20 YEARS OF MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
ANNUAL REPORT 2015–16
This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Centre and much of this year’s annual report is dedicated to reflecting on the work we have undertaken over the years and to those who have helped to make the research possible.

To celebrate our 20th anniversary we held a conference at the University of East Anglia (UEA) on the 20th April. The event was a great success with approximately 300 alumni, current staff and students as well as practitioners attending.

Emeritus Professor David Howe was, by popular request, the keynote speaker and inspired the audience with his presentation ‘What makes the Compleat Social worker?’

There were also opportunities for delegates to speak to our PhD students about their studies and experiences at the UEA and to our researchers about their work within the Centre.

Two symposia involved presentations on CRCF research. The first included research on child protection, given by Professor Marian Brandon (Fathers in Child Protection); Dr Laura Biggart (Social Workers and Emotional Intelligence); and Dr Jane Dodsworth (Child Sexual Exploitation). The second symposium contained presentations on child placement, by Dr Mary Beek (Supporting Long Term Foster Care); Dr Jeanette Cossar (LGBTQ Young People in Care); and Christine Cocker (Children’s Mental Health).

The conference was brought to a fitting close by the Centre’s founder, Emeritus Professor June Thoburn who gave the final address and whom we were thrilled was able to join us having sped back from giving evidence at the Parliamentary Select Committee on Social Work Reform.

Our sincere and many thanks to all of you who have played a part in the success of the Centre, especially the children and families who have contributed to the research process and for whose lives we hope our research will make a difference. Our whole hearted thanks also to those who continue to support our work and will be involved in the Centre’s future.

MARIAN BRANDON
Professor of Social Work, Director of the Centre for Research on Children and Families.
The School of Social Work was ahead of its time when in 1996 it established the Centre for Research on the Child and Family, later to become the Centre for Research on Children and Families (CRCF). June Thoburn was the founding Director of the Centre, with Gillian Schofield as Deputy Director. In 2003 Gillian Schofield and Margaret O’Brien became Co-Directors and then in 2013 Marian Brandon became the current Director.
OUR HISTORY

Since its launch in 1976 the School of Social Work under the leadership of Martin Davies had been very much focused on research that would build its national and international reputation and we had repeated success in the Research Assessment Exercises.

By 1996, the School had established a particularly high profile in child and family research and it launched the CRCF to provide a focus and identity for research bidding, project management, research staff recruitment, research partnerships and for wider dissemination. It was possible to build on already established areas of research in family support, child protection and child placement, funded both by Government and charitable organisations, such as the Nuffield Foundation. Collaborative research links were also made with other organisations including the NSPCC, Family Rights Group, BAAF, Children’s Society, Barnardos, the Post Adoption Centre – and most recently the Office of the Children’s Commissioner.

We were very fortunate from the early days – but also up to the present – to have the enthusiastic support of local authorities, especially Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex and London Boroughs, who have both funded projects and given us invaluable research access.

These funders, partner agencies and topic areas have remained at the heart of our CRCF work, with a number of new developments and different research questions as policy and practice needs changed.

RESEARCH INTO PRACTICE

Also continuous since 1996 has been the active engagement of the CRCF with the policy and practice community through numerous academic and practice publications, through the Annual Centre Report and through a wide range of dissemination events, including the highly successful tradition of an Annual Centre Conference, held since 1998 in London.

The first Annual Centre Conference brought together work on family support, child and parents’ participation in case conferences and significant harm. Subsequent conferences have focused on fostering and adoption and, as interests have developed, more recently on looked after children and offending, children’s recognition and help-seeking in relation to abuse, care planning, and emotional intelligence.

Dissemination has also been enhanced over the years by the Making Research Count network, an initiative launched by June Thoburn and Jane Tunstall, then at Keele University, which continued with a range of university and agency partners.
There have been a number of research highlights over these 20 years as the CRCF has grown in influence. In child placement, June Thoburn’s seminal work on permanence in the 1980s and early 1990s developed into a specific study of the placement of ethnic minority children and also into work subsequently led by Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek on long-term foster care. Gillian and Mary’s work in turn led to the development of the Secure Base model of therapeutic caregiving which has had national and international impact. Also in fostering, Clive Sellick (recognising the growing importance of the third sector in service provision) led a stream of work on the independent foster care sector. Research on the experiences and needs of children in care has more recently focused on new areas – risk and resilience in relation to offending led by Gillian Schofield and a study of independent reviewing officers (IROs) led by Jonathan Dickens and a current ESRC funded project led by Jeanette Cossar on LGBTQ young people in care.

Influential work by David Howe and Diana Hinings on adoption, with a focus on birth parents and adoptive parents, developed into a major body of work led by Elsbeth Neil on contact after adoption and support for birth parents. This research has included strong and original elements of participation by vulnerable groups, in particular birth parents, and shown the benefits of undertaking prospective longitudinal research. This research has influenced adoption policy and practice nationally and internationally.
June Thoburn and Marian Brandon’s work on significant harm in the 1990s laid the foundations for subsequent work on neglect and family support interventions but also for the Government funded analyses led by Marian of Serious Case Reviews over 10 years, so that UEA now holds the largest national database of children suffering death or serious injury in the world. June and Marian have also been founder members of the International Association for Outcome-based Evaluation and Research on Family and Children’s Services since 2001.

Also in the world of child protection the work of Jeanette Cossar with Marian Brandon has continued the CRCF’s commitment to children’s participation in child protection and understanding children’s views with projects funded by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner. This work has also demonstrated the value of working with young researchers who participate in the research process.

The Centre’s long term involvement as experts in the family justice system, in particular though the role of June Thoburn and Gillian Schofield, has developed into a significant body of work funded by the ESRC and now led by Jonathan Dickens and Chris Beckett in relation to decision making and care planning in courts and in local authorities. Jonathan is also a member of an international network for research on decision making about children.

Under Margaret O’Brien’s leadership, the role of fathers in families became an important part of the profile of the CRCF. More recently Marian Brandon was funded by the Nuffield Foundation to lead an innovative project on the neglected subject of the role of fathers in child protection.

None of this successful research work would have been possible without the expertise and commitment of researchers on all of these projects – in particular Sue Bailey, Mary Beek, Pippa Beldersen, Laura Biggart, John Clifton, Jo Connolly, Birgit Larsson, Ann Lewis, Georgia Philip, Penny Sorensen, Emma Ward and Julie Young.

The CRCF is already developing new projects and plans for further impact to ensure an ongoing contribution to knowledge and to the welfare of vulnerable children and families over the next twenty years. We remain grateful to our funders and also to the many agencies, children, families and professionals who have given their time and shared their experiences with us in order to improve the quality of services to children and families.
We were delighted that the CRCF was able to host the UK Disabled Children Network’s annual seminar in the summer of 2015. The one day event included presentations from Dr Mary Wickenden from UCL, Professor Kirsten Stalker, University of Strathclyde, Dr Anita Franklin, Coventry University, Dr Debby Watson, University of Bristol, Professor Allan Colver, Newcastle University as well as Professor Marian Brandon. The highly successful event (co-ordinated by Jane Hernon) was also attended by local practitioners and members of Equal Lives, a local organisation.

The International Foster Care Research Network Conference was held in Siegen, Germany this year Professor Gillian Schofield and Professor June Thoburn attended and renewed contact with numerous international colleagues. June presented a keynote address ‘Achieving good outcomes in foster care: what can we learn from research across jurisdictions?’ Gillian presented a paper titled ‘Identity construction and sense of family in the transition to adulthood: Life narratives of young people from foster care, adoption and residential care.’

The four country collaboration between Professor Jonathan Dickens (UEA, England) Professor Marit Skivenes (University of Bergen, Norway, Professor Tarja Pöös (University of Tampere, Finland), and Professor Jill Berrick (University of California at Berkeley, USA) is in its fourth and final phase. This cross-national study of decision-making in child protection and care order cases has provided an important opportunity to reflect on the policy underpinnings of welfare practice, and the implications for the children and their families arising from the similarities and differences between the four countries.

