

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

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RESEARCH UPDATES

What works in preventing and treating poor mental health in Looked After Children?

The NSPCC has commissioned the Rees Centre to undertake a review of the research evidence on this topic. This includes a comprehensive overview of interventions/ approaches to supporting good mental health, effective approaches to the assessment of emotional wellbeing and mental health needs, key principles for effective direct work and key principles for effective indirect work. The review will be published jointly by NSPCC and the Rees Centre and be freely available on both websites. The key findings will be included in our next newsletter.

Developing evidence-informed educational practice for children in care

The Rees Centre has been awarded funding from the University of Oxford's ESRC Impact Acceleration Account for two

part-time Visiting Practitioner Fellowships. We are thrilled to welcome Dr Alun Rees, until recently Headteacher at the Virtual School in Leeds and member of the National Steering Group and Lucy Wawrzyniak, Deputy Headteacher of the Oxfordshire Virtual School, to work with the Rees Centre for six months. Work will focus on developing mutually beneficial relationships between educational and fostering service providers and the Rees Centre to assist practitioners to make better use of research.

The Fellowships will build on existing partnerships with both the National Virtual School Headteachers' Steering Group and Oxfordshire County Council's Virtual School and fostering services. At a time when providers are struggling to reduce the achievement gap between children in care and the general school population and the Pupil Premium Plus has been more than doubled offering a significant resource, it is critical that the Rees Centre consults fully with a range of educational partners to identify gaps in research and to assist with dissemination and interpretation of evidence.

New Key Messages Publications

Short of time or require just an overview? These documents present the key points from our literature reviews on 2 sides of A4. We will continue to add to this series. Find them listed on the [Publications](#) page of the website.

[Key Messages about parent-and-child fostering.](#)

[Key Messages about peer support.](#)

[Key Messages about why people become foster carers.](#)

EVENTS

Rees Centre Webinar: Integrating Research and Practice

Online at 4pm on 1 July 2014.

Open to all. Specific instructions for participating:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/live-ga-with-rees-researchers-1-july/>

Department of Education, University of Oxford seminar series

The Rees Centre is pleased to welcome Dr Janet Boddy, University of Sussex.

Dr Boddy will contribute to a debate on whether care is a risk or protective factor in the educational and well-being outcomes of looked after children.

Monday 20 October 2014 5-6.30pm at 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Teenagers in Foster Care: the critical role of carers and other adults (ESRC seminar series)

Seminar 1: How views of parenting and teenagers apply to foster care.

[Recordings of speakers and discussion report from seminar 1.](#)

Edward Timpson, Children's Minister

John Coleman, University of Oxford

Gunvor Andersson, University of Lund

Frances Gardner, University of Oxford

Gillian Schofield, University of East Anglia

Richard Field & Jane Vellacott, foster carers

Robert Tapsfield, The Fostering Network

Seminar 2: Fostering Adolescents: sex, risks and rights.

[Recordings of speakers and discussion report from seminar 2.](#)

Jenny Pearce, University of Bedfordshire

Sue Berelowitz, Deputy Children's Commissioner for England

Carlene Firmin, University of Bedfordshire

Ronny Tikkanen, University of Gothenburg and Malin Lindroth, Malmö University

Helen Cosis-Brown, University of Bedfordshire

Maddy Coy, London Metropolitan University

Helen Holgate and Jane Muir, foster carers

Seminar 3: Future directions for effective interdisciplinary youth justice systems.

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

Report and recordings will shortly be available on the Rees Centre website.

REES CENTRE NEWS

Prestigious Doctoral Fellowship Awarded to Care Leaver

Áine Kelly, who grew up in care, has been awarded a prestigious Wellcome Trust Medical Humanities Doctoral Fellowship. This highly competitive grant worth nearly £96,000 is to undertake a doctorate at the Rees Centre on the **health experiences of young people who have been in care**. These young people are less likely to be treated in the ways recommended by the Department of Health and more likely to receive poorer healthcare in comparison to the rest of the population. Despite the recent emphasis being placed on patients' involvement in health-related decisions, the guidance for these young people fails to emphasise any role that they may have in decisions relating to their own health. They therefore have worse health outcomes and experiences of the health service which are likely to impact on their perception of the role of health services and could explain why they fail to use the services as needed. The research will explore the health experiences of young people who have been in care with a view to developing recommendations for policy makers and health and social care providers. Áine currently works in the Health Experiences Research Group in the Department of Primary Health Care Sciences in the University of Oxford.

Aoife O'Higgins - Associate Fellow of the Academy of Higher Education

Aoife is to become an Associate Fellow of the Academy of Higher Education following successful completion of her Development Learning and Teaching (DLT) portfolio in June 2014. The DLT course is offered by the University of Oxford to enable students to acquire teaching experience and reflect on practice and pedagogy.

Rees Centre blog

What do you think is the role of a Virtual School Head teacher? A collection of thoughts from attendees at the Virtual Schools Headteachers' Conference:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/the-contribution-of-virtual-school-headteachers-to-improving-outcomes-for-looked-after-children/>

Conference presentations

Many presentations are available in the Resources section of the website:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/resources>

- 19 May 2014, Judy and Nikki presented at a multi-agency conference organised by the Virtual School in Brighton and Hove. Judy spoke on *'What research tells us about improving the educational outcomes of looked after children'*.
- 23 May 2014, Nikki spoke at the Northern Looked-After and Adopted Children Forum.
- 14 June 2014, Aoife O'Higgins presented her paper *'What Works for Independent Migrant Children? The Example of Local Authority Placements and their Impact on Mental Health'* at University College London, Migration Research Unit Student Conference - Child and Youth Migrants.

