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## RESEARCH UPDATES

### **Effective parent-and-child fostering: Summary of Findings**

Our latest international literature review, to be published shortly, looks at findings from 35 academic studies and reports from the UK and North America which identified aspects of successful parent-and-child fostering provision.

The review revealed an imbalance in the literature towards research on teenagers in care who become parents, rather than adult parents who live in foster homes with their children by arrangement, and towards mothers rather than fathers. We refer to 'parent-and-child placements' in our report though in England the correct terminology for an adult parent (not in care) living in a foster home with their child is a 'parent-and-child arrangement' (Adams and



Dibben, 2011).<sup>1</sup>

The report finds that some of the characteristics of a 'good' placement identified by young parents, foster carers and social workers were those more generally associated with successful fostering of any young person:

- such as good 'chemistry' between foster carer and young person, clear 'house rules', engaging the young person in decisions about their placement and offering stable relationships with carers and social workers.

Other factors contributing to positive placements were specific to parent-and-child provision:

- The importance of engaging young parents in services provided for them.
- Consistent support from a trusted adult (usually the foster carer) exemplified through listening to the parent, being someone they feel able to confide in, and helping them to access services for parents.
- A clear agreement about the foster carer's role in assessing the parent's capabilities, and the extent to which they can be expected to act as 'babysitters' for the child.
- Being allowed to be a teenager, for example by the foster carer offering occasional babysitting in order to enable the young parent to go out with friends.

#### **Recommendations for policy and practice include:**

- Providing more specialist parent-and-child placements with dedicated training and support, where this is the appropriate option and does not disrupt those relationships that have potential to shape the parent's post-fostering outcomes (e.g. with a foster carer or the child's other parent).
- Facilitating greater peer support, both for specialist carers of parent-and-child placements and for the parents themselves.
- Service providers and social work professionals needing to understand the reluctance of parents who live in foster homes with their children to engage with social services. Any necessary assessments should be conducted sensitively to avoid leaving young parents feeling stigmatised.
- For teenage parents, seeking ways to extend support beyond statutory care age, in particular for parenting, housing and education, in order to ensure better longer-term outcomes.

#### **How Views of Parenting and Teenagers apply to Foster Care**

Postgraduate students presented relevant research at a poster session during the [Teenagers in Foster Care seminar](#) on 16 January 2014. All posters are available on the [Rees website](#).

- Effects of Early Childhood Attachment and Care Status on Eating Behaviour during Adolescence.  
*Áine Kelly (Health Experiences Research Group, Department of Primary Health Care, University of Oxford)*
- What is the current state of knowledge of children and young people in foster care's experiences of ambiguous loss, and what is the quality of the evidence base for interventions?  
*Martha Beale (MA Social Work student, Oxford Brookes University)*
- Sons and daughters of foster carers: how they support looked after young people.  
*Allison Tatton (Newman/Bristol University)*

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, P. and Dibben, E., 2011. *Parent and child fostering*. London: BAAF

## EVENTS

### **Tuesday 25 March 2014**

#### **Rees Centre Seminar from 5 to 6.30pm, 15 Norham Gardens (seminar room A), Oxford**

The speaker will be [Professor Robert Flynn](#), School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa.

Free event. No advance booking required. Drinks will be served.

### **Wednesday 26 March 2014 at 4.30pm**

#### **Online seminar open to all, hosted by the National College for Teaching and Leadership**

Judy Sebba, Director of the Rees Centre, will give a short presentation “*What can schools do to raise the learning and attainment of looked after children?*”

This will be followed by a 20 minute online question and answer session.

Further information, including details of how to login, will be available on the websites of the Rees Centre and [National College](#) nearer the time or contact [Ann.WILLACY@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Ann.WILLACY@education.gsi.gov.uk).

## REES CENTRE NEWS

### **Judy Sebba, Oxford Mail, 3 December 2013**

Judy was delighted to be featured in the University Life column in the Oxford Mail. She discusses the challenges faced by children and parents in the fostering system, as well as the ways in which the Rees Centre works with the community: ‘The centre aims to find the best ways to improve the lives of children and young people in foster care. We do this by meeting regularly with young people... their foster carers, social workers and teachers.’ She continues: ‘There are key things we have discovered about what works in foster care... we have learned that support for foster carers is very important in making sure that children stay as long as is needed and that the carers don’t give up fostering.’

