

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



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RESEARCH UPDATES

Allegations of abuse made against foster carers – [full report \(pdf\)](#)

This small scale pilot study considered the impact on foster carers of abuse allegations made against them concerning children who are or have been in their care. Commissioned by FosterTalk, the study looked at foster carers who accessed the FISS (Foster Carers' Independent Support Service) .

Recommendations – the report focuses on three areas for improvement:

- Reduce the number of allegations by providing better training and support on how to minimise these situations.
- Improve the process when an allegation is made: neither the nature of the allegation, nor the process of inquiry is made clear as set out in the minimum standards; significant delays increase the negative impact of the allegation.
- Improve independent support – the FISS was reported to be exemplary but many fostering providers don't register for their carers to get this support.

The Role of the Supervising Social Worker in Foster Care – [new review](#) (pdf)

What is known about the role of the supervising social worker (SSW) in foster care? The SSW acts as the conduit between the fostering household and fostering service, distinct in England from the role of the foster child's social worker. This review looked at 22 studies and found almost no evidence of the impact of SSWs on the stability of foster care placements. The support aspects of the role have received much more research attention to date than the supervisory aspects. Foster carers value the support provided, in particular emotional support, given through home visits or telephone calls and there was evidence that this had a direct relationship with foster carer retention. There was a lack of evidence about social workers' workloads or outcomes for the child.

What works to prevent and treat poor mental health in looked after children? - [new review](#) (pdf)

Commissioned from the Rees Centre by NSPCC, this review looked at over 100 studies on mental health interventions for looked after children.

- The report provides an overview of the evidence about interventions for looked after children's behavioural and emotional well-being.
- The report concludes that the quality of 'ordinary care' is crucial to the effectiveness of additional interventions.
- Enabling the right foster carers and staff to be selected, trained, supported and supervised is crucial to creating an environment that best supports the child's well-being.
- Making early decisions over whether a child should go into care is important. Equally, early intervention can enable parents to be given the best chance to bring up their children well.

[Executive summary](#) (pdf)

We hope that the report will help practitioners and services to select and evaluate the impact of interventions and 'ordinary care' services on children's mental health.

Nikki Luke comments in this article in [Community Care, 3 September 2014](#)

Based on key messages from the review, Louise Bazalgette, from the NSPCC, highlights practical measures that can be taken to promote a child's positive emotional well-being in [Community Care, 10 September 2014](#).

EVENTS

Seminar cancellation- 20 October Dr Janet Boddy.

Please note that the previously advertised seminar on 20 October with Dr Janet Boddy will not now take place until the Spring 2015 date to be confirmed.

Webinar Tuesday 7 October 2014 at 4.30pm

Role of the Supervising Social Worker in Foster Care

Online discussion with Nikki, Judy and Helen Cosis-Brown to discuss key findings from their recent review.

Event and log on details: <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/our-events/>

Webinar Wednesday 3 December 2014 at 4pm

Evidence-informed educational practice for children in care

Hosted online by Alun Rees and Lucy Wawrzyniak, the [Rees Centre Visiting Practitioners](#).

Seminar Monday 26 Jan 2015 at 5-6.30 pm, seminar room A, 15 Norham Gardens, Oxford

Implementing knowledge exchange models to maximise the impact of research

Katharine Dill, School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Queen's University Belfast.

Part of the [University of Oxford Department of Education](#) Seminar Series. Drinks will be served after the event.

Rees Centre appointed programme evaluation coordinator for DfE Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

The Rees Centre has been appointed by the Department for Education to be the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme evaluation coordinator, September 2014-August 2016. This is an exciting but demanding opportunity to influence the research and evaluation strategy across children's services in England.

The programme seeks to support local efforts to transform services for the most vulnerable children by providing tailored funding and professional support to up to 40 innovative projects over the next two years. It seeks to inspire whole system change, so that in five years' time the quality of services has increased, children who need help from the social care system have better life chances, Local Authorities achieve better value for money across children's social care and there are stronger incentives and mechanisms for innovation, experimentation and replication of successful new approaches.

The evaluation coordinator role is to promote both high standards of evaluation across the programme and the use of evidence by practitioners. Evaluation teams have been appointed to a framework agreement to evaluate the individual projects.

The Rees team consists of Dr Nikki Luke, Prof Ian Sinclair and Prof Judy Sebba assisted by external expertise from Dr Alun Rees, Dr Matt Woolgar and Dr Di McNeish and internal advice from Professors Steve Strand, Kathy Sylva and Pam Sammons. Their role is to challenge and support evaluation plans for proposals being developed and after approval to help broker links between funded projects and approved evaluation teams.

