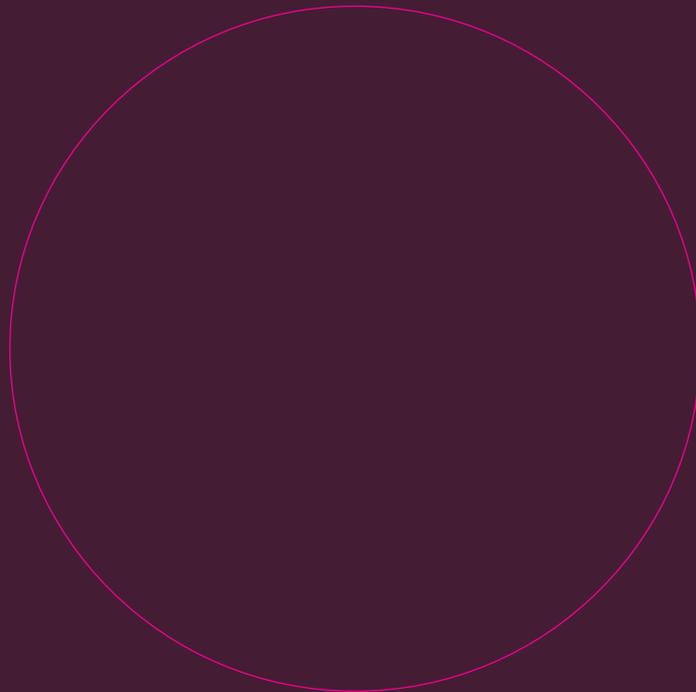


**MAKING  
A DIFFERENCE  
FOR CHILDREN  
AND FAMILIES**



We have been fortunate in gaining new funding for research in the Centre over the last year. As well as supporting our ongoing study on fathers in recurrent care proceedings, the Nuffield Foundation has granted an award to Gillian Schofield, Birgit Larsson and their team to investigate the implementation of the first Regulations and Guidance in England (2015) on long-term foster care as a permanence option. Gillian was a member of the expert working group that developed this documentation, and research from the CRCF was key in the underpinning knowledge base. We are also very pleased that Norfolk Constabulary are funding Jane Dodsworth and Penny Sorensen to study the increasing problem of child criminal exploitation and in particular 'County Lines'. Our third new study is an evaluation of the activities of the Suffolk and Norfolk Social Work Teaching Partnership, now in its third year.

Our members' efforts to bring the messages from research to a wide audience have been recognised over the last year with a clutch of engagement awards. Jeanette Cossar and her team won an award for their outstanding work on the *SpeakOut* supporting LGBTQ young people in care project. We are also delighted that a student engagement award was given to Paul McGrath for spreading the messages from his PhD on special guardians.

Several Centre members are now working closely with All Party Parliamentary Groups in Westminster to make sure parliamentarians and policy makers are aware of, and can make use of, our findings. June Thoburn, who celebrated her 80th birthday in 2019, keeps close links with

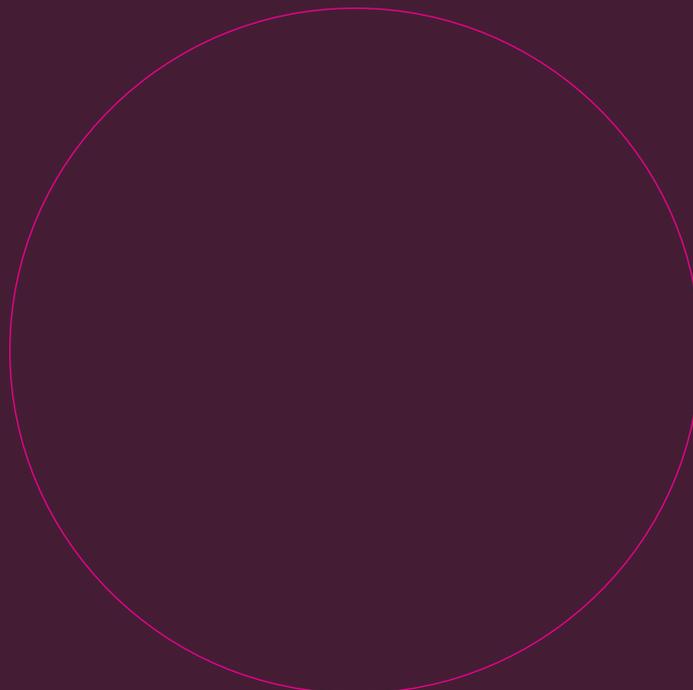
Westminster. Last year, among many other activities, June was commissioned by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) to write an expert report as part of their inquiry into Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Linked to Westminster.

