

# REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education  
University of Oxford Department of Education



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## RESEARCH UPDATES

### **Motivation to Foster Study**

In 2012 we published a [review of the research](#) looking at reasons why people become foster carers. This concluded that knowing other foster carers was a main reason why people consider becoming a foster carer, myths held by the general public about fostering are common and can put people off fostering but contact with existing foster carers helps to mitigate this. Failing to support existing foster carers appropriately may send negative messages to those considering fostering. Money is not reported as an initial motivation although covering costs and replacing income from employment that has ceased (or been exchanged for fostering) are important considerations when progressing an application.

As most previous studies involved interviewing established carers who were required to recall their initial reasons

for fostering, sometimes after many years, we decided to look at what motivates people to inquire at the moment of inquiry. Ten fostering providers (8 LAs and 2 independent providers) referred inquirers to us who were willing to be interviewed. 112 people were interviewed by our carer-interviewers and though our analysis is not yet complete, the **emerging findings from half of them once again confirm that contact with existing carers is very important**. 38 follow up interviews were undertaken 8-12 months later to see how their applications had progressed and an additional 17 initial inquirers who withdrew agreed to be interviewed.

The 30 applicants approved 15 months later represent 5% of the initial inquirers and 27% of those interviewed in the research. The average approval rate was 5% and the average time taken from initial inquiry to approval was 9.5 months with a range of 5-15 months. 64% of those who had agreed to be interviewed withdrew their applications within one year, mostly due to changing circumstances such as moving house, family illness, changing employment or needing to care for a close relative.

The main reasons identified for their initial inquiry to foster were that their own children were grown up or getting older and they wanted to fill the 'empty nest' (around 30%), they knew existing foster carers or relatives who fostered (around 30%) or they had prior experience of working with children (around 20%). Around 17% had responded to advertising. The main qualities that respondents suggested that foster carers need are patience, tolerance, empathy, hard work, capacity to set clear boundaries and a sense of humour. The main challenges they envisaged were troubled children/difficult behaviour, the impact on their own family, finance, and letting the fostered child know they are loved.

A minority (more of those who had worked with children) viewed the process as positive, the length being necessary to ensure safety and thoroughness and reported that plenty of support would be available. A significant minority gave up with their application because of what they perceived to be intolerable delays, excessive intrusion into their privacy or disproportionate paperwork.

The full report will be available on the Rees Centre website in January.

### **Update on Educational Progress of Looked After Children Project**

Our study on the educational progress of looked after children is now well underway. The project is a collaboration between the Rees Centre and the School for Policy Studies and Graduate School of Education at the University of Bristol, and is funded by the [Nuffield Foundation](#). We are working with four local authorities who have identified young people from last year's GCSE cohort for us to interview and are still seeking confirmation from a further two local authorities.

We have now linked the English national databases on educational outcomes (test scores, attendance and exclusions) and children's care histories (including number and type of placements, age at entry to care and distance from home), and we are currently running analyses that will help us to identify the key factors that predict how well looked after children do in their Key Stage 4 exams. We are focusing on the 4,847 children who had been in care for 12 months or more at 31st March 2013 and were eligible to take Key Stage 4 exams that year. We expect to report on some emerging findings in February.

### **Migrant Children in Foster Care (seminar 4), Teenagers in Foster Care Seminar Series, 11 Nov 2014**

A very successful seminar was held in London with the following speakers:

Judith Dennis, Refugee Council Policy Manager *The legal and policy context and current issues of interest for migrant children in England.*

Dr Charlotte Melander, University of Gothenburg *What relationships are facilitated for unaccompanied minors within the reception system in the Swedish welfare state?*

Dr Jim Wade, University of York *Supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people: The experience of foster care.*

Professor Ravi Kohli, University of Bedfordshire *Protecting asylum seeking children on the move.*

Dr Patricia Hynes, University of Bedfordshire *Looking back to look forward: Trust and mistrust in the lives of displaced children.*

