

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Rees Centre Newsletter #12 February 2015 CONTENTS

[Research Updates](#)

Recruitment, assessment, supervision and support of LGBT foster carers

Dr Christina S. Plafky: Research Fellow in Evidence-Informed Practice

Migrant Children in Foster Care

[Events](#)

Webinar: Evidence-informed educational practice for children in care, 10 Feb 2015

Seminar: Does being in care provide protection or increase risk? 2 March 2015

Pupil Premium Teach Meet event 11 March 2015

[Rees Centre News](#)

Recent blog postings

Conference presentations

[Foster Care in the News](#)

[Reviews](#)

Keeping foster children safe online

[Young Voices](#)

"Dear little scavenger girl" by Carrie Wilson

[Extras](#)

CONTACT THE REES CENTRE

Phone: +44 (0)1865 274050

Email: rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk

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

Blog: <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/blog/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ReesCentre>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook/ReesCentreOxford>

RESEARCH UPDATES

Research Review- Recruitment, Assessment, Supervision and Support of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Foster Carers: Summary of Findings

Our latest international review looks at findings from 20 published papers (covering 19 studies) from the UK, USA and Australia.

The review showed that most studies only considered the perceptions of established foster carers. Some looked at the perceptions of social workers and only one included young people's perceptions. Almost no research on bisexual or transgender carers was found.

Key Findings

- LGBT carers express concern about how agencies, social workers and foster children, and in particular birth families *might* respond to their gender and sexuality as well as how they *do* respond. This hampers their recruitment as foster carers or adopters;
- LGBT carers think that they would be more easily accepted by independent agencies but no differences emerge in practice;
- LGBT carers are more likely than other applicants to want to parent for the first time;
- Issues were raised about whether social workers' attitudes influenced their assessment of LGBT carers;
- Appropriate preparation of the child or young person is needed prior to any placement but specific issues should be raised where the placement is with LGBT carers.

Recommendations for policy and practice

Fostering agencies should:

- Ensure assessments are not heteronormative, but are rigorous, holistic and analytic, neither ignoring nor over focussing on sexuality and gender;
- Make sure that matching decisions are free from heteronormative assumptions and are about whether a foster carer can meet the needs of specific children;
- Ensure that processes used by fostering panels enable thorough consideration of a person's or couples' suitability irrespective of their gender or sexuality;
- Provide LGBT carer support groups as well as ensuring that other support groups are inclusive;
- Ensure that the content, processes and structure of foster carer training programmes enable LGBT carers to feel respected, valued and included.

Rees Centre Research Fellow in Evidence-Informed Practice

Dr Christina S. Plafky has joined the Rees Centre to work specifically on evidence-informed practice in fostering. As well as undertaking primary research, she will focus particularly on developing research-mindedness throughout the Core Assets Group across the UK. She will support better use of existing data to inform service-delivery decisions, implementation of research findings in Core Assets' fostering services throughout the regions and stimulate further evaluation and small-scale research projects across the organisation. Christina has an undergraduate degree in social work, a postgraduate degree in social policy and a PhD in social work/science and technology studies which focuses on the topic of research-to-practice. Her ESRC-funded PhD investigated how neuroscientific research findings influence juvenile justice practice in Scotland. She is also trained as a child protection specialist and as a systemic therapist for children and young people and has practical experience in working with foster care services and in children and families social work settings in Scotland and Germany.

Migrant Children in Foster Care Seminar ([Teenagers in Foster Care](#) ESRC seminar series)

Key Points

- **Separated children arrive into foster care managing difficult experiences and multiple pressures in their journey toward ensttlement.** These often include displacement, loss of family, abuse and persecution. They then have to manage the multiple, and sometimes conflicting, ways they are processed by the state where immigration concerns can take precedence over access to welfare.
- **These complex and competing forces mean that foster carers often need to accept uncertainty, ambiguity, distrust and silence as they care for separated teenagers.** Asylum-seeking young people live with uncertainty about their futures and may have multiple reasons not to discuss their lives fully until they are sure they can trust the adults around them. Foster carers need support to be patient and accepting in these contexts.
- **The strength of good foster care is its ability to help reconstruct a sense of 'ordinary' life for separated children.** Journeys toward settlement include achieving safety, belonging and success, and foster care can

be a crucial support in each phase. Although not all separated children want to be in foster care, the majority who are find it a positive experience and value being included as one of the family.

