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RESEARCH UPDATES

FOSTERING PROVIDERS NEEDED!!

We are currently looking for local authorities (ADCS approval has been granted, ref: RGE160425) and independent fostering agencies to participate in a research study to improve understanding of the associations between foster carers' attributes and placement success. The study will test out standardised measures which could be useful in future for the selection and training process of foster carers.

If you are interested in being part of this study, please contact vania.pinto@education.ox.ac.uk as soon as possible. (Please note we cannot work directly with individual foster carers).

Title: *'Perspectives on assessing foster carers: A cross-country comparison of the factors that are associated with successful placements'* (doctoral student Vânia Pinto, Rees Centre for Fostering and Education).

This research aims to achieve a deeper understanding of successful fostering, through analysing which foster carers'

attributes are associated with looked after children's emotional, social and behavioural outcomes and potential for placement stability. It will look at the relationship between foster carers' attributes and looked after children's outcomes in England and in Portugal.

We are looking to involve a total of 325 foster carers in England along with their supervising social workers. They will be asked to complete questionnaires about foster carers' attributes and looked after children's outcomes. We are following a similar process in Portugal.

Further information: [Rees Centre website](#)

NEW The Impact of Unproven Allegations on Foster Carers

This report was formally launched in London on 7 July. The research found that foster carers who have faced unproven allegations of abuse from children they are caring for often have little support during an investigation. Recommendations included making sure that carers are aware of the procedure of an allegation, providing more specific training on allegations for carers and social workers, and offering independent support services.

The [full report and a summary of the key messages](#) are available on our website. We are also happy to send out free hard copies on request to rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk.

You may also be interested in looking at the YouTube recording of our recent webinar on this topic:

<https://youtu.be/o0Ha8PFSLCE>

EVENTS

Dr Karen Winter (Queen's University Belfast) presented her work evaluating the Letterbox Club in Northern Ireland at our public seminar on 13 June. There was lots of interest in her study, particularly from Virtual Schools, and the slides from her presentation are now on our website:

[Slide presentation: The findings of an RCT evaluation of the effectiveness of the Letterbox Club in improving reading and number skills of foster children ages 7-11 years old](#) (pdf)

REES CENTRE NEWS



Professor Judy Sebba awarded honorary doctorate from University of Sussex

Judy is one of 10 remarkable people [honoured by the University of Sussex](#) for achieving excellence in public and academic life. She received an honorary doctorate from the Chancellor, artist and writer Sanjeev Bhaskar, at a ceremony on 18 July. Prior to directing the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education, she was the Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange in the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex. [More details on Judy's work.](#)

Welcome to Dr Eleanor Ott, new Research Fellow

We are delighted to announce that Dr Eleanor Ott is joining the Rees Centre next month as a Research Fellow. Ellie has been managing the Oxfam Humanitarian Evidence Programme and has a doctorate on the well-being of resettled refugees from the Oxford Centre for Evidence-Based Intervention, where she studied as a Rhodes Scholar. She has been a consultant to the UN Refugee Agency and spent a year as a research analyst in the US Department of Health and Human Services improving research on children and families. She is also a foster carer. Ellie will be leading future Rees research on asylum seeking children in foster care and contributing in particular to our research on foster carers.



Conference Presentations

On 22 June 2016, Judy addressed foster carers, education professionals, researchers and policy makers at an event organised by Queens University Belfast on the topic 'Supporting the Education of Children in Care: What Helps?'

On 22 June 2016, Nikki took part in a panel discussion on young people's mental health at the NSPCC national conference *How Safe Are Our Children?*

Findings from *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England* study were presented to the Ofsted South West region Social Care Conference (16 June) and to the Association of Directors of Children's Services National Conference (7 July). Dr Nikki Luke gave a public seminar on the same study at LSE (1 June).

Upcoming Presentations at EUSARF 2016

Staff and students from the Rees Centre will be presenting their work at the 14th International Conference of the European Scientific Association on Residential & Family Care for Children and Adolescents (EUSARF) this September. The Centre is leading three symposium sessions, which will draw together work on a related topic:

1: 'Supporting physical and mental health of young people in care: Messages from research and practice'

Áine Kelly and Nikki Luke (Rees Centre), with Louise Bazalgette (NSPCC), Helen Drew (University of Sussex), and Dominic McSherry (Queen's University Belfast)

This symposium covers a range of mixed methods work that sits at the intersection of research and practice in England and Northern Ireland. It incorporates a review of mental health interventions; action research with local authorities; practice surveys with Virtual School head teachers; direct work in schools; interviews with carers, other professionals, and young people; and the use of innovative visual methods. Taken together, these papers present a picture of the physical and mental health needs and experiences of young people in care. The session will draw on findings from research and practice to suggest a set of priorities for services looking to support young people's well-being. The symposium will highlight a number of themes, including the interplay between physical and mental health, and the role of 'ordinary care' in promoting well-being. A key focus across the presentations will be the importance of ensuring that

young people's voices are represented in healthcare decisions and in research.