The annual seminar of the International Association for Outcome-based Evaluation and Research (IaOBER) was held in Malosco, Italy in 2015 to discuss cross-national research collaboration and make plans for future European bids. Professor Marian Brandon and Emeritus Professor June Thoburn attended and following on from this work a joint bid is in preparation. Dr Patricia McNamara from Melbourne University Australia (also a member of IaOBER) visited CRCF again this year and met with senior staff at the Norfolk charity BREAK to discuss her research on innovations in residential care.

Congratulations to the new Centre for Child Wellbeing and Protection at Stirling University where Professor Marian Brandon gave a keynote address at the launch event in March 2016. The close collaborative links with CRCF were reinforced by the director Professor Brigid Daniel. We look forward to working together in the future.

Dr Laura Biggart has come to the end of her ESRC funded project and presented preliminary results of her study Emotional Intelligence in Social Work to the International Society for Study of Individual Differences in Canada. Laura’s study provides the focus for this year’s annual CRCF conference in London in June 2016.

We were pleased to have a strong presence at the 6th European Conference of Social Work Research, held this year in Lisbon, Portugal. Laura Cook presented a paper Conceptualising risk: making sense of the initial home visit. Over 500 delegates attended the conference from over 33 different countries. Professor Jonathan Dickens and Dr Laura Biggart also presented.

Closer to home, Peter Jordan presented a paper, Health Visitors and Social Workers: Ethics Talk and Inter-professional Practice at JUCSWEC. Peter also presented a paper ‘Ethical issues in Relationship Based Practice’ at the International Care Ethics Conference at the University of Surrey.
Professor Beth Neil was invited to address the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in Berlin, Germany and delivered a keynote speech ‘Critical issues when supporting adoptive families: meeting children’s needs related to early harm and adoption’. Beth also ran a workshop on “Supporting birth parents before, during and after adoption”. Delegates at the event included policy makers (Caren Marks, MoP Parliamentary Secretary of State Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth), adoption practitioners and researchers.

Emeritus Professor June Thoburn gave evidence at the Parliamentary Select Committee on Social Work Reform in April 2016 arguing for the need to keep social work education in universities. June also spoke at an Inside Government seminar in London on Exploring the New Framework for Children’s Services Inspections.

Professor Marian Brandon gave a presentation to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) seminar on children’s services in March 2016. The seminar explored the problems currently facing local authorities and considered ways to improve children’s safety and wellbeing. Marian presented learning from UEA’s ten years of study of Serious Case Reviews. At a separate event Marian also met with Alan Wood as part of his national review of child protection. The brief for the review required taking into consideration the triennial review of Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) being carried out by CRCF and the University of Warwick. The meeting presented an opportunity for Marian and Dr Peter Sidebotham (from Warwick University) to discuss the team’s findings ahead of publication.

Dr Georgia Philip took part in the relaunch of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fatherhood. The CRCF ‘Counting Fathers In’ project team were invited to attend by Owen Thomas from the organisation ‘Working with Men’.
NEWS
RESEARCH FOR PRACTICE
FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES,
HEALTHCARE TRUSTS
AND THE THIRD SECTOR

Dr Jane Dodsworth gave a presentation on her Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) research Pathways into Sexual Exploitation and Sex Work: The Experience of Victimhood and Agency for a conference in Nottingham. The presentation was part of their Crossing Boundaries Conference for a delegate group of solicitors, barristers, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers. The presentation was requested following Jane’s article on CSE in Community Care – Social Workers can learn from women’s stories of sexual exploitation and sex work.

At the request of the Birmingham Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) team, Professor Gillian Schofield presented material based on Professor Jonathan Dickens’ team’s ESRC funded IRO research project ‘Making care plans work well for children: messages from UEA research into care planning and the role of the IRO’. The participants warmly commended the research team for a report that captured the complexity of their role.

Professor Beth Neil spoke at the launch event of the adoption support service, PAC-UK in Leeds. This service was formed as a result of an amicable merger between PAC (the Post Adoption Centre) and After Adoption Yorkshire (AAY), to become the largest independent adoption support agency in the country. Beth drew on her research to highlight the need for adoption support services for all members of the adoption triangle.

Dr Judi Walsh spoke at the local Children and Families Services away day organised by East Coast Community Healthcare on September 2015 on ‘A (cautious) look at antenatal relationships’. There were 150 attendees, mostly from health visiting teams. Judi has also been elected as a committee member to the Society for Reproductive and Infant Psychology.
NEWS IN BRIEF

HELPING PRACTITIONERS WITH RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

4Women Resource Centre – an organisation in Norwich which provides holistic services for vulnerable women met with researchers Dr Birgit Larsson, Dr Georgia Philip and Julie Young who are working in similar areas, to hear more about the research process and get feedback about ideas about project evaluation.

Staff from the small Midlands based Boys2Men charity for dads and sons also came to visit the Centre to discuss with Professor Marian Brandon and Dr Georgia Philip ways that the Boys2Men project staff could evaluate their newly expanded project.

CRCF EVENTS AND SEMINARS

Outside speakers at our two successful series of CRCF seminars over the last year have included Professor Jo Aldridge from Loughborough University who spoke about participatory research with vulnerable, marginalised children and young people and Professor Pam Cox and Dr Danny Taggart from Essex University who discussed their research on reducing recurrent care proceedings.

The 2015 Annual Centre Conference Permanence and transitions in residential care launched a study conducted by Gillian Schofield, Emma Ward and Birgit Larsson Moving on – but staying connected. The study evaluated the transitions service at the Norfolk charity BREAK and was funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. Gillian discussed the key policy and practice issues facing the care system and the challenges of achieving permanence for young people in residential care and enabling them to make a successful transition to adulthood.

OTHER NEWS

DR HUGH MILROY OBE has been made an Honorary Visiting Fellow of the School of Social Work. Hugh is the Chief Executive Officer of Veterans Aid which is an organisation which supports war veterans who are facing a range of problems, including homelessness and mental health difficulties. A former Wing Commander in the RAF, Hugh studied for his PhD in Social Work at the UEA on the subject of homelessness among ex-service personnel and will be returning to undertake some teaching of our current students.

PROFESSOR GILLIAN SCHOFIELD won a prestigious UEA Achievement Award in 2015. The award highlights the role of social work research in engagement and was given to Gillian for her work with Mary Beek in research and in developing fostering practice since 1997. Feedback from the panel noted that this was “An inspiring nomination which evidenced great international impact and policy-maker influence.” In the light of our REF success Gillian was the academic speaker representing the School of Social Work at the annual meeting of Court, at UEA. The title for Gillian’s address was Foster care research in practice: helping foster families provide a secure base for troubled children.

EMERITUS PROFESSOR DAVID HOWE gave the second Olive Stevenson Memorial Lecture at the University of Nottingham. Professor Olive Stevenson, whose contribution to social work as a practitioner, teacher, researcher, scholar and consultant was truly immense, died on 30th September 2013. Olive inspired and helped to shape the lives and careers of several generations of social workers and academics and her research, writing and public service work contributed hugely to public policy and improving the wellbeing and safety of vulnerable children and adults who use social work services and the lectures are dedicated to remembering Olive and contributing to the continuation of her legacy. David’s topic was Feel Secure, Then Explore: Relationship-Based Social Work. The first year’s memorial lecture which was given by Emeritus Professor June Thoburn, who was taught by Olive at Oxford, can be listened to online – “Using the Heart and the Head in Social Work: Olive Stevenson’s Legacy for Today and Tomorrow”
The body of research ‘Contact After Adoption’ led by Professor Beth Neil over twenty years suggests that decisions about post adoption contact need to be made on a case-by-case basis weighing up a range of risk and protective factors. There is no simple formula that can determine which children should have what contact, so the quality of professional decision-making is crucial in getting things right for children.

Beth is in the final stages of a project to develop a range of practice resources that can help practitioners in making evidence-based decisions about post adoption contact. These resources will draw directly on Beth’s longitudinal research and are intended for staff training and the education of adoptive parents and birth relatives. The project is being carried out alongside Research in Practice (RiP – a nationwide charitable organization which champions evidence-based practice in children’s services) and the materials will be made available through an online free to use resource. The website will be publicised through the Centre and the extensive networks of RiP.

The project has involved working with participants from across the RiP network (approximately 20 practitioners experienced in the field of adoption) through a series of four, day-long development workshops. Initial meetings enabled sharing of research findings and the identification of practice issues and existing practice initiatives/resources.

