children in their care. We will report on the results of this evaluation in May-June 2014.

How are Foster Carers Selected? – international literature review

This month sees the publication of [our latest international review](#), in which we examine a range of instruments designed for use in the selection of foster carers. The review looks at questionnaires, evidence-gathering forms and supplementary instruments that have been used as part of the selection process, and evaluates the available evidence on their efficacy in predicting positive care outcomes. The review shows that the research on this is very limited. However, key themes emerging on the use of selection instruments include:

- Their potential role to improve the selection of foster carers provided they are not used as the sole basis to accept or reject an applicant.
- Additional potential to use them for identifying strengths and areas in which foster carer applicants are likely to need training and support in the future.
- The lack of longer term outcome measures in the research studies and the fact that the studies have been done on established carers rather than applicants, means that it is impossible to judge whether the selection instruments do indeed help select the most effective foster carers.
- Inadequately trained interviewers that might affect applicants' responses and thereby invalidate the findings.
- A need to recognise the importance of the on-going relationship between applicant and agency in developing and strengthening skills and competencies in fostering.
- The possibility for transfer of selection instruments across countries, bearing in mind that the cultural values reflected in the tool itself or in the process of selection within which it is embedded might create problems.

EVENTS

Outcomes-based Accountability – An International Journey

Mark Friedman, Director, Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, Santa Fe

A special seminar hosted by the Rees Centre & the Core Assets Group

Thursday 3 October 2013, 5-7pm, 15 Norham Gardens (seminar room A). Free event. Booking required.

The Outcomes Based Accountability approach, developed by Mark Friedman, has been widely used in the USA and countries across the world including the UK. It provides practical methods for taking action together that are simple and common sense, which use plain language, produce minimum paper and are useful to managers, community members and decision makers. The approach was one of the influences on the development of the 'Every Child Matters' outcomes framework in England. Mark will provide a brief overview of Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) and international examples of the impact of the approach with a specific focus on improving the quality of life of whole communities and outcomes for customers or service users.

New Seminar Series Announced: Teenagers in foster care - the critical role of carers and other adults

The Rees Centre is delighted to announce the successful award of funding by the Economic and Social Research Council for a seminar series to be organised jointly with the Department of Social Policy also at Oxford, the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Gothenburg.

Seminar participation will be by invitation only to include researchers, foster carers, care leavers, policy makers and professionals. Day long seminars on each of the following topics will be fully reported on the Rees Centre website:

- Core concepts for parenting and fostering teenagers in the future
- Sex in adolescence: Balancing rights and risks
- Future directions for effective interdisciplinary youth justice systems
- Effective support for displaced children: Moving forward
- Innovative approaches to supporting transition to independence

The full programme with speakers and titles will be available on our website very soon.

Video Recordings Now Available

The Past Events page contains links to recordings of previous seminars, where available, and related blog postings.

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/our-events/past-events/>

Rees Centre blog

We welcome your comments on the following topics:

- Merging the roles of Children's Rights Director and Children's Commissioner - *guest post by Matt, a care experienced member of A National Voice*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/young-persons-view-on-merging-the-roles-of-childrens-rights-director-and-childrens-commissioner/>
- Young people's views on coming into care – *guest post by Valerie Dunn, Research Associate, University of Cambridge and Peterborough CLAHRC (Collaborations for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care)*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/young-peoples-views-on-coming-into-care/>
- What is broken can be fixed – *guest post by Scott, a care experienced member of A National Voice and founder of The Puppet Project*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/what-is-broken-can-be-fixed/>
- Safeguarding children in the early years: research messages for professionals in education – *guest post by Professor Harriet Ward, Director of the Centre for Child and Family Research at the University of Loughborough*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/safeguarding-children-in-the-early-years-research-messages-for-professionals-in-education/>
- Why are foster carers important? Young people's views – *guest post by Kurtis Allsop, care experienced young person with Core Assets*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/why-are-foster-carers-important-young-peoples-views-1/>
- Why are foster carers important? Young people's views – *guest post by Ian Thomas, Project Officer with Core Assets and care experienced young person*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/why-are-foster-carers-important-young-peoples-views-2/>
- Why are foster carers important? – *guest post by Richard Brandford, Service Manager Carer Welfare, Core Assets Fostering*
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/why-are-foster-carers-important/>

Conference presentations

On 1 July 2013, *Judy* and *Nikki* presented a workshop on the research of the Rees Centre at the National Commissioning and Contracting Training Conference in Derbyshire. <http://www.psconferences.co.uk/event/children-services/?eID=17>

On 9 July 2013, *Judy* attended the meeting for Designated Teachers of Looked After Children at Surrey County Council and provided the keynote address 'What does the research suggest that designated teachers might do to support Looked After Children to achieve better outcomes?'

On 12 July 2013, *Nikki* presented her work on empathy and social understanding in maltreated children at the European Congress of Psychology in Stockholm. The talk focused on how particular ways of processing social information that children might learn in the context of maltreatment can have negative implications for their relationships with peers.

On 9 September 2013, *Nikki* presented a paper on 'Increasing the benefits of foster carer peer support' at the International Foster Care Research Network Conference in Padova, Italy. The talk focussed on the process of translating the messages from [our review on peer support](#) into practical schemes that will then be evaluated as part of our study on support groups and mentoring/buddying.