Slides and recordings, where available, along with a summary report of the day's themes and discussions will be available shortly: <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/teenagers-in-foster-care/migrant-children-in-foster-care/>

## 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](#). Open to all, no advance registration required. [Webinar FAQs](#)

To join the webinar on the day: <https://rees-centre.webex.com/rees-centre/onstage/g.php?d=840422880&t=a>

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

## REES CENTRE NEWS

### Webinar: Role of Supervising Social Worker in Foster Care 7 Oct 2014



Thanks to all who joined the recent webinar to introduce our latest research review on the role of the supervising social worker in foster care. The recording and slides from author Helen Cosis-Brown are now on our website in [Past Events](#).

### Takeover Day 21 November 2014

Takeover Day gives children and young people the chance to work with adults for the day and be involved in decision making. Children benefit from the opportunity to experience the world of work and make their voices heard, while adults and organisations gain a fresh perspective on what they do.

Hollie, who chairs the Oxfordshire County Children in Care Council, came to work with the Rees Centre team and successfully took over the role of Communications Officer.

*"I took part in Takeover Day at the Rees Centre. I had a brilliant time, I found out a lot of things I never knew before. I interviewed a lady who is working with the health assessments for children in care, and am really looking forward to working with her in the near future. I put a presentation together about what I do with*



Webinar in progress



Hollie taking over

*Children In care Council and what we are. I really enjoyed taking part in Takeover Day and would love to go back to the Rees Centre in the future".* Hollie Messenger, Chair of Children in Care Council, Oxfordshire.

## **Evaluation of London Schools Excellence Fund (Education of Children in Care)**

The Rees Centre has been awarded a contract to evaluate the London Schools Excellence Fund programme on the Education of Children in Care July 2014 - Sept 2015. This is part of the London Mayor's Education Programme. The Fund is a key mechanism to deliver excellent teaching in all London schools.

The Greater London Authority is funding a project to test evidenced approaches to improving educational progress for children in care *by providing innovative and high quality training opportunities for foster carers.* We expect to be able to develop some key messages and learning from the evaluation which will substantially assist foster carers and schools to work closer together to support the educational outcomes of children in care. The evaluation, learning and embedding change is part of the longer-term sustainability of the programme activity in order to ensure the maximum benefit for foster carers, teachers, pupils and schools.

### **Rees Centre blog**

[Systematic review of factors associated with educational outcomes of children in care](#) Post by Aoife O'Higgins, Rees Centre doctoral student.

[Creative Activities with care leavers and young people in care](#) Updated post by Valerie Dunn, University of Cambridge, about *Our House*, a short film made by young people on their views of living in residential care.

### **Conference presentations**

During September, Aoife O'Higgins gave presentations on her current research at [CRECS](#) University of Ottawa at the invitation of Professor Robert Flynn and [Chapin Hall](#) University of Chicago at the invitation of Amy Dworsky and Mark Courtney.

**FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS**

[Children Looked After in England \(including adoptions and care leavers\) year ending 31 March 2014, Statistical First Release](#), 30 September 2014, Department for Education

[Care system turning its back on most vulnerable young people, Too Much Too Young report](#), Action for Children, October 2014

[Radical thinking to break cycle of repeat children taken into care](#), The Guardian, Monday 20 October 2014

The Department for Education has published information for education professionals, local authorities and social workers on the potential of boarding schools to improve outcomes for vulnerable children. [Department for Education press release](#) 25 November 2014

The Department for Education is consulting on proposed revisions to statutory guidance on promoting the health and welfare of looked-after children, [Promoting the health and welfare of looked-after children: updated statutory guidance \(PDF\)](#), 27 November 2014

[Children in Care](#), Report by the National Audit Office examining how well the Department for Education is meeting its objectives to improve the quality of care and stability of placements for children in care, 27 November 2014.

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Why Won't My Teenager Talk to Me?**

Dr John Coleman, Routledge 2014

#### **Review by Jane Vellacott, foster carer.**

As a foster carer with three teenage placements, reading is a luxury normally reserved for holidays. So it was a real treat to find myself reading this helpful book and being drawn back to it in the tiny gaps available in a generally busy life.