This work is due for completion in the summer of 2016 and is part of a broader programme of impact activities all focused around improving professional practice in relation to post adoption contact. Other activities include presentation of the research to practitioners and policymakers in the UK and abroad (for example since 2014 the research has been presented in Finland, Sweden, Australia, Spain, Germany as well as presentations in the UK; forthcoming presentations in 2016 will take place in the USA, Holland and Italy). A website disseminating findings from the longitudinal “contact after adoption” study in a form accessible for practitioners, adoptive parents, birth relatives and adopted young people was launched in 2015 as a UEA Microsite: www.uea.ac.uk/contact-after-adoption

A “digested read” practitioner friendly version of the research report on the longitudinal study was published in 2014 by BAAF.
IMPACT CASE STUDIES

SECURE BASE MODEL
PROFESSOR GILLIAN SCHOFIELD AND DR MARY BEEK

The UEA Secure Base model of therapeutic caregiving has continued to be developed in practice within the UK and internationally.

A number of UK agencies have made a commitment to introducing the model in their child placement practice. In September 2015 Professor Gillian Schofield spoke at the Annual Fostering and Adoption Conference in Southwark, attended by practitioners, managers, service directors and the Mayor of Southwark, to launch the implementation of the Secure Base model. In January, Gillian was invited by Family Care, an independent provider of foster and residential care based in Stoke, to present a training day on ‘Promoting security and resilience: An introduction to the Secure Base Model’. This was also an opportunity to pilot a new training session that Mary Beek has produced as one of a range of teaching materials that will go on the updated Secure Base website. Support for this and other Secure Base implementation by Mary Beek and Gillian Schofield is being funded as part of the 2015-16 impact case study development by the ESRC Impact Accelerator fund.

In addition to previous work in Europe and in China and Thailand, international developments have continued in new areas. Gillian Schofield was invited to Melbourne in February 2016 to work with Berry Street Childhood Institute, a large and influential voluntary organisation to launch the Secure Base model. In Melbourne, Gillian Schofield was keen to maintain a relationship with CRCF during the implementation of the model. Mary Beek will be visiting Melbourne in August to follow up on this initial visit and work with Berry Street staff to further embed the Secure Base model in practice. While in Australia in August, Mary will also be giving a Master Class on Secure Base at the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies Biennial Conference in Sydney.

For the first time, Mary Beek will also have the opportunity to present on the Secure Base model to an American audience, at the Rudd Adoption and Fostering Conference in Boston in May 2016.

PRACTICE TOOLS TO SUPPORT BETTER HELP FOR ABUSE AND NEGLECT
DR JEANETTE COSSAR, PROFESSOR MARIAN BRANDON AND DR PENNY SORENSEN

This project is to develop new child-centred practice tools based on the research ‘It takes a lot to build trust’ Recognition and Telling: Developing earlier routes to help for children and young people. The study was funded by the Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England who are continuing to support and help us to develop this work. The practice tools are being aimed initially at teaching and support staff within educational settings both at primary and secondary school level. The resources are intended to help practitioners to support struggling children and young people by enabling them to better identify when a child might be experiencing abuse or neglect. This should promote an increased awareness of how young people think about abuse and neglect as well as an understanding of how hard it is to tell, and when and how a child might want to talk. Using the tools should enable practitioners to explore what will help the young person and gain a better understanding of the young person's perspective, including barriers to recognition and telling.

The practice materials will be tested at a number of events in the UK and further afield, including with social workers in Australia at a master class Professor Marian Brandon has been invited to give in Sydney in September 2016. Other resources being developed will include a website as an online resource for practitioners.

LONG TERM FOSTER CARE
PROFESSOR GILLIAN SCHOFIELD AND DR MARY BEEK

Gillian and Mary have been undertaking research on long-term foster care since 1997 and have demonstrated in a number of studies the potential for foster families to transform the lives of troubled children by providing sensitive care and a commitment to children as fully part of the family. In 2015 the Department for Education (DfE) produced new regulations and guidance on long-term foster care which recognised its role as a legitimate permanence option and required local authorities to develop procedures for assessment, matching and supporting long-term placements. Gillian Schofield was part of the DfE Expert Working Group that developed this new framework and she ran an event in September 2015 for Norfolk County Council, who have since put new procedures in place. Mary Beek will be delivering keynote presentations on Long-term foster care as permanence option at the Rudd Conference in Boston in May and at the Association of Children’s Welfare Agencies conference in Sydney in August 2016.
# RESEARCH PROJECTS

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AN EXAMINATION OF MULTI-AGENCY WORKING WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF KEY SAFEGUARDING AGENCIES

OCT 2015 – JUN 2016
RESEARCH TEAM Dr Jane Dodsworth and Dr Penny Sorensen
FUNDER Norfolk Constabulary and Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board

CONTEXT
There has been much recent research on child sexual exploitation (CSE), in particular the paradigm shift to thinking of those involved as victims of abuse rather than criminals, and the need for professionals to recognise the early warning signs and potential routes into sexual exploitation for this vulnerable group of young people. Whilst there is some evidence nationally of increased awareness and improved practice amongst key agencies, recent reports on CSE in several large cities in the UK indicate there are still gaps in awareness of the early warning signs and risks to young people of becoming sexually exploited, a lack of professional curiosity and insufficient service provision for this vulnerable group. It is therefore crucial that these issues are further explored from the perspectives and experiences of the multi-agency professionals working with these young people.

AIMS
To evaluate, from the perspectives of multi-agency safeguarding professionals, what works well, what works less well and what might be needed to improve service provision.

METHODS
A qualitative approach has been taken to ensure that the findings are grounded in the experiences and expertise of the professionals working with CSE. 17 interviews have been undertaken with Heads of Service/ Safeguarding Leads for the key agencies and a further 6 with members of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub team (MASH). Six focus groups have also been held to elicit wider views. Data are currently being coded and analysed.

FINDINGS
It is too early to report key themes emerging from analysis of the data but a sense of commitment to working in the best interests of children and young people at risk of CSE is evident amongst participants, as is a sense of the importance of effective multi-agency working.

IMPACT
The findings will be presented at the NSCB’s CSE Conference in 2016.

PUBLICATIONS
A report on the findings will be published in June 2016. Journal articles are also planned.

A SENSE OF COMMITMENT TO WORKING IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF CSE IS EVIDENT AMONGST PARTICIPANTS.
CONTEXT

We know from existing research that child protection professionals struggle to engage men. Consequently, assessments may not accurately reflect men as either a risk or a resource for children they care for, potentially endangering children and excluding men. To date, this problem has been investigated mostly from the viewpoint of professionals. This study focuses on men’s perspectives and investigates the encounters between fathers or father figures, and the child protection process after a child protection plan has been made.

METHODS

The study includes an examination of local authority case files for 150 children (50 in each of the three study areas), and an innovative qualitative longitudinal study of 30 men, following their lives and involvement with child protection processes over 12 months. Participants are interviewed around the time of the Initial Child Protection Conference and then contacted at regular intervals over the next 12 months at which time there is a final research interview. Where possible, separate interviews with the child’s mother are taking place at the beginning and end of the study.

Child protection themes are being tracked while detailed individual case studies trace the pathways through services. The study is revealing experiences and patterns as men travel through the child protection process, providing insights into their engagement as caregivers and men.

The main research questions:
- What do 150 children’s case files reveal, retrospectively, about the extent and nature of men’s involvement in child protection processes?
- How do fathers and father figures experience child protection practice and procedures as they unfold in real time?
- Are there critical moments in the child protection process which are particularly significant for participants’ lives and/or the engagement of men?
- What are the implications of strategies and practices employed to involve men in protecting and safeguarding children?

PROGRESS TO DATE

We have been successful in recruiting more than 30 men and although we expected a high drop out and attrition rate, almost all men have stayed engaged. We are beginning the final interviews and the men are telling us how helpful they have found the regular contact with the researcher as someone there to listen to them. To date we have been able to interview nine mothers. All 150 children’s case files have been examined and analysis is underway, providing a wider context to the experiences of the 30 men.