[http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/10850004.Foster\\_care\\_is\\_a\\_difficult\\_but\\_rewarding\\_challenge/](http://www.oxfordmail.co.uk/news/10850004.Foster_care_is_a_difficult_but_rewarding_challenge/)

### **Young person interviews Judy**

Judy was recently interviewed on the role of the Rees Centre by a young person participating in Takeover Day. This short video is now available on the home page of the Rees website at <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/>

### **Rees Centre, Department of Education seminar, University of Oxford, 17 February 2014**

Professor Gillian Schofield from the University of East Anglia spoke to an audience of social workers, service managers, carers and academics on *Professional foster carers and committed parents: the challenges of providing permanence in long term foster care*.

Slides and the video recording of her presentation will shortly be available on the Rees website.

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

### **Rees Centre blog**

We welcome your comments on the following topics:

- The Education of Children in Care: who is to blame? Post by Aoife O’Higgins, Rees Centre  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/phd-study-on-education-of-children-in-care/>

- How Can Care Leavers Be Better Supported When Undertaking Postgraduate Study? Post by Áine Kelly, Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford and Care Experienced  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/care-leavers-and-postgraduate-study/>
- Approved to Foster. Post by Stuart Hatch, Foster Carer  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/approved-to-foster/>
- Care Leavers Animated Documentary, "Finding My Way". Post by Valerie Dunn  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/finding-my-way-animated-documentary-by-young-people-on-leaving-care/>
- Magic Moments. Post by Lynne Blencowe, Foster Carer  
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/magic-moments/>

## Recent Conference presentations

11 December 2013, DfE Partnership Learning Day for Fostering Providers – Judy and Nikki presented a session on Rees Centre research and the importance of evaluation.

11 December 2013, BAAF Independent Fostering Providers Forum – Judy and Nikki presented a session on Research in Fostering.

## FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

There's No Place like Home, Huffington Post, 29 November 2013

[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-rahilly/child-abuse-protection-nspcc\\_b\\_4356473.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-rahilly/child-abuse-protection-nspcc_b_4356473.html)

Young people to be allowed to remain in foster care until age 21, The Guardian, 4 December 2013

<http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/dec/04/young-people-allowed-foster-care-21>

Supporting care leavers in staying with foster families until 21<sup>st</sup> birthday, Written ministerial statement, Department for Education, 4 December 2013

<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/commons-vote-office/December%202013/3%20December/4th-December-2013/3.EDUCATION-Supporting-Care-Leaver-Foster-Families.pdf>

Report reveals gaps in council foster carer recruitment, Children and Young People Now, 4 December 2013

[http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1140909/report-reveals-gaps-council-foster-carer-recruitment?utm\\_content=&utm\\_campaign=041213\\_Daily2&utm\\_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm\\_medium=adestra\\_email&utm\\_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fnews%2F1140909%2Freport-reveals-gaps-council-foster-carer-recruitment](http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1140909/report-reveals-gaps-council-foster-carer-recruitment?utm_content=&utm_campaign=041213_Daily2&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fnews%2F1140909%2Freport-reveals-gaps-council-foster-carer-recruitment)

Local Authority Fostering Service, Benchmark Report 2012/2013, The Fostering Network, December 2013

<http://www.fostering.net/sites/www.fostering.net/files/uploads/pdf/benchmark-report-v7.pdf>

Care Leavers need a strong, emotional support network, The Guardian, 12 December 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2013/dec/12/care-leavers-strong-emotional-support-network>

Combating Care Leavers' Isolation at Christmas – The Topé Project, Community Care, 17 December 2013

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2013/12/17/combating-care-leavers-isolation-christmas-tope-project/#.Us1n9Pu9agJ>

Government reluctant to raise leaving care age, Children and Young People Now, 20 December 2013

[http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141250/government-reluctant-raise-leaving-care-age?WT.rss\\_f=Joint+working+Disciplines&WT.rss\\_a=Government+reluctant+to+raise+leaving+care+age](http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141250/government-reluctant-raise-leaving-care-age?WT.rss_f=Joint+working+Disciplines&WT.rss_a=Government+reluctant+to+raise+leaving+care+age)

Councils told to stop housing vulnerable children miles away from home, Department for Education, 3 January 2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/councils-told-to-stop-housing-vulnerable-children-miles-away-from-home>

Minister launches consultation on fostering services regulations, Northern Ireland Executive, 13 January 2014  
[http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dhssps/news-dhssps-13012014-.htm?WT.mc\\_id=rss-news](http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dhssps/news-dhssps-13012014-.htm?WT.mc_id=rss-news)

How to prevent breakdown of fostering relationships, Guardian Professional, 14 January 2014  
<http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2014/jan/14/how-prevent-breakdown-fostering-relationships>

Government announces better support for children and young people's mental health, 21 January 2014  
[http://leavingcare.org/news?page\\_ID=14&news\\_ID=634](http://leavingcare.org/news?page_ID=14&news_ID=634)