Rees Centre blog

[Being the change you want to see in the world](#) – guest post by Mike Dennis, Wholistic Fostering

[My experience as a researcher and a foster carer](#) – guest post by Alex Hudson, researcher and foster carer

[Integrating research and practice. What are the issues in your work that research might help to address?](#) - based on the 1 July Rees Centre webinar, a summary of research on common topics in fostering and education.

Conference presentations

14 July 2014, Judy gave a presentation at the Centre for Learning and Teaching Research, University of Sussex: *What research suggests might be the most effective use of the Pupil Premium (Plus) for improving educational outcomes of Looked After Children.*

2-5 September 2014 EUSARF Conference Copenhagen:

Engaging foster carers in research teams

User engagement is one of the key principles of the Rees Centre. The three papers and respondent in this symposium illustrated the possible ways in which this might be approached around the theme of recruitment and support for foster carers.

Strengthening the Evidence Base for Practitioners and Service Providers

This symposium looked at strengthening the evidence base on the education of children in care through attention to methodology in the research, increasing access to the research findings and using knowledge exchange activities to ensure that services and practitioners can use findings.

12 September 2014, Nikki spoke with Helen Holgate (Foster Carer and Trustee, The Fostering Network) on parent-and-child fostering at an event organized by the National Centre for Therapeutic Residential and Foster Care.

Presentations from these events are available in the Resources section of the website:

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

Raising money for Who Cares? Trust

Congratulations to Nikki for completing the Great North Run 2014 and raising more than £550 towards the work of the Who Cares? Trust with looked after children and young people.



FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[NICE - Looked after children and young people](#), National Institute for Health Care and Excellence, 25 June 2014

[On my own: the accommodation of young people leaving care in England \(PDF\)](#), Barnardos 1 July 2014

[Major study reveals true scale of abuse of children living in care](#), The Independent, Sun 6 July 2014

[Into independence, not out of care: 16 plus care options](#), Commons Education Select Committee, 17 July 2014

[Keeping children safe: allegations concerning the abuse or neglect of children in care](#), NSPCC Inform, 7 July 2014

[Statutory guidance for local authorities to support looked-after children's aspirations to achieve in further and higher education](#), Department for Education, 23 July 2014

[Blueprint for future of child and family social work unveiled](#), Department for Education, 31 July 2014

[Foster children need more than cash to help their school careers](#), The Observer, Sunday 11 August 2014

[One in three children split up from siblings in foster care](#), Action for Children, 8 September 2014

[Foster carers need greater authority](#), The Guardian, 23 September 2014

BOOK REVIEW

Black Children in Care: Health, Hair and Skin.

by Denise Lewis and Flora Awolaja. Positive Image Project Ltd

£10 + £1.85 postage and packing

Reviewed by Jenny Harris, foster carer.

This book strives to offer advice to carers of black children. I would recommend this book for all new foster carers or those not experienced in fostering black children. It may also be a useful addition to the reading list for social workers and supervising social workers who may not be aware of some of the relatively small things that can be done to support the children they have responsibility for.

I had always followed the philosophy 'the important thing is to be loved regardless of colour, heritage etc' but having fostered black children, I am aware there are differences in hair care etc. I had to learn by asking around, taking sensible advice from a Jamaican family support worker and as regards food a certain amount of trial and error. The black child I have had very short hair on arrival as her white mother needed this book!

The book is split into easy to read sections: Hair, skin, health, nutrition and identity. The easy to follow structure and beautiful pictures make it a resource to keep handy so it can be dipped into. The section I personally found most interesting was the explanation of the different type of hair and appropriate care tips. A minor criticism is that it makes it sound easy and especially curly hair when an inexperienced hair-washer tries it is tricky to handle as it dries.

Last but not least the appendix has a glossary, lists of useful web links with online resources and organisations providing a good way of allowing the reader to find out more information.

Carers need to be aware that the recipes included will not be suitable for all children. For example, the ackee recipe suggests bacon as an optional ingredient, but some children will come from families whose religious beliefs do not permit them to eat pork products. The book also places great emphasis on differences and could make carers feel that the task is too hard with so many additional things to remember. These are small points of criticism, however.

I still believe that love is essential and the practical things can be overcome to support the needs of this group. This easy to read book tries to bridge some of the knowledge gap.

YOUNG VOICES

Words by Jack

Age 4 years old I was placed into custodian foster care with my sister, a year later I moved from my birth town 65 miles away to the South East. Another year later our access visits stopped.

