

Why do people become foster carers?

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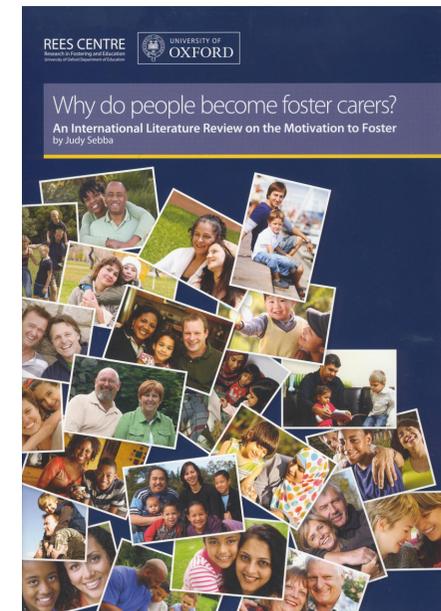
Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education

Overall aim of the Centre is to:

- identify what works to improve the outcomes and life chances of children and young people in foster care

We will do this by:

- reviewing existing research in order to make better use of current evidence;
 - conducting new research to address gaps.
- Centre is funded by Core Assets, children's services provider



Some key principles of our work

- Focus on fostering not adoption;
- User engagement throughout the research process - providers, carers, young people;
- Synthesis of existing international evidence;
- New projects including trials & mixed method;
- More accessible findings & debate about them – blog, twitter, speaking to groups etc.

What problem is the research addressing?

- number of children and young people in care is increasing faster than the number of foster carers (e.g. Rodger et al, 2006);
- only half of those who request information about fostering express their intention to consider it further (e.g. Ciarrochi et al., 2011) and Triseliotis et al., (2000) noted that 80% of enquiries did not result in an application.

Why do people become foster carers: research question

Why do people initially consider (non-kinship) fostering, and what factors determine whether they progress to application?

Why do people become foster carers: a review of the international research

- Reviewed 32 studies from Australia, Canada, US and Scandinavia;
- Studies were retrospective, mainly small scale, often relied on one source only and possible that interviewers were seen as potential 'assessors';
- Only one study (Brown et al 2006) in which carers played a significant role in the research;
- Compared findings to review of UK literature by McDermid et al (2012) & TFN's 2012 survey;
- Recommendations are being addressed through DfE commissioned survey and future Rees Centre study.

Why do people become foster carers?

main findings

- Knowing other foster carers or, less often, contact with a fostered child or young person is most likely reason for **initial** interest;
- Myths about fostering are common in the general public but can be addressed through better information though contact with foster parents is most effective;
- Lack of appropriate support for carers, not including them as part of the 'team' leads to dissatisfaction - sends negative messages to those who might foster.

Why do people become foster carers?

other findings

- main drivers for fostering are intrinsic and essentially altruistic often expressed as 'loving children' & wanting to make a difference to the lives of children;
- extending the family/providing a sibling for a lone child, personal experience of being fostered or growing up with fostered children, wanting home-based employment;
- Income generation not a principal motivation to foster, though studies rarely distinguish between carers from different income groups. Covering costs and replacing income from previous employment important.

New study on motivation

- Identify number of initial inquiries, proportion that lead to registration and time taken;
- Service provider to invite those inquiring to participate;
- Foster carers to interview those inquiring about initial motivations, types of child, etc;
- Re-interview after approx 8 months;
- Interview those choosing not to continue.

Some future research plans

- **What motivates foster carers?**

Based on the review will follow up those who inquire, interviews undertaken by foster carers

- **How do foster carers support each other?**

What is the nature of the support and what does it provide?
Outcomes for carers & children? Review & intervention.

- **Supporting carers to develop children's literacy (tbc)**

Looking at literacy of children in care at primary to secondary school transfer

- **Siblings together (tbc)**

An evaluation of interventions to bring siblings together who have been placed apart

User engagement in Rees Centre Research

Regular consultation with:

Children & young people in care, care leavers –
from LA & IFP;

Carers – LA & IFP. Ten carers completed training as
interviewers on 5 Dec, another 20 applied;

Service providers, social workers;

Advisory group with BAAF, NAFF, NSPCC, LA, LGA;

International Experts Reference Group.

Invitation to our seminars

- **16 January What are we trying to achieve in foster care?**

Professor Robbie Gilligan, Trinity College Dublin

Professor Ian Sinclair Consultant to the Rees Centre

Shirley Trundle, Department for Education

- **20 February What can schools do to realise expectations?**

Professor David Berridge, University of Bristol

Professor Peter Pecora, University of Washington

Dr Peter McParlin, Child Psychologist

- **20 March Leaving care: outcomes for fostered young people**

Professor Sonia Jackson, Institute of Education, University of London

Professor Mike Stein, University of York

Robert Tapsfield, CEO The Fostering Network

- **4 March Research on childhood well-being**

Professor Ann Phoenix, University of London

- **3 June Safeguarding children in the early years**

Professor Harriet Ward, Loughborough University

How you can find out more and get involved

- Mailing List
- Web - <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/>
- Comment on our blog – or write for us!
- Newsletter
- Twitter - @ReesCentre

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