

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

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RESEARCH UPDATES

Launch of Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England Report



The formal launch of the report took place at the Nuffield Foundation in London on 30 November 2015, attended by the Children and Families Minister Edward Timpson MP ([read his speech](#)).

The research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation and led by Professor Judy Sebba (University of Oxford) and Professor David Berridge (University of Bristol). Our website has a lot of information related to the study including all the reports, a summary of the key messages and slides from the launch event and public seminar in London and Oxford:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/research/educational-progress-of-looked-after-children/>

In addition, the slides and recording (45 mins) of the webinar held on 15 December will shortly be available on the Rees Centre website:

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

The overview report is available in hard copy by request to rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk

You can listen to an interview with Judy about the research on the Radio 4 Today programme:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06qhlhs> (around 55.00 on the clock).

See the links below for other coverage:

[TES](#), 30/11/2015

[BBC online](#), 30/11/2015

[The Times](#), 30/11/2015

[Community Care](#), 30/11/2015

[The Independent](#), 30/11/2015

[Children & Young People Now](#), 30/11/2015

[BBC Radio Oxford Drivetime](#) (interview with David Berridge) 30/11(16:30)

The study was also mentioned in the following two articles:

[Foster care is a renewal of the human spirit](#), Huffington Post, 6/12/2015

[Hard Evidence, are more children going into care?](#), The Conversation, 9/12/2015

Teenagers in Foster Care Seminar Series – project update

In 2013, the Rees Centre and the Department of Social Policy and Intervention at Oxford University, together with the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Gothenburg in Sweden, were awarded a grant from the ESRC to run a series of seminars entitled *Teenagers in foster care*. Six seminars took place between the beginning of 2014 and the summer of 2015 on topics including managing relationships with teenagers in foster care, teenage sex and risk, migrants and asylum seekers, juvenile justice and leaving care.

As well as students and researchers, the events were well attended by foster carers, young people, social workers and managers from charities and local authorities. The seminars were able therefore to genuinely involve all concerned with these topics and resulting discussions were extremely lively and informative. Research findings were presented at the seminars and a summary of the key points have been incorporated into a Handbook for Foster Carers. While the Handbook is not a report of the research findings, all the information is informed by research. As much detail as possible has been included so that the Handbook will be helpful for foster carers in their relationships with the teenagers in their care. The Handbook will be published early in the New Year and details will be in the next newsletter. In addition to a final report to the Research Council, there will also be a special edition of an academic journal with papers from the seminars.

Evaluation of London Schools Excellence Fund: Children in Care project

The draft report has now been submitted and the key findings will be summarised in the next newsletter.

REES CENTRE NEWS

Bake Sale

The Rees Centre Bake Sale in October raised £222 for The Who Cares? Trust, a charity dedicated to supporting children and young people in care. Thank you to everyone who supported this event.

Fostering Friendly Launch

Oxfordshire County Council, in collaboration with the Rees Centre, launched its Fostering Friendly Policy on 19 November at the Department of Education, University of Oxford. The policy commits employers to making it as easy as possible for their employees to foster children and young people. Corporate Parenting Manager Matthew Edwards reported that seven companies had adopted the policy which would encourage more people locally to become foster carers, enabling more children in care to stay in Oxfordshire. Oxfordshire County Council readily participates in research on fostering undertaken by the Rees Centre and uses findings from the research to inform its policies and practice. Last year OCC seconded a member of staff from the Virtual School (who support children in care's education) to work with the Rees Centre to improve the use of research findings in the education sector and assist in ensuring the research is as relevant as possible.

The following organisations have signed up to the policy so far with University of Oxford proposing to do so: Oxford City Council; Home for Good; Oxfordshire Health; Oxfam; Bishop of Dorchester; Fitzwaryn School - The Propeller Academy Trust.

Presentations

Judy gave a key note speech at the launch of the new Centre for Social Work Innovation and Research (University of Sussex) on 12 October: *'Inter-disciplinary research/innovative policy and practice: How to manage the interface effectively'*.

Judy spoke at the Irish Foster Care Association's Symposium on 19 October 2015: Challenging schools and fostering services to be more inclusive to improve the educational outcomes of looked after children.

Judy presented at the Hampshire Virtual School Conference on 21 October *'What does research suggest makes a difference to the educational progress of children in care?'*

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Looked After and Learning: Improving the learning journey of looked after children](#), CELCIS, 6 October 2015

[New study finds significant increase in children being brought up by relatives in England](#), University of Bristol, 13 October 2015

[Children in Care: Returning home from care](#), NSPCC October 2015

[Characteristics of Children in Need 2014-2015](#), Department for Education, 22 October 2015

[Poor support failing most vulnerable young people say MPs](#), BBC News, 30 October 2015

[Special Guardianship Order Assessments to be Strengthened](#), Community Care, 2 November 2015

[Care Leavers Transition to Adulthood, Ofsted](#), 28 October 2015

[Children's residential care review: independent call for evidence](#), Department for Education, 28 October 2015

[Calling for Improved Services for Children in Care](#), Royal College of Nursing, 29 October 2015

[Poor support is failing UK's vulnerable care leavers](#), Public Accounts Committee, Department for Education, 29 October 2015

[Protecting children from harm](#), Office of the Children's Commissioner, 24 November 2015