In Part I Dr Coleman takes us through a parenting framework he calls **STAGE**: the **S**ignificance of parenting, **T**wo-way communication, **A**uthority, the **G**eneration gap and **E**motion. I found these sections clearly presented and insightful as well as helping me to reflect on many situations I've faced. Additionally, the brief information about brain development, sleep patterns and risk-taking was revealing. I also liked the analogy of 'child alongside' adult during the transition from childhood to adulthood, because we all know a teenager can be 14 going on 24 one moment but act 'babyish' the next. I shared some of these ideas with a youngster I foster because it helped him feel better about his own moods and self-image.

Part II covers aspects of a teenager's world – health issues including sex, friends and peer group, the digital world and what happens when the family changes – as happens because of divorce or fostering. Although I thought I knew quite a lot about some of this, I found I learned a lot. The last section on risk-taking and challenging behaviour was particularly helpful, because there is nearly always both in fostering.

Each section has lots of reflections from parents and teenagers which made the text easily readable and realistic. The summaries throughout were useful. I felt the book was equally supportive for those doing the parenting and those being parented – it didn't 'take sides'. And finally the conclusion, which summarises how to use the STAGE framework, provides strategies and is heart-warmingly supportive.

In fact if you lack time, just the introduction and initial outline of STAGE plus the conclusion at the end of the book, provide a lot of food for thought. In the end, 'looked after' teenagers are just teenagers with different earlier experiences. But when you have time Dr Coleman, write the chapter on fostering teenagers too!

# YOUNG VOICES

*Words by a year 11 student...*

## **Being in care has affected my education in a positive way**

Since I've been in care, I have been in a foster home and a children's home but I am now currently settled in another foster home. As I've had the experience of being in a foster placement and a care home, I found that a foster placement was better for me because I feel more secure in a household living with a family than with other young children.

When I first went into care, school life was tricky to cope with because of all the emotions and thoughts I had. This could have been because I wasn't settled or I felt like I couldn't share my emotions with anyone and couldn't control them. It was stressful trying to keep up with school work and concentrating when I had other thoughts going around my head. I didn't want to think about school because it seemed to me at that time that school wasn't important anymore and I needed to focus on family matters instead. However, the placement I am settled in now has opened my eyes to show me that school does matter if I want to do something with my life.

Being in care has affected my education in a positive way because I went through a stage where I couldn't get my head around why it was important but when I got put in a settled placement I realised that if I wanted to be someone in the world I'd have to get my education. I realised this from the help of my foster carers who supported me and showed me what life really was. Through living with a different family I got taught that there's more than one way of dealing with things such as dealing with situations, emotions etc. This helped me cope and concentrate on my education.

Once my home life was settled, I figured out I wanted more out of myself. The people I thought were my friends were pulling me into bad situations. I took a step back and asked myself, are these people I really want as my friends? Will they always be in my life and help me when I need it? Then it came to me they can't be my friends if they want me to be in bad situations, they should want me to be doing well. I finally thought that if I wanted to do something I was the only person who could make that happen, it had to be my choice and my choice only. This led me to make the decision of moving schools at the beginning of year 10 where my GCSEs were just about to start. Although this wasn't an easy decision it had a positive outcome because I've made new friends who want to see me make something of myself and help me achieve what I want to. I am now getting higher predicted grades and achieving more than I thought I was capable of.

I would urge teachers to have a supporting attitude to encourage and show looked after children that you think they're doing well. I feel if a teacher is in a happy mood and smiling when teaching I tend to get along with them better because it makes me feel like you've walked into a happier place and can leave behind whatever is going on outside the classroom.

## EXTRAS

**BAAF conference: [Aiming higher - Improving educational outcomes for children and young people in care](#)**

**21 January 2015, London**

Aimed at all of those involved in developing services with an education focus. [Find out more and book.](#)