

Department of Education
Public Seminar

Monday 2 March 2015
5:00 – 6:30 pm
15 Norham Gardens
Seminar Room A



Does being in care provide protection or increase risk? Understanding the outcomes of children in care



Professor Janet Boddy
University of Sussex



Professor Donald Forrester
University of Bedfordshire

Convener: Professor Judy Sebba Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education

These two presentations are linked by the perspectives they offer on what influence care may have on children's lives.

Professor Janet Boddy will talk about the *European Perspectives on Outcomes and Everyday Lives for Young People in Care* project. Transitions to adulthood for young people in and after care are a priority in child welfare research internationally, not least because of concern across countries about poor outcomes relative to the general population. But young people in care comprise a diverse group. To support them into adulthood, it is not sufficient to focus on risk factors. At the same time, definition of 'outcomes' is neither neutral nor objective, and what we come to understand about 'outcomes' for young people in care inevitably depends on our theoretical and methodological approach. This paper draws on two studies which are concerned with the experiences of young people who are currently, or have previously been, in care.

Janet Boddy is Professor of Child, Youth and Family Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth¹. Her research is concerned with family lives and with services for children and families, including studies in Europe examining social pedagogy as a model of education for work with children and families. Recent research includes *Beyond Contact*, a four-country European study of families of children placed away from home, a study of the everyday lives of young people in care in England and France, and research on the health needs of families involved with intensive support services.

Professor Donald Forrester will explore the specific impact of care through a review of British research since 1991 that provides data on changes in child welfare over time. The outcomes for children in public care are generally considered to be poor, leading to a focus on reducing the number of children in care. Yet while children in care do less well than most children on a range of measures, such comparisons do not disentangle the extent to which these difficulties pre-dated care and the specific impact of care on child welfare. Internationally, studies consistently have found that children entering care tended to have serious problems but that in general their welfare improved over time suggesting that attempts to reduce the use of public care may place more children at risk of serious harm.

Donald Forrester is Professor of Social Work Research and the Director of the Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Care and Social Work Research, University of Bedfordshire. Donald Forrester worked as a child and family social worker from 1991 to 1999. The Tilda Goldberg Centre, is one of the largest centres for social work research in the United Kingdom. His work focuses on identifying what works in child and family social work. In particular, his studies analyse the relationship between organizational culture, the quality of practice and outcomes for children and families. He has led more than 20 research projects as well as being Academic Director of the largest social work course in the UK.

¹ www.sussex.ac.uk/esw/circy