

June 2017 Newsletter#23 CONTENTS

Research Updates

New project-Educational Progress of Children in Need and Children in Care (funded by Nuffield Foundation)
New project-randomized controlled trial of Letterbox Club and paired reading with foster carers (funded by ESRC)
Interim findings Evaluation of Birmingham City Council's Step Down Programme
Evaluations of Stoke's House Project; Wigan and Rochdale CSE (Children's Social Care Innovation Programme)

Events

Public seminar by Professor Elizabeth Fernandez, Weds 18 Oct, Oxford
Slides & podcast from Professor Julie Selwyn's seminar on Bright Spots project now available

Rees Centre News

New Centre Director sought upon Judy's retirement from post March 2018
Welcome to Dr Lisa Holmes, joining us as Deputy Director Oct 2017
International Foster Care Research Conference, Paris Sep 2017

Foster Care In the News

Book Review

A Simple Guide to Child Trauma, Betsy de Thierry. Reviewed by foster carer Alison Donnelly-Shorrock

Young Voices

My experience of higher education, Steve Hawksworth, undergraduate Sheffield Hallam University

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RESEARCH UPDATES

New project - Educational Progress of Children in Need and Children in Care

The Rees Centre and University of Bristol are delighted to announce we have secured funding from the Nuffield Foundation for a new study on the educational progress of children in care and children in need. Building on our [previous work](#) and continued discussions with colleagues at the DfE, Ofsted, the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and the National Association of Virtual School Heads (NAVSH), the research will include both children in care and children in need (those receiving social work support while living at home), in order to investigate strengths and vulnerabilities in young people with related but distinct home and school experiences. Nikki Luke at the Rees Centre will lead the quantitative analysis of government databases, to investigate a cohort of all children in England

who began their education in 2006-2007 and track their social care and educational histories through to GCSEs in 2016-2017. This will include periods as a child in need or in care at any stage of their schooling. Professor David Berridge at Bristol will lead a qualitative strand that will allow deeper analysis of issues including the use made of education and social care resources. Interviews will be conducted with a sample of children in care and children in need, as well as their parents/carers, social workers and teachers, and Virtual School Heads.

The overall research questions:

1. Compared with all pupils, what are the educational trajectories, attainments and progress of children who are CIN/CIC at some stage of their schooling, and what are the associated factors?
2. How can we account for children who succeed in their educational attainments at 16 years despite experiencing severe early adversity?
3. What are parents', pupils' and professionals' perspectives on the overall factors affecting educational progress for CIN and CIC, including the impact of family resources, educational and social work support or their absence?

This exciting new project will enable us to explore the educational trajectories and experiences of children and young people falling into distinct groups, including those whose early difficulties are successfully resolved, those who remain on the 'edge of care', and those with repeated periods of intervention from Children's Services. We hope that the findings will help all those working with young people in care and in need to identify how best to support them in their journey through education.

New project - A randomized controlled trial of Letterbox Club and paired reading with foster carers

The Economic and Social Research Council has awarded £746,000 to Queens University Belfast, the Rees Centre and Hampshire Local Authority to train foster carers in paired reading in order to support children's engagement with the Letterbox Club which provides children in care with monthly packages of books and activities through the post.

Overall, the study aims to develop an effective intervention for improving reading skills; reduce the attainment gap for children in care; and contribute to our understanding of how foster carers can contribute to their educational attainment.

The study will focus on two formats - one involves a guidance manual for foster carers on how to support their children reading, the other supplements this with direct training for foster carers in paired reading.

The effectiveness of both formats will be assessed using a randomised controlled trial involving over 500 foster children recruited from Northern Ireland and 15 local authorities in England. Before and after tests of children's reading skills and attitudes will be undertaken. Alongside this, children, carers and others will be interviewed in order to make sense of the findings from the trial.

Interim findings – Evaluation of Birmingham City Council's Step Down Programme

Earlier this year, we published interim findings from the evaluation of this programme which started in July 2014 as a partnership between Birmingham City Council and Core Assets with a Social Impact Bond provided by social investor Bridges Ventures. The Step Down programme brings young people out of residential homes into foster placements.

[Full report](#)

[Key messages](#)

Evaluations – DfE Children’s Social Care Innovation Programme

Summaries of all the project evaluations are available on the [Spring Consortium website](#). As the Evaluation Co-ordinator for the previous Wave of the Programme, we are happy to answer any questions on these reports. Please contact [Judy Sebba](#). The following two evaluations were recently published:

Stoke-on-Trent’s House Project

Stoke’s House Project (HP) is a housing project company based on a tenant-managed housing co-operative model, run for, and by young people aged 16-18 who are leaving care. The staff team includes facilitators to support young people and partner agencies (e.g. legal team, architect and training company). Void properties are transferred from the council to the HP on a short-term lease and peppercorn rent. The care leavers work with the architect and project management team to refurbish the property, developing a sense of ownership and enabling them to create a home that meets their needs. Thus far, 5 properties have been secured and fully refurbished (a further 4 properties underway) and 5 young people in the first cohort of 10 (HP10) have moved into their new homes. Young people reported increased confidence, communication skills, feelings of community and integration. One said:

‘The different opportunities it’s given me because if I wasn’t involved in this I wouldn’t get my house or be setting up an apprenticeship’.