Our long term impact work is still proving influential. Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek's Secure Base model is being implemented in new countries, such as Ukraine. An adaptation of the model – the Team as Secure Base – by Laura Biggart is being used in the national Practice Supervisor Development Programme for social workers. Laura and her team were also finalists in the UEA innovation and impact awards for this work. Beth Neil's longstanding work on contact in adoption has attracted growing interest this year, in particular from the legal sector. Beth and her team are working hard on their ESRC funded study, *From being adopted to becoming a parent* which is now in its second year,

So, all in all, another busy year. Thanks are again due to our funders who make the research possible and to the families and children at the heart of our research. We also acknowledge the tireless efforts of practitioners helping us as researchers and working to support children and families through difficult times.

**MARIAN BRANDON**

*Professor of Social Work,  
Director of the Centre for Research  
on Children and Families*



# WELCOME TO OUR ANNUAL REPORT



# NEWS

## INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATIONS



### INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR OUTCOME-BASED EVALUATION AND RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES (iaOBERfcs) 15th ANNIVERSARY

June Thoburn and Marian Brandon are both founding members of iaOBERfcs – an international grouping of social work scholars established by the Fondazione Zancan in Padova, Italy. June and Marian were part of the 15th anniversary conference in Rome in October 2018 where they were present for discussions at an Italian parliament committee meeting about funding for services to address poverty. Marian also presented a paper on key messages for working with fathers to an audience of Italian practitioners working in early years and early help services.

June has been working with Italian members of iaOBERfcs on the analysis of over 30 responses from experienced social workers in 10 countries on messages they would wish to pass on to beginning child and family social workers (the 'Looking Back-Looking Forward' project).

In June 2018, June was in Padova, working with Fondazione Zancan colleagues on their EU-funded 4 nation project (Belgium, Slovenia, Italy and Portugal) on improving accessibility to early years services for disadvantaged children and families.

June continues to work with international colleagues from eight European jurisdictions (Austria, England, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, and Spain)

on the Norwegian funded 'Acceptability Project' led by Professor Marit Skivenes of Bergen University. The project is using court judgements on infants removed at or shortly after birth, and children of all ages adopted from care to explore how judges reach their conclusions and record their reasoning in the written judgements.

In August 2018 June was a panel member at the Bergen Exchanges conference for sessions on decision-making in cases of unaccompanied refugees' children, children who enter a country when already married, and the role of social and other media in cases involving child maltreatment. Podcasts of the Bergen Exchanges panel discussions can be found on YouTube. June was also a visitor to Bergen University in May 2018 to provide consultation to PhD students.

From 2015-2018, Marian was part of the research advisory group that supports research at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, at the University of Galway in the Republic of Ireland. The research team were evaluating the implementation and outcomes of a programme of action seeking to transform child and family services in Ireland by embedding prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of the TUSLA Child and Family Agency. Marian gave a keynote presentation on working with fathers in early help services at the National Workshop for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support, Kilkenny, in December 2018 which was attended by 300 practitioners from across Ireland.



# NEWS

## INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

### CHILD PROTECTION

At the International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect (IPSCAN), in Prague in September 2018, Georgia Philip was part of the 'What about Fathers?' Symposium alongside colleagues from Germany and the USA, to share research and promote discussion around the gaps in research knowledge about men's lives as fathers and the implications for practice. Her paper was on key messages from the Nuffield funded *Counting Fathers In* study.

Georgia also presented a paper on the current Nuffield funded project, *'Up Against It': Fathers' experiences of recurrent care proceedings* at the European Sociological Association conference on Families and Intimate Relationships, in Finland in June 2018.

### SOCIAL WORK AND SEXUALITY

Christine Cocker attended the Social Work and Sexuality conference in Montreal, Canada in August 2018 alongside over 300 delegates from all over the world. Christine presented two papers: 'Transgender parenting across the life-course: findings from a systematic review', (see Research Reports) and on behalf of Jeanette Cossar, 'Young people's experiences of growing up trans in the care system'. Christine was invited to participate in a research symposium held on the day before the conference, involving 30 international social work academics researching in the field of social work and sexuality.