House of Commons Education Select Committee announces new inquiry into 16+ care options, Catch 22 National Care Advisory Service, 23 January 2014  
[http://leavingcare.org/news?page\\_ID=14&news\\_ID=636](http://leavingcare.org/news?page_ID=14&news_ID=636)

Charities call on Welsh government to give fostered young people the chance to stay, Fostering Network, 29 January 2014  
[http://www.fostering.net/media/2014/charities-call-welsh-government-give-fostered-young-people-chance-stay#.Uujqd\\_vFKHs](http://www.fostering.net/media/2014/charities-call-welsh-government-give-fostered-young-people-chance-stay#.Uujqd_vFKHs)

University support for care leavers in decline, Children and Young People Now, 31 January 2014  
[http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141895/university-support-care-leavers-decline?utm\\_content=&utm\\_campaign=310114\\_Daily2&utm\\_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm\\_medium=adestra\\_email&utm\\_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fnews%2F1](http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1141895/university-support-care-leavers-decline?utm_content=&utm_campaign=310114_Daily2&utm_source=Children%20%26%20Young%20People%20Now&utm_medium=adestra_email&utm_term=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.cypnow.co.uk%2Fnews%2F1)

Care leavers need help to choose right University, Who Cares Trust, 31 January 2014  
<http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/news.php/387/care-leavers-need-help-to-choose-right-university>

Survival of the fittest - Improving life chances for Care leavers, The Centre for Social Justice, January 2014  
<http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/publications/survival-of-the-fittest-improving-life-chances-for-care-leavers>

Report highlights data protection challenges for fostering and adoption agencies, ICO, 5 February 2014  
[http://ico.org.uk/news/latest\\_news/2014/report-highlights-data-protection-challenges-for-fostering-and-adoption-agencies-05022014](http://ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2014/report-highlights-data-protection-challenges-for-fostering-and-adoption-agencies-05022014)

Sir Martin Narey: Overhauling children's social work training, Department for Education, 13 February 2014  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sir-martin-narey-overhauling-childrens-social-work-training>

## YOUNG VOICES

Since this blog post was written, the government has set out its plans to address the gap in mental health provision. This includes better support for children and young people with mental health issues.

[http://leavingcare.org/news?page\\_ID=14&news\\_ID=634](http://leavingcare.org/news?page_ID=14&news_ID=634)

Carrie Wilson writes a personal blog at <http://carriewilsoncareleaver.blogspot.co.uk/>

She published the following on 10 January 2014 concerning mental health services for young people.

### Mental Health - A battle to feel okay (where are the services?)

So I am sure you have noticed that I have not posted in a long time.. And for that I am sorry. It has been a case of giving my time and energy to fighting to get my family the right services to help get them better. For anyone who has tried to access mental health services/multi team agencies you may have come up against the same brick walls as myself recently.. Here is my journey. That I hope will help ease yours.

I have become a full time care coordinator alongside my full time job at the Care Leavers Association and full time job as a parent/partner/keeping myself moving forwards.

The services at times have seemed to have no sense of urgency to help in my predicament.. With me constantly pushing different services for different answers to get to the end goal of having a good working support group for my brother to get him better and

happy.

It's hard... Really hard. I got to a point I were I was, what felt like, a day away from a complete breakdown .. I could not push myself any further. I sat in a ball crying trying to figure out what else I could do, trying to pull something, anything out from deep inside to carry on the losing battle. I couldn't put trust in anyone to get things done, because they just were not working fast enough and I was seeing the results of a person I love and adore spiral utterly out of control, hell bent on self destruction. I fell, stumbled, could not go on. I rang social services, held up my hands and cried that 'I could not do it' anymore'. Then had to explain what 'it' was.. I had never had them involved before.. Nearly 3 years I had dealt with so much without anything. Maybe because a deep ingrained issue with social services involvement, scared of people making judgment of how I was parenting, living my life. 'You have been through care, you will be a shit parent'

I was told they would do an assessment and 'help me' with my 'parenting skills', and to be perfectly honest I felt utterly insulted and pathetic.. Had it really all been my parenting that had got me to this point.. I doubted it, but agreed anyway. They would send someone next week.. At this point my brother had been missing a day and it was nearing 5pm on a Friday. No sense of urgency given.. 'If he doesn't come back, call the police'.. They could only bring him back, they wouldn't help me fix him and keep him safe. I spent a weekend not knowing what to do, I had been blocked on Facebook and my brother had turned his phone off.. He didn't want to be found.

Sunday 5pm I get a phone call... 'Hi this is ... he is with us... But he is on the way to hospital... He drank bleach...'

My heart dropped.. I had failed, I hadn't been listened to when I was desperately begging for help.. This wasn't my parenting.. He needed mental health help and I couldn't provide that.