- **Separated children need access to relationships that can offer friendship and ongoing presence, as well as professional help.** Swedish research suggests there is value in mapping whether unaccompanied young people have both 'close' and 'professional' relationships, and considering the role of the state in facilitating both. This might include clarifying the role of foster carers, voluntary agencies, and potentially guardians.
- **Foster carers need support to understand and respond to the needs of separated young people.** Most carers of separated teenagers are very positive about their work, but also recognise its challenges, and do not necessarily feel equipped to respond. There is potential for training, mentoring and peer support to address some of these challenges.

[Full report of the seminar](#) covering key points, themes, discussions and references.

EVENTS

Webinar: Evidence-informed educational practice for children in care

Tuesday 10 February 2015 at 4.30pm

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

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

To join the webinar on the day, [click here](#)

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

Public seminar: Does being in care provide protection or increase risk? Understanding the outcomes of children in care.

Professor Janet Boddy, University of Sussex and Professor Donald Forrester, University of Bedfordshire.

Monday 2 March 2015, 5-6.30pm followed by drinks.

Convened by the Rees Centre as part of the [University of Oxford Department of Education](#) public seminar series.

Seminar Room A

15 Norham Gardens Oxford OX2 6PY

Pupil Premium Teach Meet Event: Improving outcomes and experiences of disadvantaged and looked after children in schools through use of the pupil premium.

Chair Sir Tim Brighouse

Wednesday 11 March 2015, 5-7pm.

This free event will be of particular interest to teachers, local authority managers, teacher educators, carers, social workers and young people. Come along to share ideas and examples of best practice in schools.

Seminar Room A

15 Norham Gardens Oxford OX2 6PY

Registration opens soon. Further details from the Oxfordshire Teaching Schools Alliance or the [Rees Centre](#).

REES CENTRE NEWS

Rees Centre blog

We welcome your comments on the following topics:

[Black children in care: health, hair and skin](#) - Guest post by Positive Image project.

[Social pedagogy trained social workers in foster care](#) - Guest post by Iris King, a supervising social worker.

Conference presentations

Judy spoke at the Fostering People staff conference, 5 December, on the impact of abuse allegations on foster carers, the impact of fostering on the children of carers and the educational progress of looked after children.

Áine Kelly presented to Specialist Looked After Children Nurses at the Royal College of Nursing on the *health experiences of children and young people in care* ([slide presentation](#)).

Judy spoke at the BAAF Aiming Higher conference on 21 January. Her slide presentation *Making sense of the research evidence: Improving educational outcomes for young people in care* is available in the [Resources](#) section of our website.

Nikki presented her research on the *prevention and treatment of mental health difficulties in looked after children* at a symposium at the 4th European Conference on Child and Mental Health in Educational Settings in Lausanne, Switzerland, 5-6 February 2015.

As part of the University of Worcester's Social Work Master Class Series, Judy spoke on 6 February about the Rees Centre's research to an audience of managers and policy makers from across the region on the theme 'Foster Care Matters'.

Rees Centre Team January 2015

Interested in knowing more about us? The research interests and backgrounds of individual team members are available in the [About Us](#) section of the Rees Centre website.



FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England as at March 2014 \(PDF\)](#) Department for Education, 10 December 2014

[Chef and author Lorraine Pascale is new fostering ambassador](#) Department for Education, 24 December 2014

[A Day in the Life of a Service Manager for Looked After Children](#) Guardian Social Care Network, 9 January 2015

[Do we need to rip up the care system and start again?](#) Community Care, 26 January 2015

[A third of siblings in care 'forced to live apart'](#) BBC News, 26 January 2015

[Campaigners hope guidance will cut B&B use for care leavers](#) Children & Young People Now, 27 January 2015

[Study backs Staying Put in children's homes at cost of £76m a year,](#) Children & Young People Now, 28 January 2015

BOOK REVIEW

Keeping Foster Children Safe Online.

Positive Strategies to Prevent Cyberbullying, Inappropriate Contact, and Other Digital Dangers.

