

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



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OXFORD

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RESEARCH UPDATES

Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

The Department for Education (DfE) launched the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to act as a catalyst for developing more effective ways of supporting vulnerable children. The programme is seeking to inspire whole system change to improve the life chances for children receiving support from the social care system, to provide stronger incentives and mechanisms for innovation, experimentation and replication of successful new approaches and to increase value for money across children's social care. 57 projects have been approved and are being evaluated by 22 evaluation teams.

The Rees Centre was appointed as the Evaluation Coordinator (<http://springconsortium.com/evidence-learning/about->

[evaluation/](#)) for the programme, overseeing 57 individual project evaluations and capturing the value which is added by working in a group programme rather than working separately. The Rees team has been working with the evaluation teams to develop and agree an evaluation framework for assessing the outcomes and processes for the areas of focus which include rethinking children's social work, support for adolescents in, or on the edge of care, mental health, child sexual exploitation and many other areas of children's social care. We are also quality-assuring the evaluations to ensure that they not only serve the specific needs of the projects but also contribute to the overall programme evaluation. The Rees team is creating links and networks between projects and their evaluators covering similar themes and approaches.

The output for the evaluation findings of the Innovation Programme will be a number of thematic reports, published in late 2016, identifying models of practice and factors that seem to be contributing to improving outcomes for children and young people.

The team for this project is Judy Sebba, Nikki Luke, Alun Rees and Di McNeish supported by Clare Rowsome-Smith (Project Manager) and Diana Jones (Project Coordinator). Further details from: reesdfevaluation@education.ox.ac.uk

The Impact of Allegations on Foster Carers

The Sir Halley Stewart Trust and FosterTalk have awarded the Rees Centre £30,000 each to undertake a major study on the impact of allegations on foster carers. This study builds on a small pilot funded by FosterTalk, the report of which is available here: <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/allegations-of-abuse-against-foster-carers/>

Approximately 2,500 allegations of abuse are made against foster carers annually in the UK and 77% of subsequent investigations are closed as unproven (Biehal et al, 2014). Families experience severe disruption and many carers resign from fostering. A recent pilot (Dyson and Sebba, 2014) illustrated the devastating effects of allegations on fostering families including break-up of families, income loss and subsequent deterioration of health. This study aims to inform strategies for reducing allegations and addressing them more effectively in order to enhance stability of family life, increase recruitment and retention of foster carers and reduce costs.

The study involves two phases:

Phase 1: Secondary data analysis of anonymised records from 200 allegation cases that were unsubstantiated during the calendar years 2013 and 2014 obtained from fostering providers (LAs and IFPs). The characteristics of the foster carers and children involved will be analysed in order to identify any patterns that might help to target support and reduce the incidence of allegations.

Phase 2: In-depth interviews will be conducted with foster carers, social workers and fostering managers drawn from the 200 records to give a range of those who continued fostering, those who resigned and those who were de-registered.

We are looking for fostering providers (both local authority and independent) in England who would like to participate in Phase 1 of this study. If you are interested or would like more information please contact the researcher Gillian Plumridge at: gillian.plumridge@education.ox.ac.uk as soon as possible to discuss.

References:

Biehal, N., Cusworth, L., Wade, J. with Clarke, S. (2014) Keeping children safe: allegations concerning the abuse or neglect of children in care, London: NSPCC.

Dyson, P. and Sebba, J. (2014) Pilot study into the impact of allegations made against foster carers who accessed FISS or Foster Talk Services. Oxford: Rees Centre.

Rees Centre Evaluation of Step-Down project (Core Assets and Birmingham City Council)

The Rees Centre is evaluating the 'Step-Down project' run by Core Assets for Birmingham City Council. It will investigate

- whether and how the project supports a young person to move from a residential home to a stable foster care placement over a minimum of a year;
- what works well for the transition and what works less well to sustain and stabilise this move.

It will concentrate on the developmental impact of the transition from residential to foster care services on the long-term future of the young person.

Data Collection

The evaluation is using a mixed-methods approach. Semi-structured interviews with the young person, the foster carer, the child's social worker, the supervisory social worker and the mentor and quantitative data analysis (e.g. SDQs, Ofsted Happiness Scale, absconding, school attendance) will be undertaken at set periods of time during and after the placement. The collected data will be triangulated across respondents, in order to cross-reference and compare at both the individual level and across the group. This will also provide an individual trajectory of each case.

Further details from the evaluator Christina Plafky, Christina.plafky@education.ox.ac.uk

UPCOMING EVENTS

Webinar NEW DATE: 5 October 2015 - Educational progress of looked after children, linking care and education.
Further information: <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/our-events/>

REES CENTRE NEWS

Identifying and Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Children In Care – Webinar (3 June 2015)

[Webinar recording](#) (54 minutes) now on the website. [Slide presentation](#) also available.

This month's Rees Centre's blog post: [Identifying and addressing the mental health needs of children in care](#)
Aspects of 'ordinary care' have been shown to influence looked after children's mental health. Which aspects of 'ordinary care' can *you* influence?

Virtual School Handbook

Launched earlier this month, the handbook was produced with Rees Centre support through an ESRC Impact Acceleration grant for Visiting Practitioner Fellowships at the Centre. Available online only. Further information and to download:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/visiting-practitioners/virtual-school-head-handbook/>

Conference presentations

Judy chaired the one day national conference Looked After Children in Education: Improving Outcomes & Driving Progress on 19 May in Birmingham. Nikki and Jane Vellacott, one of our carer-interviewers, co-presented a workshop on *how schools can work with foster carers to support children's learning at home*. This [article](#) in Schools Week 7th June summarises presentations by Alun Rees and Lucy Wawrzyniak, Rees Visiting Fellows June-December 2014.

