

REES CENTRE

Research in Fostering and Education
University of Oxford Department of Education



UNIVERSITY OF
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RESEARCH UPDATES

Evaluations - Children's Social Care Innovation Programme

Reports on ten projects have been published so far. The summaries can be seen on the [Spring Consortium website](#). As the Evaluation Co-ordinator for the Programme, we are happy to answer any questions on these reports. Please contact [Judy Sebba](#).

Evaluation of the Mockingbird project (by the Centre for Child & Family Research, Loughborough University)

The Mockingbird Family Model (MFM) involves foster care provision in which clusters of between six and ten 'satellite homes' are grouped together to form a 'constellation' supported by 'hub carers' who provide a range of support including: planned and emergency respite care; regular constellation meetings and activities; learning and development opportunities; informal one-to-one advice and support. By September 2016, The Fostering Network had supported

eight fostering providers to establish 16 constellations with 106 fostering households fostering 116 children.

Key findings from the evaluation:

- Approximately 4% of the children in MFM experienced an unplanned placement change, significantly lower than the 8% of all children looked after over the same period.
- None of the foster carers participating in the MFM ceased to foster compared to around 6% of foster carers ceasing to foster nationally over the same period.
- Those participating are very positive about it, reporting that it enabled foster carers and those placed with them to experience increased use of planned respite as well as providing emergency respite with a familiar carer and access to one-to-one flexible support from an experienced carer.

Evaluation of KEEP (by Ipsos MORI and Professor David Berridge, Bristol University)

KEEP is a 16-week group training programme for foster and kinship carers, approved to care for children aged 5-12 years old, which aims to improve the skills and confidence of carers when responding to children's difficult behaviour thereby improving child behaviour and carer well-being. Developed in the USA, KEEP became available in England in 2009 through the National Implementation Service (NIS). This evaluation carried out by Ipsos MORI was the first independent evaluation of KEEP in England, informing its effectiveness in a UK context. 12 KEEP groups from ten local authorities in England were involved in September and November 2015. 59 carers participated in the training and measures before and after the training were compared to those of carers who had not participated (a control group).

Key findings from the evaluation:

- There were significant improvements from baseline to follow-up for the KEEP trained carers on emotional distress and prosocial behaviours compared with the control group. No statistically significant differences were found on the total SDQ score or on sub-scales relating to conduct problems, hyperactivity or peer problems.
- Improvements in parenting were observed for both the intervention and control groups; however, the intervention group showed significantly greater improvements compared with the control group at follow-up.
- The intervention group showed greater improvements in carer well-being compared with the control group though these differences were not statistically significant.
- Carers were very positive about the programme, and particularly praised the format of sharing strategies and experiences with other carers. Carers felt that the programme improved how they responded to challenging behaviour and equipped them with new strategies. Most carers described changes in their child's behaviour as a consequence.

Key findings from other projects will be highlighted in future newsletters.

New research project looking at the matching process - local authorities wanted

What makes a good matching process between foster carers and children in care? How can local authorities and independent fostering agencies improve their placement stability figures and Ofsted reports? There is currently little research evidence on the matching process, but there is some indication that providing more information and involving children and young people in the process may be critical to outcomes.

We are beginning the first phase of a matching study in collaboration with Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council, North Yorkshire County Council, and Fostering People to develop an improved and feasible matching process. We are also recruiting local authorities for a second phase of the research to rigorously evaluate an enhanced matching process. If your local authority is interested or if you would like more information, please contact Dr Ellie Ott at the Rees Centre on 01865 284062 or ellie.ott@education.ox.ac.uk. There is no obligation to take part. Thank you!

Teenagers in Foster Care: a handbook for foster carers and those that support them

Authors: John Coleman with Jane Vellacott, Graham and Maggie Solari, Nikki Luke & Judy Sebba

We are delighted to announce that the handbook will be published in early January. It is aimed at foster carers and those who support them, for example their families, supervising social workers, children's social workers, teachers, fostering providers and therapists. We recommend that the handbook is provided at the point of new teenage placements or as part of fostering training for anyone intending to foster teenagers.

It is designed as an easy to use guide with numbered sections covering, for example, adolescent development, building relationships, and sexuality and sexual health in foster care. Each section begins with a summary of relevant key points from research. There are 'Top Tips' boxes throughout as well as suggested discussion points between social workers and foster carers or for foster carers' own reflection. Below is an example from the chapter on risk-taking.

Top tips

- Make sure the rules and boundaries are easily understood
- Discussion and negotiation are better than imposition
- Get the young person to suggest their own sanctions
- Rules and boundaries should be appropriate to their developmental and chronological age and circumstances
- Try and give more praise than punishment
- If you focus on the positives, the negatives sometimes seem less important

Discussion points

1. Rules and boundaries are essential if a placement is to work. What do you consider the best way to ensure that these are upheld in your household?
2. The balance between praise and punishment is a recurrent theme in relationships between adults and young people. Research suggests that ideally you should use at least twice as much praise as punishment. What can be done to make this a reality in the foster care situation?
3. Using strengths-based language (e.g. 'chooses not to...' rather than 'is resistant to...') can avoid confrontation. Ask those working with you to help you reframe scenarios so you can begin to 'mind your language'.

This publication came out of a seminar series [Teenagers in Foster Care](#), funded by an ESRC grant to the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education and the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, together with the social work departments of the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. The five seminars covered research on young people which would be useful for foster carers as well as research specifically about young people in care. Topics included relationships with teenagers in foster care, teenage sex and risk, asylum-seeking children, juvenile justice, and leaving care. Foster carers, young people, social workers and managers from charities and local authorities participated in the lively, informative discussions at each event along with students and researchers.