[What children, young people and adults told Ofsted about children's homes, fostering services and adoption agencies](#), 23 November 2015

BOOK REVIEW

Helping foster children in school. A guide for foster parents, social workers and teachers. By John DeGarmo, JKP £16.99

A book about the American Foster care system. Focusing on research, American history, American statistics and American education this book paints a bleak picture of foster children being rescued from cycles of abuse only to be caught in a cycle of negativity and change where school seems presented primarily as an obstacle. With the first 70 pages summarising statistics, within child 'diagnoses', abuse patterns and poor life chances this book certainly does not start off with a solution focused outlook. By chapter 6 some positive ideas begin to creep in. Potentially the most useful parts of this book are the short vignettes and case studies by foster carers, educators and young people which bring home the reality of some experiences of children in the care system. It is not until the author starts talking about foster parents' roles that the passion shines through and ideas begin to come alive.

This book is likely to have limited use outside America as American terminology and systems around social care and education are deeply embedded throughout. There are lots of ideas thrown around but often deeply embedded in text and threaded in with frustration around the American foster system's failings.

Review by Richard Field, Foster carer, Teacher & Educational Psychologist



YOUNG VOICES

In our recently published research on the Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, 26 young people, eligible to take GCSEs in 2013, gave their views on what had helped or hindered their educational progress.

We've extracted a few below. To read the full report, see [Technical Report 3](#).

Young people's experiences were often cited as reasons for their educational outcomes:

We first went into care because my mum didn't want us anymore. Well, it wasn't really that; she'd got a boyfriend, and the boyfriend said, 'It's me or the kids', and obviously she chose him. She took us into school, and I remember it like it was yesterday – she took us to school with packed bags and said she wasn't going to come and pick us up afterwards... Obviously, they had to call the social services because of it.

As I went to secondary school... Actually, my first year of secondary school, I was with my dad and it was still that bad that I was on the verge of getting kicked out of that school. Then, when I got into care, that's what basically saved me...

And obviously, throughout all of this, I was going through so much, the stress of my mother ringing my phone at 12, 1 o'clock in the morning to talk. And because I didn't want to say no, I would talk to her, and then I would wake up in the morning and be too tired to go to school because I was on the phone to her. Then I ended up getting [name of illness] during school, because of the stress-related problems. I used to literally feel like I was going to soil myself every time my taxi drove into my school.

Like I said, no one barely, at school knows I'm in care, so they would never, ever, ever... I think, if they knew, it would be harder for me to just act like I weren't. Like, it would be harder for me to focus on my education and stuff... I think if people knew, like, what you were like as being a foster kid, and what everyone else is like as a foster kid, you'd conform, not even realising you were. But, I think where no one really knows, I actually see myself as not in care... I actually see myself as normal, as the rest of my friends are, with parents, and stuff like that.

Listen a lot, a hell of a lot. Listen, because not enough people do that. I mean, there are a lot of kids out there that do need help, and they won't ask because they're too scared to, or they're too scared to get shut down. So if a child is telling you they need help, you need to listen, and even if they're not telling you, ask questions. Ask them if they need help, because a lot of kids don't get asked that. They just, kind of, 'Well, do you need help?' 'No, not right now'. That doesn't mean I'm never going to need help; that means that I don't need help right now.

Entry into care and relationships

I wouldn't say being in care itself. Being in the right support is what actually really helped me out, and my carer's what really, like, helped me out. I think that if I was with my mum, I probably wouldn't have done as well...

Although she's in care she's been brought up with family, other family members, extended family members, and they've been very, very supportive and rock solid for her, and, obviously, it's given her a very strong foundation... In fact, so much so that even when the unfortunate death with regards [to] her grandparents that were her carers and they both passed away over the last couple of years, and her aunt then moved into the family home rather than move [name] out of the family home, you know, just to give her that stability and that consistency in her life.

...and the thing was, when it came to my last carers, I was getting support, like, food, shelter and like, you know, warmth but yeah, I was getting those ones, but I wasn't getting love, care, you know, compassion. Like, I just felt like it was just a placement...

School experiences

I think best, it would've been teachers, yes. Because teachers, I've always looked at them for schoolwork and everything, because they helped me; I've always, like, related to them more than carers or anything. Like, carers and social workers have helped me, but teacher have always been there for me, always.

Halfway through year, so it was Year 9 and they were taking their exams. I didn't know so they sat me in the school taking these prep exams and I didn't know what on earth I was doing.

..my brother went to school in [name] as well, but he was at primary school for a bit of it, and then he came to my school, and if I had revision sessions after school, I couldn't do it because we went in the same taxi, so he would have to stay later and he'd have nowhere to stay...so it'd have to be at exactly the same time. So, I missed out on stuff like that...

And because I did the lower paper, it's C and below, getting a D is all right. I mean, no one's expecting me to get a C, realistically, you know, not of our predicted grades, unfortunately, which I think is very rude. I don't like predicted grades: it makes kids feel like they're shittier than what they are.

These extracts are from: Berridge, D., Bell, K., Sebba, J. & Luke, N. (2015) [The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England Technical Report 3: Perspectives of Young People, Social Workers, Carers and Teachers](#) Oxford and Bristol: The Rees Centre and Bristol University