

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Rees Centre Newsletter #8 April 2014

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RESEARCH UPDATES

Effective parent-and-child fostering: an international literature review

The newest report by the Rees Centre is now available. A summary of findings was included in the February newsletter.

All our publications can be freely downloaded as pdf files from the Rees Centre website at <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/publications/>

If you would like to receive free hard copies of the full report or a short summary of key findings, please email the number of copies you require and your address to the Rees team at rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk



The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data.

Study funded by The Nuffield Foundation February 2014 – April 2015

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/educational-progress-of-looked-after-children/>

This new research study will identify key factors associated with the low educational outcomes of young people in care in secondary schools in England. It will explore the relationship between educational outcomes, young people's care histories and individual characteristics by linking the National Pupil Database and the data on Children Looked After for the cohort who completed GCSEs in 2013. Outcomes for children with different characteristics (e.g. gender, ethnicity and socio-economic status), and the relationships between outcomes and placement type and stability, school stability and length of time in care will be explored. These statistical analyses will be complemented by interviews with 36 young people in six local authorities and with adults significant in their educational careers, such as foster carers, teachers, social workers and Virtual School staff. These interviews will explore what can be done to improve the progress of secondary school pupils in care and how better coordination of services might contribute.

How will the research be used?

The project will identify ways to improve educational outcomes of young people in care and influence resource priorities. Local authorities, independent fostering providers, schools, foster carers and young people with care experience will be involved throughout the project in order to ensure that the research is relevant, realistic and has maximum impact. Policy makers in central and local government will also be regularly updated on the findings and their views sought on further questions that might be studied. The research will identify types of data and ways in which the data collection might be improved to enable better use of it in future to monitor outcomes and inform improvements in services.

Research Team

The research is being undertaken collaboratively by researchers in the School for Policy Studies and Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol and the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education and Education Department, University of Oxford.

Research Team: Professor Judy Sebba, Professor David Berridge, Professor Steve Strand, Professor Sally Thomas, Dr Nikki Luke, Dr John Fletcher, Professor Ian Sinclair, Dr Karen Bell.

More information

Contact Sally Winiarski at the Rees Centre, Sally.winiarski@education.ox.ac.uk

EVENTS

Teenagers in Foster Care Seminar Series (by invitation only)

Seminar 3 will be held on 25 June 2014: Future directions for effective interdisciplinary youth justice systems.

[Seminar 1: How views on parenting and teenagers apply to foster care](#)

A summary report of themes and discussions from the first seminar, videos of each presentation and research posters from postgraduate students are now available on the Rees website.

Seminar 2: Sex in adolescence, balancing rights and risks

Please visit the website to see the poster presentation “Sexualized Girls-Narratives of the Safeguarded”, by Lara Pizycki at Northumbria University. A seminar report and video recordings will be available shortly.

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/teenagers-in-foster-care/>

REES CENTRE NEWS

National Virtual School Headteachers’ Conference, Oxford, 21 March 2014

The contribution of Virtual School Headteachers to developing resilience in children in care



Held in Lady Margaret Hall, University of Oxford, the annual conference, jointly organised by Oxfordshire County Council and the Rees Centre, was attended by 150 delegates from Virtual School teams across the country.

While the conference is held annually, this year’s event was particularly important as the new Children and Families Act makes the role of the Virtual School Head a statutory requirement for each local authority. The educational attainment of looked after children, while improving, is not doing so fast enough. The role of the Virtual School Head, who champions the education of children in the authority’s care, as if they all attended the same school, has been shown to have a positive impact on educational progress.

Young People’s Presentation

Seven care experienced young people gave a presentation at the conference after discussing their experiences of education. Their key findings and recommendations for Virtual School Heads are below:

- *Get to know your Looked After Children and Care Leavers –*
We are not all the same; we have different needs, know your cohort to best serve them.
- *Minimize Disruption –*
How does it make you feel? How can a child concentrate when there is disruption? Help resolve the disruption and the education will fall into place.
- *Challenge the stereotypes –*
We can achieve, our actions as children and our situations should not dictate the attitudes about our ‘achievements’ by the adults around us.
- Education is the number one priority for you, but is it for us?

What can you do as a Virtual School Headteacher?

- Involve care leavers in statutory training of staff/teachers
- Regularly celebrate achievements
- Listen and act on the issues in your area
- Listen and act on the national issues
- Make a pledge [many attendees did this, either using the poster at the conference or on Twitter – see the following link.]

If you are curious to see what people were saying on Twitter about the Virtual School Headteachers’ Conference, you can see all the comments in one place using the link below:

<https://storify.com/NikkiLukePsych/virtual-school-headteachers-conference-2014>



Rees Centre seminar, Professor Robert Flynn, University of Ottawa, 25 March 2014

How can teachers and schools promote the educational achievement of children in care?

Slides and the video recording from Professor Flynn’s presentation are available on the Rees Centre website:

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

Rees Centre blog

We welcome your comments on the following topics:

- What's in a name? By Aoife O'Higgins
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/whats-in-a-name/>
- Young people's everyday lives and their sense of belonging. By Lena Hedin
<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/how-to-increase-the-involvement-of-young-people-in-decisions-which-affect-them/>

Great North Run, September 2014



Nikki Luke, research officer at the Rees Centre, has started training for the half marathon and will be taking part in the Bupa Great North Run in September. Nikki will be raising money for the Who Cares? Trust. You can sponsor Nikki at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/NikkiLuke>

Conference presentations

17 March 2014, keynote by Judy Sebba to Joint Fostering Panel and Service Development day, Essex County Council.

26 March 2014, online seminar hosted by the National College for Teaching and Leadership, keynote presentation by Judy Sebba *"What can schools do to raise attainment of looked after children?"*

If you missed the live seminar, Judy's presentation and follow up discussion was recorded and can be downloaded:

<https://btevent.webex.com/btevent/lsr.php?RCID=2e8019095b0049aca9775fb9abc5b42c>

19 May 2014, Judy and Nikki are both presenting at a multi-agency conference organised by the Virtual School in Brighton and Hove at the Amex stadium.