[Further information from the seminar series](#) is available online and can be accessed for free. This includes videos of many presentations along with slides and summary reports.

To request a free hard copy, please send your address to the Rees Centre rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk.

EVENTS

Launch of Teenagers in Foster Care Handbook, Thursday 19 January 2017, London

This event will be held Thursday morning at the Abbey Community Centre in Westminster from 10.30am (speakers from 11am). If you would like to attend, please register by email to rees.centre@education.ox.ac.uk but please note that we are limited to 40 places.

Supporting the Sons & Daughters of Foster Parents: Integrating Research and Practice Wisdom, 20 Feb 2017 (online)

This online event is free but requires you to register in advance. Findings from our literature review on the impact of fostering on the children of foster carers will be discussed. It is being organised by colleagues in Canada:

This free virtual symposium brings researchers, practitioners, and fostering community from around the world together to share leading edge research, evidence-based practices, and emerging ideas on practical strategies to support the sons and daughters of foster parents (sons/daughters) throughout their fostering experiences. Be a part of the dialogue and the community of global members bringing innovative and collaborative wisdom into their research and practices within foster care. Further information: <http://www.sharingsupports.com/index.php/about>

REES CENTRE NEWS

Overseas Institutional Visit Award

Congratulations to Vânia Pinto, doctoral student at the Rees Centre, who has won an ESRC Doctoral Training Centre Overseas Institutional Visit award that will take place at the University of Groningen for two months. Vânia will be working alongside Dr Mónica López López and her team from the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences.

Rees Centre blog

Guest post this month from George and Lucy about the Oxford community coming together to invite care leavers from Oxfordshire to join them at The Oxford Christmas Dinner. This is part of a greater initiative led by poet and writer Lemn Sissay, the Chancellor of Manchester University, who is care experienced himself:

<http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/show-care-leavers-you-care-this-christmas/>

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

[Foster care focus for child asylum strategy, Edward Timpson, statement to Parliament](#), 2 November 2016

[Thematic report on unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children](#), ADCS, 3 November 2016

[Child asylum seeker numbers double in two years](#), BBC News, 4 November 2016

[Mental health assessments needed for children in care](#), The Guardian, 8 November 2016

[Lords defeat government over child protection proposals](#), The Guardian, 8 November 2016

[Improving mental health & emotion wellbeing support for young people in care, Department of Health](#), SCIE, Dec 2016

BOOK REVIEW

Parenting a Child with Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

Dan Hughes, CoramBAAF £8.95

ISBN: 978 1 907585 60 9

Review by Theresa Winnard, foster carer

This is a very handy size book to carry around and refer to. The cover is colourful and the illustration provides a strong message that explains how people feel regarding emotional and behavioural difficulties. I do like the fact that foster carers, adoptive parents and other professionals have contributed, giving a valuable insight into the problems they have dealt with. The content page gives a clear idea of the issues that are to be presented. The book is divided into two sections. Section 1 deals with understanding emotional and behavioural difficulties. Section 2 explains about parenting children who are affected by this disorder. Good clear guidelines are given to enable success for carers as to what they need to do to help the child develop. I found the 24 S guidelines on page 45 particularly useful. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone dealing with emotional and behavioural difficulties in children.

YOUNG VOICES

Care Leavers Week 2016 lecture

Around 10,000 young people move on to independent living from foster care or residential care each year in England and Wales. The 20th-30th October 2016 was Care Leavers Week, a time to raise awareness of the issues facing people who have left the care system. As part of Care Leavers Week, a special lecture was hosted by the Rees Centre.

Presentations were given by three care experienced academics who discussed their research work and explored what life at university can be like for those who have just left care. The event was well attended and the audience heard about research into resilience in children in care, developments in Scottish law for young people in care and about the lived experience of a care leaver at university.

The lecture was organised by Rees Foundation, a charity that supports any young person or adult who has been in foster care or residential care, through financial support, signposting, events and training. During Care Leavers Week, Rees Foundation celebrated and announced its merger with The Care Leavers Foundation as they became 'Rees- The Care Leavers Foundation'.

Sarah Milan (CEO) said "For both charities, intentions have always been to work hard, and in partnership to achieve our aims, and to maintain an ambitious approach. This outlook has allowed us to see the potential in a more formal arrangement and to proceed this year with a merger of Rees Foundation and The Care Leavers Foundation. After initial discussions it became clear that there were many similarities between the two charities in terms of our origins, passion and ambition for the future".

Rees-The Care Leavers Foundation aims to offer those with care experience opportunities to develop individually but also to build their community, giving them wider support and a chance to help each other. They are also able to deliver training to carers and social workers on all elements of the care journey, with the resource 'Living With Strangers'. All courses are co-facilitated with young people and adults with care experience so you get the real life insight that makes a difference.

Contact: contactus@reesfoundation.org or visit the website www.reesfoundation.org

Starting Out Right: Early Education and Looked After Children

Opportunities to narrow the achievement gap between children in care and their peers are being missed because too many of them do not receive good quality early education places, according to new research funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

This recent report by Sandra Mathers and colleagues from the University of Oxford FELL research group and the Family and Childcare Trust was launched on 1st December. The authors were joined on the discussion panel by the Earl of Listowel, Matthew Blood (Virtual School Head), Margy Whalley (Pen Green Research Base), John Simmonds (Coram BAAF) and others.

Full report and summary: <http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/starting-out-right-early-education-and-looked-after-children>

Elements of Effective Practice for Children and Youth served by therapeutic residential care

Published by Casey Family Programs, March 2016

Executive summary: <http://www.casey.org/media/Group-Care-Exec-summ-complete.pdf>