IMPACT

- Presentations are being given to participating local authorities to inform practitioners’ understanding of men’s experiences to aid safer, more inclusive practice.
- A final practice focused report will have implications for policy, for social workers and also for other practitioners.
- An audit tool is being offered to partner authorities to allow monitoring of men’s involvement in child protection practice.
- A research presentation will be made to an invited audience of key sector leaders at the Nuffield Foundation.
- Research briefings will be circulated to all Local Safeguarding Children Boards.
- The anonymised data from the qualitative study will be archived for future use by other researchers.
- A Continuing Professional Development (CPD) module ‘Working with men in child protection’ is being developed for 2017.
CONTEXT

The death of children through abuse or neglect is of great concern to the public and, of course, to practitioners. The national analyses of local enquiries into such cases (serious case reviews, SCRs) provide important learning for policy and for practice. This is the fifth consecutive national review undertaken by the same team led by Professor Marian Brandon from CRCF and the third review carried out in collaboration with Dr Peter Sidebotham from Warwick University.

AIMS

A particular aim is to provide evidence of key issues and challenges from SCRs from 2011-2014 in the context of wider learning from the ten years we have been undertaking these reviews. The study also aims to provide the government with evidence of any changes in the light of their reforms, and to identify areas where further change may be required to support organisations to learn from SCRs and keep children safe.

METHODS

The study includes an update of our ongoing database with 293 SCR notifications from 2011-2014, making a total of 1,100 SCR notifications since 2005. The qualitative analysis of more than 70 cases builds on our previous approaches to also use a systems methodology to understand what may have led to mistakes being made. Cases are considered within a framework that looks at opportunities for prevention and protection, within the concept of pathways to harm.

KEY FINDINGS

The pattern over time shows that once a child is known to be in need of protection the system is mostly working well. There has been an increase in the number of SCRs since 2012, but this has been against a backdrop of a steady increase in child protection activity. There has been no change in the number of child deaths linked directly to maltreatment.

There are still, however, pressure points at the boundaries into and out of the child protection system. While less than half of SCRs revealed current involvement with children’s social care, almost two thirds of the children had past involvement. This highlights the need for long term planning and support where children have known risks or vulnerabilities and especially where they have already suffered maltreatment.

While these most recent SCRs suggest a good professional awareness of risk factors, practitioners are not always rigorous in assessing and following through on all identified risks of harm. Where the threshold for children’s social care involvement is not met, there may be little analysis of risks of harm. Support plans may be unclear and can easily drift.

PUBLICATION AND IMPACT

The Department for Education is publishing the study report to coincide with the publication of the government review of child protection. We have worked with Research in Practice to co-produce on-line summaries specifically for Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), and professional groups including social work and early help, health, education and the police. BASPCAN are funding seminars in the four UK nations and in the Republic of Ireland to promote the learning from the study.

FOR MANY OF THE CHILDREN, THE HARMs THEY SUFFERED OCCURRED NOT BECAUSE OF, BUT IN SPITE OF, ALL THE WORK THAT PROFESSIONALS WERE DOING TO SUPPORT AND PROTECT THEM.
PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED, AT RISK, IN CARE AND ADOPTED FROM CARE

CONTEX

In 2013, the University of Essex, the University of East Anglia, the University of Kent and London School of Economics were awarded funding for five years to set up the ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre. The overall aim of the Centre is to help local authorities and companies to harness the power of their data. One of the themes that was established as part of the bid was ‘supporting vulnerable people’ and CRCF is leading the work under this theme. We will be undertaking a demonstration project using local government data from children’s services to examine the pathways of vulnerable children.

Local authorities are required to collect and submit to the government a range of data about children in their care, and the headline figures from these data are published in aggregated form. This project aims to harness the potential of these datasets to answer a range of questions through analysing case level data, linking datasets, and undertaking longitudinal analysis. For example, nationally there are concerns about the numbers of children in care, and variations in these figures between local authorities. Some previous research has studied the pathways of children entering the care system, but the impact of local authority input with families before this threshold is reached needs more understanding: can early intervention divert families from more intensive services, and is the best outcome for children? Where children do enter care and adoption becomes a permanency plan, again there is much variation in the timescales on children’s journeys towards adoption, and there is potential to analyse in more detail how the individual characteristics of children determine the time taken to adoption.

AIMS

To use the administrative data available from local authority children’s services to gain some understanding of the pathways complete cohorts of children take through different levels of children’s services interventions. This project also hopes to take advantage of the opportunities offered by data linkage, exploring the characteristics and outcomes for children across services. For example we hope to link the data about children in need and in care with information about these children within the education system. This linking of data will be important not just for the research, but for policy and practice.

METHODS

We are working with a range of local authorities to analyse administrative data sets. Norfolk Children Services have shared Children in Need census data and the SSDA903 data on looked after children, and we are working with these to map the characteristics, pathways and outcomes for children in contact with children’s social care. We are also working with the Yorkshire and Humberside Adoption Consortium to analyse the characteristics and outcomes of children adopted from care in the 15 local authorities within this consortium.

FINDINGS

Findings from the project are anticipated in 2018.

IMPACT

This project has the potential to benefit participating local authorities by providing them with a detailed analysis of their service users and the impact of their interventions. This can inform future service planning and delivery, enhancing outcomes for children and families. The project will also benefit other local authorities through the demonstration of data analytics.

PUBLICATIONS

Key findings from the research will be published in a range of formats addressing the key audiences (academic articles and policy/practitioner articles). www.blgdataresearch.org

WE WILL BE UNDERTAKING DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS USING LOCAL GOVERNMENT DATA FROM CHILDREN’S SERVICES TO EXAMINE THE PATHWAYS OF VULNERABLE CHILDREN.
AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF THE GOVERNMENT’S SUBSIDY OF THE INTER-AGENCY ADOPTION FEE

FEB – OCT 2016
RESEARCH TEAM Professor Beth Neil,
Dr Cherilyn Dance & Dr Emma Koivunen, Manchester Metropolitan University,
Dr Ruth Rogers & Zulfi Ali, Canterbury Christ Church University
FUNDER Department for Education

CONTEXT
Adoption offers good opportunities for positive outcomes for looked after children. However, adoptive placements are harder to find for children who are of school age, those who have a minority ethnic background and those who have disabilities or long term health conditions (or who are at risk of developing these). Research suggests that to find a suitable family for a child who has these additional needs local authorities need to consider an inter-agency placement at the earliest opportunity. In most cases, inter-agency placements are available at a price and, in the context of resource constraints, the cost of this ‘interagency fee’ may be one barrier to timely matches and placements. To try and overcome this, the government is piloting a subsidy of the interagency fee, covering this cost for children in ‘hard to place’ categories.

AIMS
This research project aims to a) establish what difference the government subsidy of the interagency adoption fee might have made and b) develop a more nuanced understanding of what other barriers to inter-agency placement may exist and how they are to be understood.

METHODS
The evaluation will work with 6-9 local authorities (LAs) and 3 voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs). Agencies will be selected to provide representation of the different types of agency structure, different regions of the country, varied levels of placement activity and (where applicable) whether they have or have not used the subsidy.

The study uses a mixed methods design and has four strands. Strand 1 involves a quantitative analysis of placement outcomes for all children subject to a Placement Order in the 6-9 LAs. Strand 2 will use the datasets provided by LAs to purposively select up to 50 children’s cases for case file analysis, and supplement these data with telephone interviews with the social worker or family finder for 18 of these 50 children. Interviews will be undertaken with the managers of 9-12 Adoption Agencies (6-9 LAs and 3 VAAs) (Strand 3). In strand 4 a total of 12 focus groups will take place, 3 with LA adoption teams, 3 with VAA adoption teams, 3 with approved adopters and, if possible, with 3 existing regionally based groups.

IMPACT
This research will impact on adoption policy at a national level, in particular informing the government’s future plans regarding the subsidy of the adoption interagency fee. The study will also be useful to adoption agencies in terms of broadening their understanding the range of factors that can affect how children waiting to be adopted are matched with approved adoptive parents.

PUBLICATIONS
Outputs will include a report (plus summary) to the Department for Education, presentations at relevant conferences or workshops, and articles in journals aimed at practitioners and policy makers.