2: 'Measuring outcomes'

Vânia Pinto and Mariela Neagu (Rees Centre), with Gabriella Tonk (Babes-Bolyai University), Irina Sirbu (University of East Anglia), and Sónia Rodrigues (University of Porto)

This symposium will reflect on which are the most relevant needs of looked after children in different countries, and how their outcomes can be measured. It includes two studies conducted in Romania. The first is based on document analysis of case-files of child abuse and neglect and on interviews with public social services. The second is based on analysis of interviews with young adults that were raised in residential care, foster care, domestic or international adoption. One retrospective study will present evidence from in-depth interviews with biological mothers and participatory research methods with young people that were removed and re-integrated into the child protection system in Moldova. The final two studies will look at Portuguese data, the first is focused on the quality of residential care and will look at results from direct observation, documentary analysis, interviews and questionnaires from children and young people, caregivers, welfare services' professionals and directors. The final paper is based on focus groups conducted in Portugal and in England with social workers, foster carers, care leavers and young people in care and will analyse their perspectives about outcomes and successful placements. The speakers will reflect on looked after children's outcomes and what actions should be taken to improve residential care, foster care and the decision making process, taking into account the voice of looked after children. These studies intend to contribute to knowledge by developing research that can support country level policy decisions.

3. 'Understanding the evidence on the educational progress of young people in care'

Judy Sebba and Nikki Luke (Rees Centre), with David Berridge (University of Bristol), Nicholas Tessier (University of Ottawa), and Karen Winter (Queen's University Belfast)

This symposium describes mixed methods research from England, Canada and Northern Ireland that encompasses secondary data analysis, interviews with young people in care and key adults in their education and a randomised control trial of a widely used intervention. In so doing, it identifies some important factors contributing to the poor outcomes noted and suggests what might be done to improve these. Furthermore, the symposium demonstrates the importance of robust research designs being employed to evaluate contributing factors and approaches. It also highlights the role of young people's perspectives in helping us to understand the 'how' and 'why' of the processes that led to these findings. Furthermore, young people's views are contextualised in wider theoretical perspectives that might increase our understanding of some of the similarities and differences between the education of young people in care and their peers.

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Raising the Attainment, Achievement and Aspiration of Children Looked After: best practice report](#) Estyn (Wales)

[Ofsted Social Care Annual Report](#) July 2016

[Putting Children First: our vision for children's social care: DfE policy paper, 4 July 2016](#)

[Our response to Estyn's report about educational attainment looked after children in Wales](#), *The Fostering Network*, 5 July 2016

[Keep on Caring: Supporting young people from care to independence](#), *DfE policy paper, 7 July 2016*

[Abused Children 're-traumatised' by support services](#), *Children and Young People Now*, 12 July 2016

[Referrals to social workers 'less likely to progress if made on weekend'](#), *Community Care*, 11 July 2016

[Narey report gives children's homes the status they deserve](#), *Guardian Social Care*, 11 July 2016

[Scope of major children's services review set out](#), *Children and Young People Now*, 11 July 2016

[MPS claim lack of evidence on children's Trust model](#), *Local Government Chronicle*, 13 July 2016

[Measuring the wellbeing of looked after children - current approaches and future recommendation](#) *Strategic Briefing, Research In Practice (July 2016)*

YOUNG VOICES

We end with these thoughts from Scott, taken from his blog post at www.B2longblog.com

What Schools Can Do To Help Fostered Children

When I was at primary school I wasn't very 'good'. I would get sent out of class a lot. I could paint a picture of the head master's office as I was sent there so much!

When the class would get a substitute teacher, well, let's just say it never went down well with me.

I got a teaching assistant in year 4 and she really helped the teachers understand a bit about me and she would take me out of class if I was struggling to concentrate. This helped because sometimes my mind wasn't in the right place for work.

I have tried listening to music whilst I worked in class. This helped get my mind in the right place for work. However I do not use any of those methods anymore because I have made such a big improvement.

When I was in primary a lot of teachers were very impatient and the teachers and me would get cross with each other. My mum came into school having arranged a meeting with my teachers to tell them a bit about me. This was very helpful for the teachers because they could understand the difference between me and some of the other students and why I did certain things.

Okay, next topic.

Home and school communication was difficult for me when I was at school because I wouldn't know what the teacher was writing in the diary. Once a substitute teacher came in and all was good until the afternoon when I started to get agitated and messed around and the teacher wrote this in my diary. I was cross with her and that the day hadn't been perfect so I ripped out the page and wrote my own version of the day! I probably should have done a better job with my handwriting because my Mum knew straight away.

Overall I would like to say that school can be tricky for foster kids and I hope that all teachers read this so they can understand them better. We aren't naughty. We just need more help.

From Scott. Aged 14.