Age 6 I was assessed by an Education Psychologist and was given a statement, for educational difficulties, funded by the Local Educational Authority. With the statement attached to me I was given a place at a brand new Primary School and a Middle School, this is because it had a learning support base offering small groups and speech therapy the staff were excellent but I felt isolated from my peers and the core national curriculum.

Age 8 years old I secretly always fantasised that Sir Alex Ferguson was my father. Sometimes whilst waiting for my taxi to pick me up for school I wanted the fast car to whisk me away to see my Grandparents - my roots – my Jewish heritage. The connection was swiped away from me by not just one Local Education Authority, but two.

Age 10 was when I started to find my voice campaigning for Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, NSPCC, fundraising for Blue Peter running for School Councilor and being part of the Wild Life Garden Club. I was learning to be part of the School community if it wasn't for my kitchen table at home I'm not sure what would have become of me. Every day we would sit down as a family and talk about the day, sing and debate. I remember wet walks in the countryside, theatre and ballet and dancing in St Marco Square (Venice) and visiting hundreds of chateaux in France. I had chores, took the rubbish out and swept the leaves to empty the stream next to our house otherwise the floods would come, walking and feeding the dog! Having a nurturing environment, which provides the basic boundaries, is key to building resilience.

Age 16 was originally when a young person would be placed in independent living. With the support of my carer and the open minded art teachers, I was offered a place in my Secondary School Sixth Form. My foster carer called the School for the end of the year annual review to which the school replied; "Jack isn't supposed to be in this School he's not on the school role". After the School received thanks for supporting me, I found out after I left Sixth form that the Local Education Authority 'lost my files' whilst the Sixth Form School received extra funds to support me.

After completing my Art & Design Diploma, I was applying for University at this time the first LEA wanted to withdraw from the original agreement in covering further education.

One hundred and eighty days in a school year and after school clubs, weekends and holidays are essential every day is key for every child and young people to access the best education and play. It is the right of the child to receive this under article 31 of the United Nations Convention.

If a child is to be removed from the birth parents it's key that the Foster Carers and Local Authorities, Schools and Voluntary Sector, work together to provide the best support for all Looked After Children in England, Wales and Scotland. To cut the bureaucracy out for good!

Words by Claire

I was fostered when I was 7, along with my younger brother. I was moved from my grandparents' house where I had been living for a year, and was taken to live with a family where we couldn't watch Coronation Street or Emmerdale, we weren't allowed to go to the shops to get a 10p bag of mixed sweets and where I had to pretend that I didn't miss my grandparents and biological mother. We were told that what had happened was the "best thing" and that we were lucky we were together (myself and my brother). My brother followed me everywhere at the beginning; he held onto my fingers and wouldn't let me go. My foster mum told me to tell him I loved him and that I wasn't going anywhere.

At the beginning I went to a private school with my foster sister, who was years older than me. I loved sport and art but struggled academically - by the time I was 7 I'd already attended 3 primary schools. I was then moved to a local state school and did well. Our family house was full of books, there was a huge garden and we would all eat dinner around the table together. On the surface we were white middle class children, but the access visits to our biological mother were an obvious nuisance and disturbed the picture perfect ideal of what was trying to be created.

I looked forward to seeing my biological mother - she was loving, caring and fun and I could relate to her in so many ways, ways in which I could never relate to my foster parents. As the years went by I couldn't stand to look at my biological mother because her pain was tangible. I felt guilty.

I lied constantly to social services and to my foster parents because I was trying to please everyone - I told them what I thought they wanted to hear. By the end, I didn't even know what I wanted and so I stopped thinking about it all and got on with my life with my new family. I was a "pleaser" for my entire childhood.

Now I am a mother I can understand how important stability and routine is in a child's life. I know that my biological mother didn't give that to us, and in hindsight what happened to my siblings and I was probably "the best thing", but I think that to completely cut us off from our roots was a huge mistake. I have two identities, one pre-7-years-old and the other, post. ***We were loved, but we were pulled in too many directions.***

EXTRAS

[Staying put - a good practice guide](#), written by The Children's Partnership, 15 July 2014, for everyone involved in making and supporting Staying Put arrangements in England, from managers in children's social services to looked after young people themselves.

Many care leavers have a more difficult start to adulthood as a consequence of their past experiences, coupled with the absence of a supportive family base. Staying Put arrangements help to mitigate these factors by allowing them to stay with their foster carers longer, so that when they leave care they are better equipped to do well in life.

Under new laws included in the Children and Families Act 2014, local authorities have a duty to support care leavers who wish to continue to live with their foster carers when they reach 18. The Staying Put arrangement continues until the young person reaches age 21, or stops living in the household before then.