We beat the ambulance to the hospital then spent the next 7 hours trying to get him assessed/safe/admitted/anything. They didn't want to admit him, he thankfully was physically fine.. But if he left I knew, and he knew, he would do whatever he could to hurt himself. 'I don't see any other option to stop how I am feeling'. We both begged for him to be admitted and he finally got a bed nearly 7 hours later.

At this point I had left a voice mail with adult mental health services .. Where my brother had a worker.. Not camhs.. They had apparently washed their hands with him once he turned 16. (Funny how if you are Inpatient you can use the service up to 18.. Just a thought) to tell them what had happened and that the fact he had only seen his worker 2 times in 3 months, wasn't working.

I contacted my boss 'I don't think I will be able to make it in tomorrow.. My brother drank bleach to kill himself.. I'm sorry'. I went home, I didn't sleep.

8.30 I rang the hospital.. 'How is he...'

9.00 I rang the adult services 'did you get my voice mail.. What's happening... '

'His worker was not in.. Only 2 staff on call.. Not sure what to do.. Can't really come out to us in case something happens here'.

He needed a mental health assessment, he couldn't leave hospital without one and because we were 'out of area' there was (for once) an urgency of 'he's not ours, your services need to deal with this'.

'Our' services didn't come out.. We didn't know they weren't until 3pm.. 6 hours messing about, undecided on what to do next. The local camhs worker saw my brother at 4, said sorry repeatedly.. She could have seen him at 11am.. But was told by our services they would come.. They told her at 2 that actually they weren't. We were half hour drive from 'our' services.. Too far to go 'just in case' something happened elsewhere.

15 mins with the worker and he has decided he needs to be in patient again. But there are 'no beds'... So there is no other option than to bring him home...?? But how do I look after him if I need to go to work? Nearly a week of me trying to go to work, the services get him into a bed in a completely different local authority. I think that hopefully they will listen and help more than the last place.

So off he goes there.. The first meeting is promising.. I feel confident.. Maybe this will help fix his issues.. And everything will be good...

A week in and this image is shattered... I get a phone call saying my brother has gone missing... He was meant to be back hours ago and isn't..

I ask the questions.. Whys he been aloud out when you know he is high risk? Why was he not supervised as you said he would be at the first meeting...?

"This isn't a secure unit, we can't force him to stay" utter lack of taking responsibility for the situation

Every few days for two weeks an incident like this occurs, making me lose all trust in the services and making me very stressed about the whole situation. This also made my brother lose trust.. "They can't stop me, they can't help me".

He ended up leaving the place early due to posting a picture of him and another young person on Facebook.. The girl knew it was posted and was fine with it, it didn't say anything about the place or who she was.. He was thrown out.. She stayed. No plans in place.

I told them I can't keep him safe, "he can't come to me because if cannot keep him safe"...

Local CAMHS say no, a flurry of phone calls where no one knows what is going on, where he is going.. And I have to go pick him up as they will just release him into Leeds with no money or parent as he is 16 and not under a Section... Am I the only one who finds the idea and logic of letting a mentally unstable young person who is highly depressed just walk out of somewhere totally and utterly wrong?!

I spent over an hour on the phone to a worker there and said I wanted to complain.. To be told 'it probably won't go anywhere' ?! Umm what?

Anyway, he came home to me, I then had to spend more time working from home to watch him and keep him safe, insisted more needed to be done to help... Which we are now getting...

We are now 4 months from that situation.. And I can finally sit back and spend time to look at the situation and really look at how the services did and didn't work. I fully believe that if I had not put so much effort and time into coordinating all the different services.. It would be a very different blog I would be writing.

My brother is doing a lot better, he is getting regular support from different services and I feel has really matured, he's not dealt with all the different issues.. That is a long term battle but we are moving forwards, not battling round in a violent bubble of self distruction!

It is a new year, and I promise to write more here, my energy levels are back, I can breath and think about the bigger picture again.

Thank you to all of those who stood and helped, sat and listened when I ranted/cried/stressed

To those who kept me going and provided a safe haven to recuperate

The battle is won... But the war for better and more connected services is still very much ongoing - BRING IT ON.

By Carrie Wilson, Young People's Project Coordinator at the Care Leavers' Association

## EXTRAS

The Higher Education handbook for Care Leavers, *Updated version published January 2014, Who Cares Trust*  
Available free from the following site:

<http://www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk/pages/the-h.e-handbook.html>

Children In Care Council Newsletter, Message from Edward Timpson MP, *Winter Issue 2014, Department for Education*

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/279677/CICC\\_WINTER - ET\\_FINAL\\_2\\_.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/279677/CICC_WINTER_-_ET_FINAL_2_.pdf)