The project, now led by Warwickshire LA, has received more funding and is being developed there and in five other local authorities – Solihull, Staffordshire, Islington and Cheshire East.

Wigan and Rochdale CSE

The Wigan and Rochdale project aimed to address the problem of young people affected by CSE being placed in high cost or secure accommodation that was not always meeting their needs. The project involved the co-design of a new pilot service, Achieving Change Together (ACT), to work with young people at medium/high risk of/or having experienced CSE who are also at high risk of family or placement breakdown. ACT social workers operate as key workers, co-working with children’s social workers and working non-standard hours to better meet the support needs of young people. 25 young women have been supported to date. There has been a reduction in risk factors for many young people including: awareness of risks, association with risky peers/adults, sexual health, missing episodes and relationships with parents/carers. Protective factors have increased including a positive relationship with at least one supportive adult, improvements in relationships with family members and attendance at school/college. Young people report improvements in things that matter to them like relationships, how they feel, and attainment of personal goals.

Findings suggest that young people affected by CSE can be supported without ‘escalating’ into high cost placements.

EVENTS

Date for your diaries

Seminar, **Wednesday 18 October 2017** at 5pm

Professor Elizabeth Fernandez , University of NSW Australia

Seminar room A, University of Oxford, Department of Education
15 Norham Gardens, Oxford OX2 6PY

Professor Fernandez is an internationally renowned scholar in the field of out-of-home care, neglect, abuse, long term outcomes of migrant children and child welfare indicators.

Bright Spots seminar – the slides and podcast from the previous seminar given by Professor Julie Selwyn (Bristol University) on the Bright Spots project can be accessed via the [Events page](#) on our website.

New Centre Director Sought

Professor Judy Sebba will be retiring from the Directorship of the Rees Centre in March 2018. Her role is currently being advertised, ideally to start while Judy is still in post to allow for a short handover. [Further details](#)

Please contact Judy or Professor Jo-Anne Baird, Director, University of Oxford Department of Education, for an informal discussion about this opportunity: judy.sebba@education.ox.ac.uk or jo-anne.baird@education.ox.ac.uk

Dr Lisa Holmes, new Deputy Director of Rees Centre

Welcome to Dr Lisa Holmes who has been appointed Senior Research Fellow and Deputy Director of the Rees Centre from October 2017. Lisa has an international reputation for her research on fostering and child welfare and is joining us from her role as the Director of the Centre for Child and Family Research at the University of Loughborough. Over the past seventeen years Lisa has undertaken a range of research and evaluations to inform child welfare policy and practice. She has been leading work nationally and internationally (with Chapin Hall, University of Chicago) on the cost calculator for assessing costs of children's social care services and relating these to needs and outcomes. Lisa is also co-chair of the International Work Group for Therapeutic Residential Care. Lisa first started her career in child welfare as an outreach worker in the early 1990s, followed by two years working as a residential social worker in a local authority children's home.



Rees Centre blog

We welcome your comments on the following guest posts:

[An open letter to my childhood social worker](#)

[Which way now?](#)

Media

[Most care leavers say they survived the system....I survived because of the system](#), Áine Kelly, Mosaic, 9 May 2017

Conferences/Presentations

If you would like to view slides from previous presentations we have given, including to social workers, foster carers and virtual school staff, please look at the [Resources](#) page of the website.

9th International Foster Care Research Conference (Paris) September 2017

Researchers from the Rees Centre will be presenting the following papers:

The education of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in care (Ellie Ott);

The matching of children in foster care in England (Ellie Ott);

Measuring 'stability' using national care and educational data (Nikki Luke);

Perspectives on assessing foster carers: A cross-country comparison of the factors that are associated with successful placements (Vânia Pinto);

What Was It Like? - Care Leavers' Accounts of Moving In and Between Care Placements (Mariela Neagu)

What is the role of carer involvement in predicting pupil engagement & school performance? (Aoife O'Higgins)

Eran Melkman, currently a visiting researcher at the Rees Centre from Haruv Institute, Israel, will also present a paper.