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[How to Get Better Value for Money In Children's Services, The Guardian, 27 February 2014](#)

[Someone to Care, Experiences of Leaving Care, Barnardo's, February 2014](#)

[I was one of Britain's last foundlings, The Guardian, 8 March 2014](#)

[Landmark Children and Families Act 2014 gains royal assent, Department for Education, 13 March 2014](#)

[Five ways children's social workers can change lives, The Guardian, 18 March 2014](#)

[NSPCC research shows rigorous evaluation pays off in social care, The Guardian, 25 March 2014](#)

[Child mental health issues 'missed', BBC News, 25 March 2014](#)

[Parenting scheme cuts number of children going into care, The Guardian, 26 March 2014](#)

[From a distance: looked after children living away from their home area \(OFTSED\), NSPCC Information Service, 14 April 2014](#)

[Law allowing children to stay with foster carers until 21 is both confusing and discriminatory, Community Care, 16 April 2014](#)

[Attainment Gap between looked after children and the rest, Department for Education, 16 April 2014](#)

[Government's first foster-friendly employer, Department for Education, 24 April 2014](#)

BOOK REVIEW

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, Interdisciplinary Perspectives.

(Eds) Barry Carpenter, Carolyn Blackburn and Jo Egerton.

Published by Routledge: London. 2014.

Reviewed by Liam Curran Independent Social Worker/Certified FASD Educator

It is without question that this book is presented at a most interesting time of British social policy, as the country considers the sensitive and ethical challenge of criminalising mothers who consume alcohol heavily during pregnancy. This book quickly informs us that Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASDs) are cited to be one of the leading causes of childhood disability in the 21st century. We also learn in the chapters that follow, that children and young people with FASD are currently the largest group of children within our fostering and adoptive services. The authors demonstrate eloquently how adoptive parents must become their own experts in dealing with FASD, as there is a “paucity of professional knowledge” (pg65)

This lack of professional knowledge is stated repeatedly by many contributors throughout this book, with both the fostering and adoptive parents struggling in the caregiver role due to untrained and unskilled professionals. We read what happens when society fails to see these children, resulting in a high percentage of adolescents suffering school failure, addiction, homelessness and criminal justice issues. It is great to see Jo Egerton's advice on transitions to adulthood – reminding us that FASD is a disability across the lifespan. The focus on the adult side of living with FASD is still in its infancy in many research communities.

This book provides a wealth of contemporary insights into a rapidly ascending public health issue of main stream public importance in the 21st century. The human and social cost burden of FASD permeates all aspects of our society today. The book is unequivocal in its call to public health agencies to initiate robust programmes of prevention throughout all facets of society and community.

This book is highly recommended to social policy personnel, university educators or allied health professionals and frontline professionals in children's services. This book can and will greatly enhance society's knowledge and understanding of this devastating but preventable disability. In doing so, it is hoped that we may see these children and adults who are living with FASD within our social services provision and respond appropriately.

YOUNG VOICES

Reflections on the Virtual School Headteachers' Conference from Becci Wallace and Karylle Phillips, both care experienced young people.

Young people's workshop

I attended a workshop the day prior to the conference and was one of the people that helped to put the presentation together on what helped or hindered our educational progress. It was a great experience to be part of and meeting other care leavers and hearing their views and experiences of the care system and education. Also it is great to be able to help change the way things are done for young people in the care system so they don't have to go through the stigmas and hard times I did.

Becci Wallace

"A great teacher never stops being a student."

Just one quote which for me, can describe the many individuals that attended the Virtual School Heads Conference. It was a pleasure to meet so many individuals within education who are making every effort to learn more about looked after children and how to support their educational development.

As a previously looked after child during a time when Virtual School Heads were non-existent and when school staff just taught children, to have the opportunity to witness now these same individuals sharing ideas and best practice experiences, amongst one another in order to improve the school experiences for looked after children, was simply overwhelming.

The conference was a great opportunity to hear and experience some of the issues looked after children are faced with when in education. From disruption both within the class room and outside school, to exploring the negative perceptions held about looked after children and their predicted long term achievements and finally the areas that could improve these experiences including involving care leavers in training, involving looked after children in changes and celebrating achievements no matter how small.

I had the opportunity to meet some very inspirational individuals who appear to be best placed in their roles. I cannot wait till the next conference where I am sure I will hear stories of success within many areas and where we can celebrate the great changes being made in schools for looked after children everywhere.

"Education is a number one priority for you, but it may not be for a looked after child."

*Karylle Phillips *A voice for children & young people everywhere*, Independent Trainer & Consultant*

EXTRAS

Jade Ward, Assistant Participation Worker at Catch 22, attended the launch in March of the music video "How to Fly".

The Springboard Music and Video Production Project is funded by Springboard in association with Inspired Youth and partners City of York Council, York St John University and Access to Music. The project provides young people with real experiences of care / leaving care, to come together in a professional environment to create a song and video with inspirational artists to share their voices with the world.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vD4TYdpaEEU>

The video is not only inspirational but shares a very personal story that everyone should hear – well done to all involved.