Judy gave a keynote at the Hampshire Fostering Network's Big Event for 150 foster carers on 3 June 2015. Her keynote

presentation, [Messages from Rees Centre research](#), is available in the [Resources](#) section of the website.

Nikki presented the key messages from the NSPCC/Rees Centre evidence review on mental health of looked after children at the Kent Foster Care Association's conference, 24 June 2015.

Judy gave a keynote at the national conference on use of the pupil premium with children who are looked after or adopted hosted by the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, 30 June 2015.

Áine participated in the poster session at the BAAF Conference, Troubled Teens, Recognising and Responding to the health needs of looked after young people, on 23 June 2015.

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Teens moved too many times in care](#), The Fostering Network, 1 June 2015

[Social Workers need attachment training says NICE draft guidance](#), Community Care, 1 June 2015

[Foster children can stay with families until 21 under reforms](#), BBC News Wales, 12 June 2015

[Foster Carers perceive special guardianship orders as nothing short of blackmail](#), 2 June 2015, Community Care

[Children In Care often feel ignored – but there are ways to give them a voice](#), The Guardian Social Care Network, 17 June 2015

[Social workers under scrutiny as parents capture sessions on camera](#), The Guardian, 17 June 2015

[The College of Social Work to close due to lack of funds](#), Community Care, 18 June 2015

[MPs concerned government is making adoption 'gold standard' for all children](#), Community Care, 23 June 2015

[Residential care in the English child welfare system](#), Department for Education, 25 June 2015

BOOK REVIEW

Creating Stable Foster Placements. Learning from Foster Children and the Families Who Care for Them.

Andy Pithouse and Alyson Rees. JKP £22.99. The lives and routines of 10 foster families, considered to be providers of effective and lasting care, are examined. Featuring original research, the book presents an analysis of the type of care that these families provide and the reason for their success.



CREATING STABLE FOSTER PLACEMENTS

Learning from Foster Children and
the Families Who Care for Them

FOREWORD BY FREDA LEWIS
ANDY PITHOUSE AND ALYSON REES

Creating Stable Foster Placements is a must read for anyone linked with fostering, thinking of fostering or working with children in a fostering environment. It is both addictive and compelling.

The study focuses on ten families and gives an in depth account of their day to day lives. What I personally like is the way it looks at each family member's feelings on an individual basis, resulting in a no-holds-barred account of what family life is really like in this kind of setting. The premise of the book is clear: in order to succeed, you need patience by the bucket load, the support of family and friends and a determination to succeed when working with Looked After Children.

Reviewed by Judith Clare, foster carer.

YOUNG VOICES

How do Schools speak to children in care about their birth parents?

Thanks to Luke Rodgers for letting us reprint his [blog post](#).
hello@lukespeaks.com

Yesterday I spoke at Optimum Educations 9th annual conference, talking about how we can support children in care to achieve in education. Addressing the conference of mostly teachers, my responses and this blog is aimed at teachers and those working in schools with looked after children.

As always being introduced as the 'inspirational address' giving me that pressure to talk about what I think we should do, in a way that's engaging and remembered. This is a little pet hate of mine as I would like to think I do more than just inspire, I like to believe that I provide professional services and frameworks that offer resourceful and sustainable change for children's services.

At the end of my presentation I was asked: "how do schools engage with children in care to speak about their birth parents?" After an initial gulp and slightly concerned mind, I was left wondering why schools would want to be speaking to children about the birth parents, and is it really their place or role to do so?

A child's parental history is unequivocally the most integral and important aspect of a child's life, positive or negative. Beyond my thoughts as to why schools need to be exploring this, I understand that it happens so I'd like to share my response with you, in the hope that if you are crossing those boundaries, you must be mindful with your approach.

For a child to share something so emotionally important to them you must ensure they trust you, that you are and have a consistent figure for them and that you have a relationship that promotes their aspiration, non-judgmentally.

Too often our approach can be a disingenuous attempt to understand children through their experiences, trying to pinpoint an event or moment in a child's history that can explain a reason for their behaviour. If this is your reason to speak about a child's parents, my advice would be not to entice this conversation as it's for the wrong reasons.

So what do we do when children want to speak about their parents? We need to be able to allow young people to explore their own ideas, feelings and understanding of the relationship with their parents, reserving their own personal projections.

Schools can be one place that has been consistent for a child, with placement moves at an all time high, more and more children are becoming unstable in their home lives. If as teachers and educators you can inspire aspiration and believe in children's endless capability, you may just be the stability that makes a positive impact on their life chances.

We can't promise children they will achieve in school, we can't promise children that they will be at the top of the class, if we have the ability as educators to look at the bigger picture, what we can promise is when children discover their passion and aspiration, it's going to be far better than anything they can imagine.

EXTRAS

The draft **NICE guidelines on children's attachment** (attachment in children and young people who are adopted from care, in care or at high risk of going into care) are currently open for review and comment.

Deadline 13 July 2015 at 5pm.

Details of the consultation:

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/gid-cgwave0675/documents/childrens-attachment-draft-guideline-consultation>

Two articles on **care leaver educational transitions** have been published by colleagues at LaTrobe University, Australia.

The following article in The Australian Journal of Education is freely available until 3 July. **A forgotten cohort? Including people from out-of-home care in Australian higher education policy** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0004944115587529>

Opinion piece in Australia Policy Online: <http://apo.org.au/commentary/out-care-and-university>