THE GOVERNMENT IS PILOTING A SUBSIDY OF THE INTER-AGENCY FEE, COVERING THIS COST FOR CHILDREN IN ‘HARD TO PLACE’ CATEGORIES.
CONTEXT

The Department for Education (DfE) Young People’s Social Care Innovations Programme has funded a wide range of projects. Evaluation of the outcomes is part of the investment in this programme. The CRCF successfully applied for approval as part of the Innovations Programme Evaluation Framework and was selected by Match Foster Care to evaluate their project. This evaluation is now complete and the report submitted to the DfE, although the findings have not been published at the time of writing.

Match Foster Care, an independent fostering provider (IFP) won funding to pilot a new system for supporting long-term foster placements. Support for IFP foster care placements is usually provided by the local authority (LA) child’s social worker and the IFP supervising social worker. The funding was for Match to develop a system in which the LA would delegate their statutory duties (i.e. the child social worker role) to the IFP and one social worker (from Match) would support the placement. The young people also had access to an advocacy service and additional psychological, health and education support was provided to achieve a ‘wrap around’ service to the placements.

AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

- To investigate different ways of organising social work services and support for long-term fostering placements.
- To identify the practical and financial consequences of the delegation of statutory powers and different divisions of responsibility between the IFP and the LA.
- To investigate how different structures and practice are experienced by young people, foster carers and social workers.

METHODS

- A comparison IFP was identified, Anglia Fostering Agency (AFA).
- A sample of young people in long-term foster care in both agencies was identified.
- Young people, foster carers and a range of professionals were interviewed.
- File data were gathered.
- Measures of young people's emotional and behavioural development, attachment relationships and foster carer efficacy were completed.
- Focus groups were held with LA senior managers and Independent Reviewing Officers.

FINDINGS

- Implementation had a number of challenges - translating LA intentions to participate in the innovation into signed agreements was not straightforward and this meant that the Match sample size was smaller than anticipated.
- The delegation of statutory duties has far reaching implications for care planning and review systems. The LAs, as corporate parents, remained accountable for the welfare of their looked after young people and important decisions.
- It was necessary, therefore, for LAs to establish detailed protocols for the delegation of statutory duties.
- Match staff identified many advantages of the new model of support and wrap around services.
- The evaluation focused on the process of developing and implementing the innovation, rather than its impact and outcomes. Nevertheless this area of enquiry yielded some important lessons for supporting long-term foster care, in both the independent and public sectors.
- As in previous CRCF studies of long-term foster care there were children from very troubled backgrounds in both agencies who were receiving excellent care from committed foster carers.
- Young people and foster carers valued relationships with social workers who were reliably available to them.
- This mode of support would merit further research.

IMPACT

This project will contribute to policy and practice in long-term foster care in the independent sector and in local authorities. The final report of the evaluation project will be placed on the DfE website. A report of the key findings will be available to all participants. Conference presentations and a journal article are planned.
A STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND/OR TRANSGENDER YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND THE SUPPORT THEY RECEIVE

NOV 2014 – OCT 2016
RESEARCH TEAM Dr Jeanette Cossar, Pippa Belderson, Dr Birgit Larsson, Julia Keenan, Dr Emma Ward, Professor Gillian Schofield, Dr Jane Dodsworth, Christine Cocker
FUNDER Economic & Social Research Council

CONTEXT
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and/or Transgender (LGBT) young people in care face challenges such as homophobic and transphobic bullying and violence. As a result of adverse experiences, this group are known to face additional risks such as homelessness, sexual exploitation and self-harm. Some LGBT young people in care have reported that their needs have not been met adequately, and they have encountered peers who are less than accepting of their LGBT identities. However, the literature is also clear that not enough is known about the resilience of LGBT young people in care and this research focuses not only on risk but also on how these young people overcome challenges and develop positive identities.

AIMS AND METHODS
The research aims to: explore the identity development of LGBT young people in care through a lens of intersectionality; analyse how foster carers experience caring for this group of young people and how they support them; investigate how practitioners work with LGBT young people in care (and how young people experience such professional support); develop a national picture of the type of services and care planning provided by local authorities to meet the needs of this group.

The study consists of:
– A systematic literature review of international policy and practice involving LGBT young people in care.
– A mapping survey of 152 local authorities in England exploring care planning for LGBT young people in care.
– Life history interviews with 40 young people between the ages of 11 and 26 who have spent at least 6 months in care and identify as LGBT.
– Semi-structured interviews with 25 foster carers who have looked after a LGBT young person.
– Focus groups with professionals who have worked with LGBT young people in care.

Central to the research process is the involvement of a group of young researchers who have been working with us over the past year. They have provided invaluable insights, helping us to develop interview schedules, to recruit young people to interview, and assisting us with analysing interview data. Their perspectives have ensured that the complexity of the intersections between religion, ethnicity, sexuality and gender is reflected in the analysis. The young researcher team will continue to work with us as we write up findings and disseminate the research.

IMPACT
We anticipate that findings will allow us to develop guidance to improve services and support for LGBT young people in care and for the foster carers and professionals who look after them.

NOT ENOUGH IS KNOWN ABOUT THE RESILIENCE OF LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE AND THIS RESEARCH Focuses NOT ONLY ON RISK BUT ALSO ON HOW THESE YOUNG PEOPLE OVERCOME CHALLENGES AND DEVELOP POSITIVE IDENTITIES.
Establishing Outcomes of Care Proceedings for Children Before and After Care Proceedings Reform

Context
Long-standing concerns about unnecessary delay in care proceedings led to major reforms in 2013-14, intended to reduce the duration of proceedings to 26 weeks. Prominent case judgments have also had a significant impact on social work and legal practice. This study builds on the UEA-Bristol team’s earlier work on care proceedings to examine the subsequent outcomes for children and the impact of the recent reforms.

Aims
The study will compare outcomes for children before and after the 2013-14 changes, and investigate the impact of the reforms on social work and legal practice. Specifically, it will:

- Compare care proceedings and outcomes before and after the reforms of 2013-14.
- Examine how the new ‘Public Law Outline’ (which limits care proceedings to 26 weeks) is operating and what orders are being made.
- Identify outcomes of care proceedings for children in the pre- and post-reform samples, one year after the proceedings ended.
- Identify outcomes four years after the proceedings ended for children in the pre-reform sample.
- Evaluate the quality and usefulness of administrative data for tracking and evaluating outcomes for children.

Methods
The pre-reform sample will be drawn from children who were included in the team’s earlier ‘edge of care’ study, and became subject to care proceedings in 2009-10. The post-reform sample is being drawn from proceedings starting after May 2014 in the same six local authorities. There will be approximately 600 children, 300 in each sample. The primary source of information about outcomes will be the administrative data routinely collected by local authorities and reported to the DfE / Welsh Government for national databases on looked after children, school pupils and children in need. This will be supplemented by case file information for a sub-sample of the children, and interviews with key professionals in the six areas.

Findings
The study started in September 2015, and data gathering about care proceedings on the post-reform sample is well underway. This is drawing on documents in the Cafcass electronic case file system to collect information on the children’s circumstances and the progress of the proceedings. Formal applications have been made to the Department for Education for relevant data from the looked after children and child in need databases, for the outcomes information, and the child in need data have been supplied.

Impact
The study is timely and important given the extent of the 2013-14 changes to care proceedings. Local authorities and courts both require knowledge of outcomes and understanding of practice to achieve more systematic thinking about the plans and orders they make and approve.

Publications
There have not yet been any publications from the new study, but two papers from the previous ‘edge of care’ study are:


The study is timely and important given the extent of the 2013-14 changes to care proceedings. Local authorities and courts both require knowledge of outcomes and understanding of practice to achieve more systematic thinking about the plans and orders they make and approve.
DECISION-MAKING IN CHILD WELFARE: A FOUR-COUNTRY STUDY

JAN 2014 – AUG 2016
RESEARCH TEAM Professor Jonathan Dickens and Julie Young, with international colleagues: Professor Marit Skivenes (Norway), Professor Jill Berrick (USA) and Professor Tarja Pösö (Finland)
FUNDER Norwegian Research Council

CONTEXT
The compulsory removal of children from their parents is one of the most intrusive interventions that a state can make in the lives of its citizens, and imposes great responsibilities on the various professionals involved. In difficult and often uncertain circumstances, they have to try to engage with the families, work with professionals from other disciplines, and comply with legal requirements and organisational procedures. All this takes place within a wider context of the state’s overall welfare approach and its specific child and family welfare policies.