### LIVING ALONE

Penny Sorensen presented a paper: 'Older Men Living Alone: A Photo-elicitation Study of their Social Worlds' at the Asian Conference on Aging & Gerontology (AGen2019), in Tokyo, Japan in May 2019.

### ADOPTION

Beth Neil gave three presentations at the 6th International Conference on Adoption Research, also in Montréal, in July 2018: a symposium about adoptees as parents where she discussed her new ESRC study, and recruited Prof David Brodzinsky as a member of the academic advisory board and as a pilot interviewee (Prof Brodzinsky is not just a leading adoption scholar, but an adoptive grandad); a paper presented with Cherilyn Dance and Ruth Rogers exploring prospective adoptive parents' journeys – based on the DfE funded study of inter-agency fees; and a paper reporting findings from the Yorkshire and Humberside project on the ongoing needs of adopted children, and whether the services provided were matched to need.

### DISABILITY

At the Nordic Network on Disability Research 15th Interdisciplinary Conference: 'Inclusion and Exclusion in the Welfare Society,' Nicola Jones presented a paper based on her PhD: Sharing the tasks of parenting: Disabled parents, their children and PA support.

### OUTCOMES AND GUARDIANSHIP

Jonathan Dickens presented on the *Outcomes of Care Proceedings* study at two European conferences: at the European Scientific Association on Residential and Family Care for Children and Adolescents (EUSARF), in Porto, Portugal in September 2018, and at the European Social Work Research Association, (ESWRC) in Leuven, Belgium in April 2019. Paul McGrath also presented findings from his PhD study on Special Guardianship Orders at the ESWR conference.

### SAFEGUARDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE PROJECT JUNE 2018



Christine Cocker gave a keynote address *Let's talk about...*, (on behalf of Jeanette Cossar and the *SpeakOut* research team), at the closing conference of a 4 country 'EU funded project involving, the Netherlands, Belgium, Scotland and Denmark. Christine presented an overview of the results of CRCF's ESRC funded project about the experiences of young people who are LGBTQ+ and in care.

# NEWS

## INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE CLOSER TO HOME

### CHILD SAFEGUARDING

June Thoburn was commissioned in 2018-19 by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) to write an expert report on the child safeguarding documentation and procedures of 21 government departments, the Palace of Westminster and all political parties. This formed part of the IICSA inquiry into Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse Linked to Westminster. In March 2019 she gave evidence on her report at a public hearing (available on the IICSA website).

### FATHERHOOD

CRCF are involved in the All Party Parliamentary Group on Fatherhood in Westminster in relation to both of our Nuffield funded studies on fathers. In July 2018 John Clifton presented messages for policy from our *Counting fathers* study of fathers' perspectives on child protection. The session was chaired by David Lammy MP and attended by approx. 30 parliamentarians, policy makers, third sector organisations and academics.

### GUARDIANSHIP AND KINSHIP

Paul McGrath also shared his PhD findings with the All Party Parliamentary Group into kinship care in March 2019. Two MPs and one member of the House of Lords were present along with a number of senior managers from different local authorities. Paul contributed his findings to the rapid review into Special Guardianship Orders which was commissioned by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory and undertaken by Coram BAAF in January 2019.

### PARENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS

Kate Blake-Holmes was invited to talk to the qualitative research team in the Office of the Children's Commissioner, in July 2018, about research methods and to share findings from her recently completed PhD on growing up with a parent with a mental illness. They also discussed possible future projects.



# NEWS

## UK CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND EVENTS

### BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS (BASW)

As a member of the BASW Children and Families Policy Practice and Education Group, June Thoburn introduced a Webinar conversation in August 2018, based on a BASW briefing on the roles and tasks of child and family social workers (the briefing and the webinar recording are available on the BASW website).

At the BASW conference **Strength – Support – Solution – Celebrating Social Workers' Resilience** in May 2019, David Howe gave a keynote address. This event was organised by BASW in collaboration with the Eastern Region Independents Group.

### VULNERABILITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH CONFERENCE

Penny Sorensen was the keynote speaker at the Pan Bedfordshire LSCB event. Her title was 'Adolescence, risk-taking behaviours and suicide: learning from serious case reviews'.

### DISABILITY STUDIES CONFERENCE

Nicola Jones gave a presentation drawing on her PhD study, 'Parenting with personal assistance' at the Biennial Disability Studies Conference, Lancaster University in September 2018.