FOSTER CARE IN THE NEWS

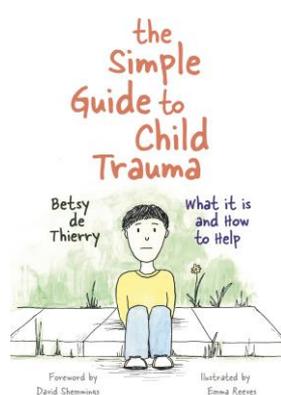
The Call for Evidence in the National Fostering Stocktake, led by Sir Martin Narey and Mark Owers, has now closed. The government expect to publish their report in the spring 2018.

[Goodwill to replace Timpson as Children's Minister](#), Children and Young People Now, 19 June 2017

BOOK REVIEW

Simple Guide to Child Trauma by Betsy de Thierry

Reviewed by foster carer Alison Donnelly-Shorrock



The book begins with an explanation around trauma and what causes it. The writer uses a term 'emotional constipation' and this goes a long way to describe how a child feels inside, stuck and they cannot let the pain out, but the writer explains we all need to be able to express our feelings.

The writer goes through the book in stages, taking you along a journey of learning, may be you have some knowledge on the topic, revisiting something you have already learnt, or learning new knowledge or understanding. Teaching a child or young person emotional self-regulation, and the book gives the reader a 'reservoir of strategies' to add to their personal 'tool box'.

The book reminds us as carers that we need to look after ourselves, stating "we usually need the support of other adults who understand this process and can champion us as we invest in the recovery of a traumatised child". The word 'champion' here is very fitting for the explanation of your support network.

Overall this book is easy to read, written in 'normal language', giving knowledge of how we may develop our practice and add to our 'Tool Box'. Giving advice on how we can empower these children to access recovery through a therapeutic and empathic relationship and supporting a person centred approach within our homes. Most of all building an effective relationship built on trust within a secure base.....

[See all book reviews](#)

YOUNG VOICES

My foster carers always made me believe I was capable of achieving great things.

Steven Hawsworth is a care experienced young adult who has just completed an undergraduate degree in Education Studies.

I was in the Care system from the ages of 7-18. Thankfully I only had one long term foster placement with a very education centred family who had all completed degrees and postgraduate qualifications, something which my birth family had not. As my foster carers both hold degrees and post graduate degrees, and because I had a long period of time with them, I was able to share their passion for education. Having a stable environment rather than changing

placements like other foster children I feel this definitely helped as education should be a smooth process. My foster family always made me believe that I was capable of achieving great things and I have now come out of university with a 2:1 degree. Had I stayed with my birth family this wouldn't have been possible.

Upon leaving the care system I embarked on my Academic journey to Sheffield Hallam University where I have just completed my Undergraduate degree in Education studies. I have just been offered a place to do a MA in Social Work at The University of Sheffield to hopefully become the Social worker who can improve social inclusion of minority groups such as Care leavers.

My undergraduate research was exploring the experiences of Care leavers in education.

What lead me to choose this topic was my own experiences of having spent time in the care system and the shocking university enrolment figures from Care leavers. Currently only 7% of Care leavers attend university (DfE, 2012) compared with 48% of the general population (DfE, 2016). I wanted to know direct from the Care leavers themselves why this was the case.

I feel Care experienced individuals often have their voice ignored.

What is your experience of care leavers and university?

RESEARCH SUMMARY

My study aimed to explore the educational experiences of adult care leavers as children and young people.

Rich data was gleaned by conducting interviews and questionnaires to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that impacted upon people's experiences of education. 37 care experienced individuals aged 18 to 64 years from England and Scotland responded to a request to fill out detailed questionnaires about their educational experiences and the support they did or did not receive to help them progress. Respondents' educational success levels varied from no educational achievements to those who had attained doctoral qualifications. The majority of participants claimed that they would not have achieved the levels of educational attainment had they not been in the care system. There was little evidence of the disengagement by Care Leavers' in the educational system that the literature indicated, all of the participants in this study reported that they felt that education was important.

The study's findings indicate that the Care Leavers had a very varied experience of the education system. Some people found that their school provided the support that they did not get elsewhere. There was an example of one young person who was homeless relying on the school facilities to shower and wash clothing with teachers going above and beyond their duty of care to provide the looked after young person with food and Christmas presents. Other people found being in care was very stigmatising. There were a number of references to being 'cut off' from classmates either through their peers' lack of understanding of what they were going through or because of formal systems that meant they could not participate in everyday activities such as trips at school or informal opportunities to make friends and feeling 'normal' e.g. sleepovers. One respondent said they felt 'detached and unlovable' another that they felt 'less of a human.' Participants reported not feeling a sense of belonging and this was exacerbated in many cases by placement instability and a lack of any one individual with responsibility for engaging them in education. Only 15% of the respondents reported that their social workers had effectively supported their educational journey.

The study did find that a positive relationship with an adult role model, and the emotional support that comes with this, can have a significant impact upon the individual's experience.

Steven Hawksworth

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