AIMS
Professor Jonathan Dickens is a member of a cross-national study of decision-making in child protection and care order cases, with colleagues from Norway, Finland and the USA. The aim is to explore how decisions about taking children into care are made by social workers and the courts in these countries. What knowledge and expertise is relied upon? How tightly regulated are the processes, and what room is there for individual professional judgement? What priority is given to involving parents and young people? What biases are more or less likely in the four countries? And what is the potential for cross-national learning to improve policy and practice?

METHODS
The study is a four stage project. The first stage (before Professor Dickens joined the project) was a comparison of the wider legal and policy frameworks – key legislation, government policy, regulations and guidance. The second stage was a questionnaire survey of social workers who are involved in ‘edge of care’ work and deciding whether cases should go to court. The third stage was a questionnaire survey of judges and others involved in decision-making in the courts. The fourth stage was a survey of public attitudes to welfare services and child safeguarding, using a representative sample of 1,000 people in each of the four countries.

FINDINGS
In broad summary, the two Nordic countries aim to divert cases from court through high levels of family support and generous provision of universal and early intervention services; the USA aims to divert them through a much more ‘hands off’ approach, upholding a strong sense of family autonomy and seeing state intervention as warranted only when the child is at immediate risk. England has an elaborate intermediate stage, its child protection system. Here, monitoring and ‘supportive’ services are provided to children and families when the child is the subject of a multi-agency child protection plan, but with the possibility that more coercive intervention will follow if the parents do not comply.

IMPACT
Awareness of the similarities and differences between the four countries creates an important opportunity to reflect on the policy underpinnings of welfare practice, and the implications for the children and their families.

PUBLICATIONS

AWARENESS OF THE SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE FOUR COUNTRIES Creates AN IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITY TO REFLECT ON THE POLICY UNDERPINNINGS OF WELFARE PRACTICE, AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.
FOLLOW-UP STUDY OF OUTCOMES OF THE TRI-BOROUGH CARE PROCEEDINGS PILOT

CONTEXT

Long-standing concerns about unnecessary delay in care proceedings led to major reforms in 2013-14, intended to reduce the duration of proceedings to 26 weeks. Prior to those national changes, the Tri-borough authorities in London (Hammersmith & Fulham, Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea) launched a pilot project to try to hit the 26 week target. It ran from April 2012 to March 2013. The project was evaluated by a research team from the CRCF. The team have since been commissioned to undertake a follow-up study to track and evaluate the longer-term outcomes for the children.

AIMS

The original evaluation compared the timings and outcomes of care proceedings in the pre-pilot year (2011-12) and the pilot year (2012-13). This gives a combined database of 180 cases (256 children), and a valuable opportunity to track and compare longer-term progress and outcomes for the children. The follow-up study aims to assess whether or not delay has shifted to the post-court stage, and whether the new regime leads to different long-term outcomes.

METHODS

The research team devised a questionnaire to get information on the children’s care plans and the progress towards achieving these following the care proceedings. With the help of staff in the Tri-borough authorities, we now have this information. We aim to supplement this with further information about the children’s wellbeing, from their carers (parents or others). We also aim to get further information about the organisational context, from interviews with social workers and managers in the three local authorities.

FINDINGS

- The original study showed that the Tri-borough pilot had succeeded in its key aim of reducing the length of care proceedings. The median duration of care proceedings was 27 weeks compared to 49 weeks the year before, a reduction of 45%. The study also showed there had been a reduction in the average pre-court period, between the legal planning meeting and the issue of proceedings.
- There were 125 children in the pilot year. Of them, 65% were already in their planned permanent placement at the time of the final hearing. When children did have to move to a permanent placement after the conclusion of proceedings, the mean time taken reduced by over a half, from almost 30 weeks to just over 14.
- For children not already in their planned permanent placement by the end of proceedings, the average (mean) duration of the whole process, from legal planning meeting to permanent placement, fell from 96 weeks in the pre-pilot year, to 52 weeks in the pilot year.
- The pattern of care plans did change between the two years, although these differences did not quite achieve statistical significance. The proportions of cases ending with a plan for the children to be adopted or to live in long-term non-kin foster care both fell, whilst the proportions living with one or both parents, or with a connected person, both rose.

IMPACT

The original evaluation was widely quoted and circulated, because it showed that the 26 week target could be achieved without compromising justice and thoroughness, as long as there was proper regard for flexibility. The new study will give important information about what happens after proceedings, the outcomes of the care plans agreed by the court, and the factors that may affect that.

PUBLICATIONS

The full report on the original evaluation is available free of charge on the CRCF website.

Two papers have been published in social work journals:


FOR CHILDREN NOT ALREADY IN THEIR PLANNED PERMANENT PLACEMENT BY THE END OF PROCEEDINGS, THE AVERAGE (MEAN) DURATION OF THE WHOLE PROCESS, FROM LEGAL PLANNING MEETING TO PERMANENT PLACEMENT, FELL FROM 96 WEEKS IN THE PRE-PILOT YEAR, TO 52 WEEKS IN THE PILOT YEAR.
A REVIEW OF A LONDON BOROUGH COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK SERVICE

CONTINUOUS UK policies in health and social care place an emphasis on preventative work and early intervention as a means of improving health, independence and wellbeing as well as improving outcomes and reducing cost. At the heart of the Care Act 2014 is the wellbeing principle, which assumes that the individual is the best judge of their own wellbeing, of what is important to them and the outcomes they wish to achieve. It stipulates that initial assessment should take into consideration the wishes, feelings and the outcomes that individuals and their carers would like to achieve.

The Community Social Work Team plays a strategic role in generic adult social work in the borough by preventing, reducing and delaying the need for care and support. The Team provides early intervention services to clients. The main objective is to provide preventative support to enable clients to maintain a level of independence. The model of practice is based on 12 intensive weekly meetings with clients. This is extended to 20 sessions in complex cases with clients with multiple care and support needs and in some cases (e.g. hoarding) the intervention is open-ended dependent upon need.

AIMS

The main aim was to provide a follow-up evaluation of the practice of community social work in one team in the London Borough in light of the substantial changes to the service in April 2014. More specifically, the review sought to consider: the clients’ experience of this preventative approach; how team members approach the work; the impact of the approach on shared working with other agencies; the perceptions of other agencies about the work and how it meets their own agency priorities and finally; the outline costs of this way of working.

METHODS

The review involved a mixed methodology. The qualitative aspect included interviews with clients, managers, social workers in the team and stakeholders. The quantitative aspect included a costing analysis and analysis of ‘goals and satisfaction with life’ questionnaires.

FINDINGS

The study demonstrates evidence of the preventative, relationship-based work undertaken by the community social work team. There is congruence between what the social workers say they do, what the stakeholders experience and the perceived outcomes articulated by the clients. Overall, there was evidence that the team’s service is currently less crisis-driven and that the emphasis now is on longer-term, practical help.

Participants (clients) valued the time the social workers spent with them and the way that they were treated with sensitivity and respect. The general consensus from interviewees was that the benefits from involvement with the team would last and if they needed further support in the future, they felt confident to make contact with the team again.

The mechanisms used by the social workers to assess the effectiveness of their engagement include: the use of photographs to enable clients to map and assess their own progress over time (encouraging self-hoarders, for example, to declutter and reclaim their living space); informal phone conversations and formal six-month or end-of-work reviews as part of contractual agreements made with clients.