Forthcoming events

On 16 September 2013, *Judy* will contribute to a symposium on family-based care in different countries at the International Foster Care Organisation World Conference in Osaka, Japan (13-16 Sep). She will present a keynote on 'What does research suggest that foster care can offer to support positive outcomes for out-of-home children?' *Judy* will also present detailed findings [from our reviews of motivation to foster and foster care peer support](#) at a workshop during the conference. <http://www.ifco.info/node/1078>

On 26 Sept 2013, *Judy* will present a keynote 'Foster carer peer support and motivation to foster: some research findings and implications for practice' at the one day conference organised by the University of Bedfordshire on Supporting Parents and Carers of Teenagers: Useful lessons from research. <http://www.beds.ac.uk/research/iasr/mrc/events/thursday-26-september-2013>

On 16-17 November 2013, *Judy* will present a keynote on research on fostering: 'An overview of recent findings from the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford' and a workshop on foster carer support at the Irish Foster Care Association Conference. <http://www.ifca.ie/index.php/events/event2/>

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

- Progression from care to HE in Scotland-*CELCIS*, 21 May 2013
http://www.celcis.org/resources/entry/from_care_to_uni_research_briefing#
- Groundbreaking new programme heralds brighter future for Scottish children in foster care – *The Fostering Network*, 6 June 2013
<http://www.fostering.net/media/2013/groundbreaking-new-programme-heralds-brighter-future-scottish-children-in-foster-care#.Ue6J2KxmPAk>
- Amendment offers chance to stop young people in care being forced to live alone at 18 – *The Fostering Network*, 10 June 2013
<http://www.fostering.net/media/2013/amendment-offers-chance-stop-young-people-in-care-being-forced-live-alone-18#.Ue6NFKxmPAk>
- Young people leaving care must not be cast out into the cold – *The Guardian*, 11 June 2013
<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/11/young-people-leaving-care>

- Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers, *Ofsted Consultation, 14 June 2013*
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/inspection-of-services-for-children-need-of-help-and-protection-children-looked-after-and-care-leave>
- Good independent fostering provision – *Ofsted Consultation, 14 June 2013*
<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-independent-fostering-provision>
- Call for Foster Carers to Respond to Ofsted Consultations – *The Fostering Network, 20 June 2013*
<http://www.fostering.net/news/2013/call-foster-carers-respond-ofsted-consultations#.Ue6OYaxmPAk>
- Pupils who switch schools in-year do worse in exams – *The Guardian, 21 July 2013*
<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2013/jul/21/pupils-schools-exams>
- Ofsted Consultation Response - *Catch22 National Care Advisory Service, 23 July 2013*
<http://resources.leavingcare.org/uploads/8e444a038875d2bf5b97d6fa29966131.pdf>
- Welfare Changes are Failing Care Leavers – *The Guardian, 1 August 2013*
http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2013/aug/01/welfare-changes-failing-care-leavers?CMP=&et_cid=44352&et_rid=7553356&Linkid=welfare+changes+are+failing+young+care+leavers
- More councils look at care charging for parents – *Children and Young People Now, 13 August 2013*
http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1078065/more-councils-look-care-charges-parents?utm_content=&utm_campaign=130813_EarlyYears&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fcyp%2Fnews%2F1078065%2Fmore-councils-look-care-charges-parents

YOUNG VOICES

“What makes a good foster carer”?

By Ian Thomas, Project Officer with Core Assets and Care Experienced.

I have a lot of experience of foster care, some much better than others admittedly! As an adult and having had the experience of working with young people and foster carers it's a different insight but the facts are the same... I now see the things I used to see when I was in care myself but the difference now is that I can process it much better and furthermore I can articulate it in a way that makes sense to me and others I hope.

Being a good foster carer is about internal qualities within the carer... meaning having an internal desire to make a positive impact on a young person's life this internal desire has characteristics such as caring, considerate, patience, loving and compassion for individuals and to be the best to support in the best way and so on...

But the care system is full of good willed people who are not always making positive effect in the lives of young people. I notice a lot that selflessness is the key to fostering because I see that foster carers place expectations on the outcomes of the young people who live with them and it's like they start to resent them when they don't conform I am not sure that the foster carers even know this is happening themselves! Some of this is fear based, fear that they are not doing good enough!, or keeping the young person safe/ happy... and through the willingness to do the right thing they end up making it about them..

But the opposite I see to this would be... Understanding and remembering it's a journey that is inconsistent and there is no one way, sometimes we take 2 steps back to go 4 steps forward, it's about progress not perfection and as I always

say to carers and other professionals just because we don't see the flower grow it does not mean we did not plant the seed...

Nobody can avoid being human that's a fact! Good supervision and self-honesty can work through many issues effectively, the best carers were the ones who allowed me to be who I wanted to be not what they wanted me to be...

Just because I have care experience does not make me right about anything, this is what I see and how I feel, everything I know and feel has to be up for debate, it's an ever changing world we live in...

But all in all we have to stay "teachable", life and people are very diverse and so must our care be... After all everyday is really a school day 😊

Ian Thomas

- To see how the qualities highlighted by Ian compare to the ones measured in published instruments, take a look at the review just published by the Rees Centre: [How are foster carers selected?](#)