### HOMELESSNESS

Christina Carmichael presented two papers over the last year drawing on her PhD study – at the Social Policy Association Conference (July 2018) where she presented: 'Homelessness and the third sector: insider accounts from the age of austerity' and at the British Sociological Association Forum Event: 'The promise and perils of researching sensitive issues' (November 2018) – where her paper was: 'Accessing, engaging and representing vulnerable voices: reflections from a homelessness research study'.

## NEWS

### CRCF 2018 CONFERENCE

The *Outcomes of Care Proceedings* study was the topic of last year's very successful Annual CRCF Conference in June 2018. Jonathan Dickens and Julie Young presented from CRCF and Judith Masson from Bristol University. The event was attended by over 100 delegates – mostly social workers and lawyers as well as professionals from voluntary organisations and academics.

Jonathan also presented from the study to Kent Children's Services in Feb 2019; at a Norfolk Family Justice Board training event in February 2019 and at two Cafcass training days in September 2019 and February 2019 and at the East of England Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) conference at Bury St Edmunds in November 2018 which was attended by 80 IRO managers. The other speaker at the IRO conference was Paul McGrath.

## NEWS

### DOMESTIC HOMICIDE

In August 2018 Marian Brandon presented to a group of senior managers and commissioners working with Domestic Homicide Reviews in Birmingham. The theme was 'How recommendations transfer or translate to learning and cultural change: learning from serious case reviews'. Marian also used the expertise of the group to test out a draft survey about recommendations in SCRs, which was part of the recently completed SCR triennial review which is the focus of this year's annual CRCF conference.



# NEWS CRCF 2019 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

## COMPLEXITY AND CHALLENGE: A TRIENNIAL ANALYSIS OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS 2014-2017

The 2019 annual CRCF conference being held at Woburn House in London is **Complexity and Challenge: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2014-2017**. The conference provides a rare opportunity to hear and discuss the findings from this newly published DfE funded study carried out by Marian Brandon and her team from CRCF and Peter Sidebotham and his team from Warwick University.

The context of complexity and challenge provides an underlying theme to the 368 SCRs from 2014-17.

As we looked into the reviews we were struck by the complexity of the lives of these children and families and the challenges – at times quite overwhelming – faced by the practitioners seeking to support them in such complexity. The conference presents an overview of the reviews and new learning with a special focus on neglect, vulnerable adolescents and care and court cases. The implications from this new learning for practitioners and for multi-agency working are being discussed.

# NEWS

## AUTUMN 2018 CRCF SEMINAR SERIES

Our autumn 2018 seminars included two visiting academics from Australia. The series was opened by **Dr Susan Collings** from the Institute of Open Adoption Studies, University of Sydney New South Wales, Australia. Susan spoke about supporting parents with learning difficulties with children in care: Challenge and lessons from Australia. Also from Sydney was Paul-Auguste Cornefert who presented early PhD findings from his study on marginalised Australian birth fathers.

From closer to home, we welcomed **Anja McConnochie**, a PhD student from the University of Cambridge. Anja presented findings from the UK Longitudinal Study of Adoptive Gay Fathers Families for discussion. Our own PhD students also presented at CRCF seminars over the last year: **Nicola Jones** and **Donna Maree Humphery**.

Three seminars were also held in conjunction with the teaching partnership between the School of Social Work at UEA, Norfolk and Suffolk County Council and the University of Suffolk. In addition practitioners from Norfolk and Suffolk attended many of the seminars held at UEA in the 2018-19 series.



## NEWS INTERNS

In the summer of 2018 Beth Neil worked with one of our social work student research interns, **Kat Norry**, analysing adopted young people's interviews in the longitudinal *Contact after Adoption* study. This new analysis explored young people's perceptions of their relationships with birth family members. The research was presented at the EUSARF meeting in Porto in October 2018 as part of an invited symposium around adoption and relationships. Kat and Beth also discussed the research at a "best practice" seminar hosted by Norfolk County Council, where Kat now works. The seminar was attended by a wide range of social workers from across Norfolk County Council and it prompted

productive debates and discussions around content planning in the agency. Beth was also invited to present the analysis at the University of Edinburgh social work seminar series. Beth and Kat are hoping to publish a paper from this project later this year.

The second social work student research intern working last summer was **Kezia Twigg** who worked with Penny Sorensen and the SCR team on the 'Triennial analysis of serious case reviews study'. Among other helpful research activities, Kezia produced case studies which have been adapted for the final report.