IMPACT

The study report has suggestions for future changes and developments for consideration by the funder. The evaluation adds to the evidence of the importance of relationship-based work with adults who need support within their communities.
EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI) AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN CHILD AND FAMILY SOCIAL WORK

2012–2016
PROJECT TEAM Dr Laura Biggart, Dr Emma Ward, Laura Cook
FUNDER ESRC

CONTEXT

For social workers, good interpersonal skills are very important for the quality of service that they deliver. Skills such as listening and thinking about how the other person may be feeling are critical. Just as important is the ability for individual social workers to manage their own anxiety and stress, otherwise they may not perform as well as they should. This research will investigate what factors constitute good practice in child and family social work, as this is considered to be one of the more stressful jobs to do. We are interested to see whether something called emotional intelligence helps social workers do a better job and whether emotional intelligence also helps them manage their anxiety and stress better. Emotional intelligence refers to a number of related skills in individuals: understanding how emotions work; recognising emotions in themselves; recognising emotions in others; managing their own emotions; managing emotions in others. If emotional intelligence does help both performance and managing anxiety and stress, we want to see if teaching emotional intelligence skills to child and family social workers makes a difference to their practice and anxiety levels over one year whilst they are in work.

AIMS

The research project had several aims: the first aim was to examine conceptualisations of good social work practice from different perspectives. These perspectives were explored with four focus groups of social work service users; social workers themselves; social work managers and social work lecturers. The second aim was to design and test a questionnaire which captures these elements of social work practice identified from the literature search and focus groups. The third aim was to evaluate an emotional intelligence training package as an intervention to one group of social workers and compare their levels of stress and burnout and perceptions of social work practice to another group of social workers who do not receive the training. Social workers’ stress and burnout and perceptions of social work practice were tracked over one year.

METHODS

Identifying good social worker practice: Nine domains of good social work practice were identified from focus group data: Knowledge, Communication, Relationships, Case Work Skills, Emotion Management, Traits, Values, Professional Role, and Work-time Management. These domains were compared to the Professional Capabilities Framework. A first draft of a social work practice questionnaire was designed which went out to child and family social workers in 75 Local Authorities in March 2014 and 420 responses were analysed to inform a revised version of the practice questionnaire which included eight domains: Analysis, Consultation and Empathy, Co-operation, Coping, Adaptability, Exercising authority, Approach to learning and Organisation skills. This revision was used in the Emotional Intelligence training evaluation. Data collection is complete and analysis is underway.

Emotional Intelligence training evaluation: Child and family social workers (n=210) in a variety of different roles were recruited across eight diverse local authorities in England to take part in a 12 month study evaluating a two day Emotional Intelligence training programme. Half of this group were randomly allocated to receive Emotional Intelligence training early in the 12 month period and the other half to receive the training at the end of the 12 month period, acting as a control group.

FINDINGS

The training itself received good feedback about its usefulness and relevance to both social worker’s lives and their work with service users.

IMPACT

The research is important for two main reasons: First, social workers’ stress is known to affect practice. Secondly, if emotional intelligence skills are important to carry out the social work role, it is essential that these skills are adequately assessed at the stage of recruitment, both for training and into work, and then supported in practice.
MENTALIZATION AND SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

JUN 2013 – OCT 2015
RESEARCH TEAM Dr Jeanette Cossar, Laura Cook, Professor Gillian Schofield
FUNDER Department for Education

CONTEXT
The Anna Freud Centre’s Early Years Parenting Unit (EYPU) in London was set up to offer mentalization-based therapies to high-risk families with complex needs. Mentalization can be defined as the ‘mental process by which an individual implicitly and explicitly interprets the actions of himself and others as meaningful on the basis of intentional mental states such as personal desires, needs, feelings, beliefs and reasons’ (Bateman & Fonagy, 2004: 21).

AIMS
UEA and the University of Sussex worked with the Anna Freud Centre to embed mentalization based teaching in their social work qualifying programmes. Teaching was provided to students by staff from the Anna Freud Centre, as well as being incorporated into existing units such as Relationship-based practice and Working in Organisations. The research project at UEA and Sussex aimed to investigate the following:
- How can we measure mentalization in relation to social work practice?
- Does the capacity to mentalize differ between social work contexts? (e.g. child and family/adult mental health).
- Do students show an improvement in mentalization at the end of their qualifying training compared with at the beginning?

METHODS
Data were collected from students at different points in the course and analysed. Students responded to case vignettes at the beginning and end of the course. The responses were coded using an adapted measure of mentalization (developed for this project). Students also provided examples of reflective writing based on their placement work.

FINDINGS
A measure was successful developed which achieved a high level of interrater reliability between several coders. There was a significant correlation between students’ performance on the child and family case vignettes and the vignette based on an adult scenario. There was no significant difference in students’ scores at the start and end of the qualifying programme on the measure of mentalization. Future work could seek to refine the measure and test its validity.

IMPACT
The project was successful in embedding mentalization-based training in the curriculum and the teaching was well received by students. At the launch event there was substantial interest from social work educators in using the measure of mentalization developed in this project to assist with recruitment and admissions, and to assess students’ reflective writing. There was also interest in using the measure with students as a teaching tool to develop their understanding of mentalization and facilitate reflective evaluation of practice.

PUBLICATIONS
The findings were presented at a launch event for social work educators hosted by the Anna Freud Centre in 2016. Academic and practitioner articles will follow.
At the launch event there was substantial interest from social work educators in using the measure of mentalization developed in this project to assist with recruitment and admissions, and to assess students’ reflective writing.
GROWING UP WITH A PARENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS: MAKING SENSE OF THE EXPERIENCE THROUGH THE REFLECTION OF ADULT OFFSPRING

Many children are cared for by a parent (or parents) with a severe and enduring mental illness, this can have a significant impact on their experience of childhood and subsequent formation of adult identities. Historically, research has focused on the risks and detrimental effects for these children. Whilst such risk and disadvantage must be considered, research also suggests that the stigma of mental illness, assumption of poor parenting and subsequent fear of intervention, further disables parents and negatively impacts on their children. Additionally not all children in such families experience significant difficulties and research shows that multiple sources of risk and resilience can be influential. As such the impact on and needs of the child cannot be measured by psychopathology alone, but rather assessed within an understanding of their individual experience.

The goal of this research is to explore how adults, who grew up with at least one parent with a mental illness, make sense of their childhood and family narrative. By reflecting on their experiences, themes and processes can be identified which, when considered in the light of existing research could offer further understanding of this particular issue. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better understanding of children’s conceptualisations of parental mental illness, which in turn can inform the development of resources to support children and their families foster resilience.

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK: MAKING SENSE OF THE INITIAL HOME VISIT

This doctoral research project examines how the experience of encountering a family in the ‘intimate space’ of the home impacts on the task of social work assessment. It aims to investigate how child and family social workers make sense of what they see, hear and feel during the visit in order to arrive at a professional judgement. The project has used narrative interviews and focus groups in order to ascertain workers’ experiences of encountering the family during an initial home visit. It explores: how workers begin to ‘construct’ the family on the basis of an initial encounter, the overt communication and meta-communication involved in the encounter between family and professional, and how the worker’s emotional experiences during the home visit affects and informs their claims to knowledge about the case. The study, which is now in its final year, will contribute to our understanding of how social workers exercise their professional judgement and the systemic, procedural and psychodynamic factors that impact on this process.
THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL ASSISTANCE ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DISABLED PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

As a social worker in a local authority team working with disabled adults, Nicola developed an interest in the relationships which exist between disabled people and their personal assistants (PAs). This led to the development of a research project which formed part of her MA in Disability Studies at the University of Leeds, findings from which suggested that the challenge of managing this already complex dynamic increases with parenthood. Although accurate statistics are not available, it is widely agreed that there has been an increase in recent years in the numbers of disabled parents – estimates suggest that 1.1 million UK households with dependent children have at least one disabled parent (Morris and Wates 2006). With the increase in uptake of personal budgets, more disabled people are employing PAs, yet little is known about the impact of PA support upon parenting.

This new doctoral project will explore the significance, influence and meaning of the PA role in the intimate arena of family life by examining the interaction between disabled parents and their children. Working with local user groups of disabled people to promote recruitment, the project will have a sample of approximately 30 participants; these will be divided into three equal study population groups – disabled parents, children, and PAs. Views of participants will be gathered by semi-structured interviews; face-to-face meetings will be held with disabled parents, and discussions with children will be based around age-appropriate activities. Telephone interviews will be held with PAs. Findings will be analysed thematically.

Outcomes for this study will include development of a more detailed understanding of how PA support operates in the lives of families with disabled parents. It is anticipated that both positive experiences and areas of tension/difficulty may be uncovered. An accessible guide will be produced to disseminate findings and share best practice.