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

Long-term fostering has been overlooked and undervalued for too long, Community Care, 30 April 2014

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/04/30/long-term-foster-placements-need-distinct-status-support-finds-report/#.U2jioKJOpyl>

Fostering misconceptions remain, poll shows, The Fostering Network, 12 May 2014

<http://www.fostering.net/media/2014/fostering-misconceptions-remain-poll-shows#.U3CfSKLvZ8E>

Face to face Service, Interim Findings, NSPCC Inform, 16 May 2014

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/findings/evaluation/face-to-face-interim_wdf102622.pdf

Can Ofsted inspections galvanise change for children's services? 28 May 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/healthcare-network/2014/may/28/ofsted-inspections-change-childrens-services>

Edward Timpson announces extra personal support for care leavers up to age 25, Catch 22, 28 May 2014

<http://www.catch-22.org.uk/news/edward-timpson-announces-extra-personal-support-care-leavers-age-25/>

Children in care and adoption performance tables 2013, Department for Education, 5 June 2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-in-care-and-adoption-performance-tables-2013>

Siblings in care should be kept together, The Guardian, 11 June 2014

<http://www.theguardian.com/social-care-network/2014/jun/11/siblings-in-care-kept-together>

10 key stats for social workers from Ofsted's latest looked-after children research, Community Care, 12 June 2014

<http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2014/06/12/10-key-stats-social-workers-ofsteds-latest-looked-children-research/#.U6AFaEDtI8F>

Educational Outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children, Scottish Government, 17 June 2014

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2014/06/6518>

Research in Practice, with funding from the Department of Education, has developed fostering and adoption learning resources for practitioners, CASPAR NSPCC Inform, 30 June 2014

<http://fosteringandadoption.rip.org.uk/>

BOOK REVIEW

A Different Home

John DeGarmo

Kindle edition £9.41

A new foster child's story

This book is a refreshingly accessible read for foster carers and other professionals working within the same field. It is a tool that all foster carers, new and experienced will benefit from adding to their fostering tool box. Seen through the eyes of Jessie, a young girl, we are taken through the first experiences of a child coming into foster care. The book is sensitive to the child's viewpoint throughout via smells and feelings that we as 'big people' often neglect to consider. Removed during a school day and taken 'home' by strangers, Jessie's story is a familiar one. Poignant illustrations by

Norma Jeanne Trammell convey Jessie's loneliness and helplessness and bring the reader alongside her on her journey.

The book is not lengthy, and it is not meant to be. It is designed to be read to a child when they enter a new home in order to assure them that their feelings are normal, and more importantly, valid. It helps to explain some of the often worrying behaviours from a child new to the care system such as stealing or being withdrawn. A calm breakfast with plenty of food and no violence can indeed be a completely alien concept to a child that is accustomed to another way of life. We are shown how essential it is for carers to be sensitive to a child's needs at such a traumatic time of transition for them. Through some of the conversations that Jessie has with her new foster carers, we are shown a positive example of the balance of sensitivity and honesty that they must find. Ultimately, Jessie would rather be home with her mother, but is somewhat accepting of her situation through the professional and loving approach of her foster carers and their family.

A helpful afterword gives some simple yet very important points to think about when a foster child comes into a new placement. Some 'dos and don'ts' and general advice makes this book a valuable addition to any foster carer's collection. Although the aim of this book is to help with children aged between four and ten, it does so much more. This book may be essential reading for new and inexperienced foster carers, but it provides timely reminders also for long standing foster carers such as me who sometimes forget to view things from the eyes of a child. John and Kelly DeGarmo are clearly vastly experienced and conscientious foster carers and this work from them is highly recommended.

Reviewed by Colin Chatten, IFCO Treasurer, National Carer Representative, FCA UK

YOUNG VOICES

My name is Alicia Nielsen, I am 16 years old, and I am currently a foster child in the U.S. I came from some difficult circumstances, and my parents weren't making the best decisions in what morals they ought to be teaching their kids. But through the loving guidance, and support of everyone on my foster care team, I've learned how to take the things my parents taught me to do, and turn them into lessons of what not to do.

I have been really blessed throughout my whole experience with foster care. I have an awesome case worker, who actually cares about me as a person (and not a job). My foster parents treat me as if I was their own. My guardian ad litem, and my judge listen to me and truly act on the behalf of my well being. One thing that I really have appreciated with foster care is the constant wish to have me (as a foster child) be one day independent of any and all government support, and be a contributing member of society. Everyone wants me to succeed and they give me support in everything that I do that betters me. They have provided me with a therapist who listens to me and has helped me work through a lot of trauma that was a result of my childhood. They have given me many opportunities to learn more about my rights as a foster child, and how I can take advantage of them.

Overall, I would say that I am rather pleased with my foster care experience (if I could have one gripe, it would be how often paperwork is misplaced). For the first time in my life, I feel as if I am loved and cared for. I know that when I ask for things that I need, the request will be filled without any guilt or shame, no matter what it is that I need. I am so grateful for everyone on my team that have made me feel so positive about myself, and about my future.

Thanks to Alicia for agreeing to share her experience of foster care.

EXTRAS

Carlile Report on Youth Courts

The National Children's Bureau website provides a [summary of the recent inquiry into Youth Courts](#).

[Independent Parliamentarians' Inquiry into the Operation and Effectiveness of the Youth Court](#) (pdf file)

Chaired by Lord Carlile of Berriew CBE QC. June 2014.

Great North Run, September 2014



Nikki Luke, research officer at the Rees Centre, will be taking part in the Bupa Great North Run in September. Nikki will be running a half marathon and raising money for the Who Cares? Trust. You can sponsor Nikki at www.virginmoneygiving.com/NikkiLuke