# NEWS OTHER NEWS

## AWARDS SUCCESS!

We are delighted to report successes for CRCF members in gaining prestigious UEA awards. **Jeanette Cossar** and team won an engagement award for their outstanding work on the SpeakOut project which the panel called: “An important, multi-dimensional and user-led project”. Thanks to CLARHC funding over the last year, Jeanette and the team of **Penny Sorensen**, **Pippa Belderson**, **Julie Young**, and of course the young researchers have been developing training materials for professional practice with LGBTQ young people in care, and engaging with professionals and the public about the findings, in particular the SpeakOut film.

**Paul McGrath** has won two awards: the PGR prize for excellence in teaching and a student engagement award for his PhD work on special guardians. Paul’s judging panel were “impressed with the dialogues with many types of public groups. Exceptional work.”

**Laura Biggart** and team were finalists in the University Innovation awards in the health, well-being and welfare category, for their development of Emotional resilience and Team as Secure Base training.

## REPORT SUCCESS!

**Sara Connolly** has been working with former CRCF Co-Director Prof Margaret O’Brien (now Director of Thomas Coram Institute UCL) on a funded project for the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE). Their final report Eligibility for Parental Leave in EU-28 (see publications) was submitted in March 2019. EIGE are using the report to develop the new sections on parental leave for their annual index report.

## PHD SUCCESS!

Good news for **Dr Christine Cocker** and **Dr Peter Jordan** who gained their PhDs in September 2018, and **Dr Jane Hernon** who completed hers in May 2019. Many congratulations to them all!



## WATCH THIS SPACE

Laura Cook has been successful in gaining an award from the British Academy/Leverhulme small grants scheme to examine professional identity among child and family social workers. The study starts next year when we will look forward to hearing more about Laura’s new project.

# A LOOK AT BRIEFINGS

Our research briefings are useful summaries of completed CRCF studies. A set of these briefings of studies dating back to 2014 is available on the CRCF website.

[www.uea.ac.uk/crcf](http://www.uea.ac.uk/crcf)



# IMPACT MAKING A DIFFERENCE

## IMPACT | SUPPORTING LGBTQ YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE LAUNCH OF THE SPEAK OUT FILM

Jeanette Cossar and her team, including the young researchers, launched a short animated film promoting the findings of *SpeakOut* – CRCF’s national study of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and questioning (LGBTQ) young people’s experiences of growing up in the care system. The six-minute animation was screened at a public launch event in Norwich as part of Pride celebrations on 28th July 2018. The young researchers, who identify as part of the LGBT+ community and spent time living in care, made the film with UEA and the Creative Research Collective. Jeanette, some of the young researchers, and the Creative Research Collective took part in the launch’s Q&A session which was well attended by the public, social workers, health professionals, academics and foster carers. The young researchers carried the Pride flag at the front of the procession after the screening.



### THE FILM

The film was also mentioned in some media outlets and the BBC website:

[www.qweerist.com/culture/short-film-to-reveal-experiences-of-lgbtq-young-people-in-care](http://www.qweerist.com/culture/short-film-to-reveal-experiences-of-lgbtq-young-people-in-care)

You can find the film and other information about this ground breaking study on <https://www.uea.ac.uk/speakout>

One of the young researchers, Brett Service, shared his own personal story for Gay Star News: [www.gaystarnews.com/article/brett-service-care-system/#gs.ehicQec](http://www.gaystarnews.com/article/brett-service-care-system/#gs.ehicQec)

**IMPACT TEAM**  
JEANETTE COSSAR  
PENNY SORENSEN  
PIPPA BELDERSON  
JULIE YOUNG AND  
YOUNG RESEARCHERS

## IMPACT | IMPROVING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE IN POST ADOPTION CONTACT

Interest in our contact research has been growing in the legal sector. Sir Andrew McFarlane, president of the Family Division, has made a number of public comments in speeches about our research on contact after adoption, and in response to these Beth Neil published a paper in Family Law in September 2018, summarising the research findings for lawyers. She presented at the annual conference of the Family Law Bar Association in Liverpool in November 2018, to the Family Justice Council in the Royal Courts of Justice in May 2019, and at the ‘President’s Conference’ (the annual meeting for all judges in England), also in May 2019. The CoramBaaf conference on contact in adoption (May 2019) also featured keynote presentations by Beth Neil and Andrew McFarlane.