John DeGarmo, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, £12.99

Review by Jackie White, foster carer

I considered myself to be fairly well educated regarding the dangers that foster children face in relation to the internet and social networking but I had barely finished the first chapter of this book before I realised how misguided that belief has been.

DeGarmo looks at the positives of internet use but also explores in detail the “nastiness” of the cyber-world we all know about, but want to close our eyes and ears to. Some of the content such as information on communities of hate, pornography, sexual predators, violent images, bomb making and the like made me want to close the book and never open it again, but it also made me acknowledge that burying my head in the sand could leave children in my care more vulnerable than I had previously realised.

The chapter on contact with birth parents is a ‘must read’ and the addition of case studies brings the realities of this to life. The list of acronyms used by teens on the internet was a complete revelation to me as my previous knowledge extended to lol (lots of laughs) and POS (parent over shoulder). The practical advice on topics such as blocking inappropriate images, searching safely, establishing ground rules etc. was also helpful though it would have been useful if this information had extended to cover games consoles as many young people access the internet via this means.

Including the Pan European Game Information (PEGI) ratings alongside those for the Americas in the ‘Apps and Video Games’ section would have also been helpful but doesn’t detract from the usefulness of this publication. In fact I would go as far as to say that this is an invaluable resource and should be required reading for all parents and everyone in the children’s workforce.

YOUNG VOICES

Carrie Wilson writes a personal blog at <http://carriewilsoncareleaver.blogspot.co.uk>

She published the following on 3 January 2015:

Little Scavenger. Self-compassionate letter to the neglected hungry me (as a child)

Dear little scavenger girl,

You tiny little thing, your hair so blonde and fluffy, your face so smiley.. but why are your eyes dark, your skin so dank, your hair so thin, your nails to brittle.....

When did you last eat? When was your last meal?

Is this why you travel across town to other peoples houses and wait around until its time for tea.. hoping they offer up food?

Let me feed you, healthy, proper food, let me give you love and support.. so you don't feel the need to scavenge for your food like a street rat. You might be given food from a skip to eat from those who are there to look after you, but this doesn't mean you are worth less than the other children.

I am sorry you were so hungry you have constant stomach pains, that you throw up bile..because there just isn't anything else in your tiny stomach.

The hunger pain is your comfort.. the only thing that keeps you sharp, keeps you alive... the hunt for the next meal.

Then when a meal was provided, you have to eat every last piece .."Think of the starving children in Africa".. be grateful for what you have.

Force fed liver, blegh I know you hate the feeling it creates at the top of your mouth.

Picking out glass in your pasta as you eat it... the shops had started to make it harder for people to take from the skips, by putting glass and bleach in them..

Food wasn't a priority for Herion parents.. and thats not your fault, you were small, and kept quite to make sure you didn't get a wack.

You are a good child, and you don't deserve to feel the way you do, to be scared to ask for food..

I still dream of the kitchen cupboard, of you scavenging through it, looking for something, anything to eat. Dried pasta was easy.. you and your scavenger brother would 'cook' it in the flame of the gas cooker. Dried noodles... they helped to make you feel full for a while. I remember the day you and your brother learnt to make pitta breads, flour and water...easy to do.

I want to tell you something... you can put down your hunting tools, let me clean up your face.

I can look after you now, feed you well, care for you. You do not need to eat as if its your last meal, you don't need that extra bit of fat to get you through the day or until you can eat again.

Do you trust me? I trust you.. and I know all you want is for someone to make sure you get fed... I am sorry I have made you eat more than you need for fear of you starving...I know now that you won't starve again.. I have money, time and skill to feed you in the right way... and you deserve that. Lets make your hair long and healthy, your nails and bones strong and take away those bags under your eyes.

I love you little scavenger girl, lets drop the scavenger so you can just be a girl, a healthy, happy, well fed girl. Feel that difference in your stomach? Thats it realising that you are safe, secure and well fed.

Love you and will always feed you well

Carrie

EXTRAS

News from the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers

The National Network for the Education of Care Leavers (NNECL) has been awarded funding by the Higher Education Funding Council for England for the development of a National Network for Collaborative Outreach (NNCO). This website will act as a single point of information about all outreach opportunities for children in care and care leavers delivered by further and higher education institutions in the UK.