EXPLORING DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE’S PERSPECTIVES OF CHILD PROTECTION

Disabled children have the same rights to protection and to participate in decision making as all children (UNCRC, 1989, UNCRPD, 2006). Research shows disabled children to be at significantly greater risk of experiencing abuse and neglect than other groups of children. Identifying and responding to disabled children’s needs should therefore be a particular priority in child protection practice. Yet recent evidence shows that they are less likely to be made the subject of child plans in England (DfE, 2011).

This PhD study aimed to improve our understanding of this issue by exploring disabled young people’s own accounts of their experiences of participating in child protection decision-making in three English local authorities.

Thematic methods were used to analyse data from in-depth qualitative interviews with 16 disabled young people, aged 11-17, and their parents or carers. All participants had experienced significant professional involvement relating to suspected abuse or neglect. Many young people understood, and some agreed with professional concerns for their welfare. Young people perceived carers, and particularly practitioners, however, as often more concerned with their protection and impairment-related needs than facilitating their appropriate involvement in decision-making, or enabling them to make informed choices about matters that were important to them.

How young people made sense of and responded to their experiences varied. Some, despite feeling frustrated, struggled to express their views, and identified others’ negative perceptions of their impairment and vulnerability as affecting their confidence to speak up. While others responded by attempting to defend their right to self-determination, usually resulting in conflict and a lack of engagement with professionals and services. A third group of young people had greater confidence expressing their views and in these being taken seriously in decision-making.

In responding sensitively to their complex support needs professionals and carers need to ensure that young people’s right to have their views valued and respected in decision-making is upheld alongside their right to protection and support with impairment related needs.

Theoretical perspectives that promote a holistic approach to how disabled people make sense of their lives and impairments have much to contribute to improving practice in this area.
FEMALE VIOLENT OFFENDING AND CARE: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF PATHWAYS AND PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In June 2015 an independent review was established by the Prison Reform Trust and chaired by Lord Laming in a bid to explore why British children who have been in care are over represented in the criminal justice system. Reports have found that girls with care histories are at risk of not only engaging in offending behaviour, but offending escalating in frequency and seriousness, often into violence (Criminal Justice Joint Inspection, 2014). In the UK girls with care histories also make up 61% of girls in custody, putting them more at risk of receiving custodial sentences than boys with care histories (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Given that statistically there are more male offenders overall, this raises questions around what the relationship is between gender, care and offending behaviours. It also raises questions around how the system responds to these girls.

This research project aims to contribute to developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender, care and offending and the systemic response. In order to achieve this a case file analysis will be conducted, in addition to focus groups with front line practitioners. Taking an intersectional focus, the project will examine pathways to violent offending and will explore how cultural ideals around gender, being in care and being an offender influence service intervention. It is hoped that findings will provide a complex understanding of the impact of gender on care and offending pathways and that this will help inform future policy and front line practice.

ETHICAL DECISION MAKING IN CHILD PROTECTION WORK

My research focuses on the ethical dimension of decision making in child protection work. I have specifically looked at the relationships between health visitors and social workers – a key dynamic in child protection with children under five. Amongst other factors, I am interested how ideas about ‘doing the right thing’ are framed within this relationship and how decisions are reached in a complex and challenging context. The research takes a discursive approach, examining the language and interactional practices that frame the decision making within this context. Making use of joint interviews with pairs of social workers and health visitors, the research hopes to add to the knowledge base that we currently hold about the ways in which professionals are able to make sense of the ethical dimension of their work. The research also challenges the idea that professions generate distinct and fixed value positions. I suggest instead, in line with Banks (2016) and others that professionals navigate ethical issues making use of principles and other ethical frameworks, but also responding to situational factors that emerge within the contexts that they work. Doing the right thing requires professionals to be constantly mindful of the ethical landscape that they occupy.
UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE’S EXPERIENCES AND VIEWS OF PARTNER VIOLENCE IN TEENAGE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

Adolescence is known to be a critical developmental period in the life course and a time when most young people are likely to enter into their first intimate relationships. The significance of a young person’s early intimate relationships are twofold: firstly they can impact upon a young person’s development, depending upon the nature and quality of the relationship; secondly, they provide a framework for intimate relationships in adulthood. However, exploration of behaviours that young people think are acceptable and unacceptable within these relationships has been relatively limited within the UK.

This project drew upon feminist criminology and feminist qualitative psychology to explore young people’s experiences and views of teenage intimate partner violence. A mixed methods approach was used in the study. A quantitative online survey was completed by 233 young people aged 16-19 about their experience of violence from an intimate partner and the impact of this violence on their wellbeing. A series of eight predominantly single gender qualitative focus groups were conducted with young people aged 16-19 to investigate how teenage intimate partner violence is understood, interpreted and made sense of.

Substantial numbers of young people were found to have experienced some form of violence from their partner, with girls reporting higher rates of victimisation than boys across all categories of physical, emotional and sexual violence. The finding of the survey also illustrated the negative impact that intimate partner violence can have on some young people’s wellbeing, again with more adverse impact being reported by young women than young men. The qualitative study provided insights into the ways that young people perceive teenage intimate partner violence and what shapes and informs their perceptions. Young people’s conceptualisations of gender identities were relevant to how they defined and understood violence. The perceptions of young people about what someone should or could do if they were in a violent relationship provided insights into how best to respond to this problem. The findings of the study generated a number of recommendations for research, policy and practise with regards to intervention and prevention.

GOING HOME FROM RESIDENTIAL CARE: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF SEPARATION AND RE-INTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR MOTHERS IN MOLDOVA

Re-unification from child residential care (RC) is a widely-researched topic in social work literature. However, it remains greatly under-explored in Moldova, where the institutionalization of children is a significant child welfare concern due to high parental migration rates. The present qualitative study aims to explore separation and re-integration experiences of children and their birth mothers in Moldova and includes the perspectives of children, their mothers and social workers professionals.

The study explored retrospective accounts of young people (13-16 years old) and their mothers before and during separation, and following re-integration from residential care. Drawing on grounded theory approach, data from 42 in-depth open-ended interviews (20 mothers and 22 children) in 20 localities in Moldova were collected and analysed. Children’s views were explored using participatory research methods: photo-elicitation, life story maps, and drawings, producing rich child-driven data. Five focus groups with non-governmental organisations and local social assistance professionals were conducted to provide a more informed view on reunification processes.

This project is currently at the stage of data analysis. The early findings suggest that while still maintaining contact with their birth families, children formed their compensatory family-like relationships at residential care homes, which they identified as their “second home”. Re-union with their families was fraught with challenges: children struggled to fit into their homes, schools and communities; many saying they felt like a “stranger” alienated from their surroundings. Mothers’ accounts revealed their lack of agency in decision making both at separation and at reunion. In most cases placing the child at RC was an imposed or forced measure. The mothers employed a range of strategies to manage separation and maintain contact with their children. Re-union challenges were identified as being inadequately supported by social services and feeling “under surveillance”. Alienation and stigma in their own families and communities came out as strong themes in mothers’ narratives.

The findings highlight the need for mothers to be better informed and involved in decision making processes at all stages of separation and re-unification. The study also revealed the families’ complex needs for a more comprehensive and fair system of ongoing social support. The findings will contribute to creating social support policies and practices in Moldova that are better informed by vulnerable families’ needs and perspectives.


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OUR AIMS

TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH ON A WIDE RANGE OF CHILD AND FAMILY ISSUES ACROSS REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL Contexts.

TO USE RESEARCH TO ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND THE DIVERSE NATURE AND MEANINGS OF FAMILY LIFE ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE IN A CHANGING AND MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY.

TO ADVANCE OUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF SERVICES ACROSS THE STATUTORY, VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE SECTORS.

TO WORK IN COLLABORATION WITH, OR ON BEHALF OF, CHILD AND FAMILY AGENCIES IN THE STATUTORY, VOLUNTARY AND PRIVATE SECTORS.

TO DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE RESEARCH KNOWLEDGE WHICH WILL INFORM AND HAVE AN IMPACT ON POLICY AND PRACTICE, ENHANCING THE WELLBEING OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.