Interest in our contact research has also come from the Department for Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland. The Department are carrying out an open policy debate to consider whether open adoption should be introduced in Ireland. Beth presented at the stakeholder event launching this consultation in Dublin in May 2019.

**IMPACT TEAM**  
**BETH NEIL AND**  
**JULIE YOUNG**

Over the summer of 2018 Julie Young delivered five one day workshops looking at how research into contact in adoption can be applied in practice. The workshops were funded by the UEA Higher Education Impact Fund to enable the dissemination of findings from extensive CRCF research into contact in adoption and promote the Contact in Adoption website set up by Beth Neil in association with Research in Practice ([www.contact.rip.org.uk](http://www.contact.rip.org.uk)). The workshops took place in Manchester (for Adoption Counts), Leeds (for One Adoption), Bridgwater (for the South West Adoption Consortium) and London (separate events for CVAA and the South London Consortium).

After the Adoption Counts day in Manchester, the organisation was inspired to implement changes to contact and adopter/birth family meetings across the area. They presented their practice initiatives at a conference organised by CoramBaaf (in collaboration with Beth Neil) in London in May 2019.

The Contact in Adoption website has been updated to include new practice guidance around both planning and managing contact between adopted children and their brothers and sisters. Research in Practice also published a blog by Beth Neil on this topic.



# IMPACT | THE SECURE BASE MODEL: A FRAMEWORK FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S DEVELOPMENT

Safe and secure relationships with adults provide children with the support they need to thrive. The Secure Base model, developed by Gillian Schofield and Mary Beek, provides an attachment and resilience based framework for understanding caring relationships and promoting children’s development in a range of settings. A secure base relationship provides available, sensitive, accepting, co-operative care that also helps children to gain a sense of belonging. The child’s confidence in a secure base adult reduces their anxiety and enables them to explore, learn, play and fulfil their potential ([www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase](http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase)).

The Secure Base model has been implemented by a growing number of local authority Children’s Services and independent organisations in the UK and internationally as the basis for a range of practice activities that can support parents, caregivers and professional staff to provide a secure base for children. These include training and supporting foster carers and adopters, and also staff in residential care, social work agencies and schools; assessing, matching and supporting children’s successful development in placement; helping children move between placements; providing therapeutic residential child care; enabling schools to offer all children an environment in which they feel valued and cared for and their learning is supported.

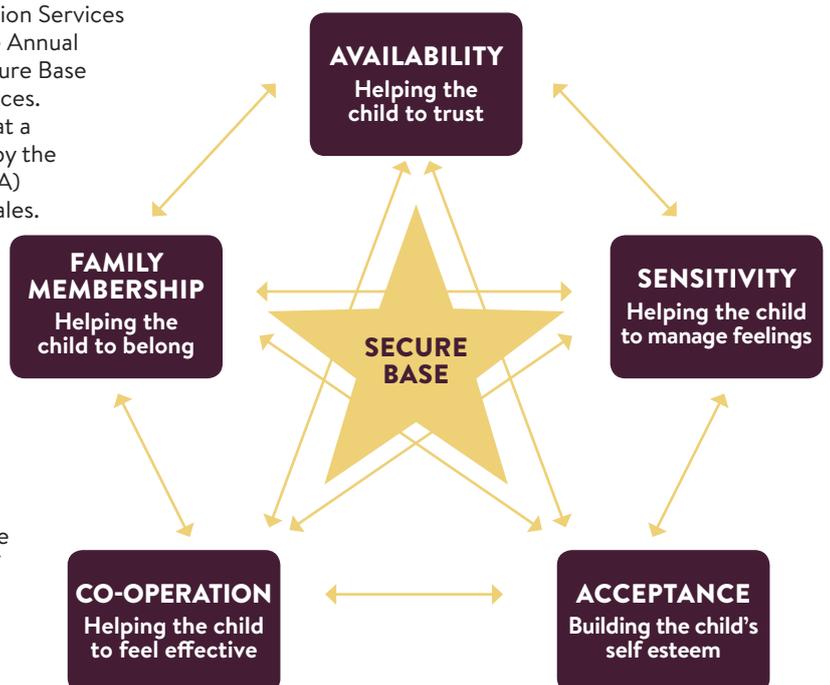
Highlights of Secure Base development in the UK this year have included a range of different activities. For example, in May 2018, Gillian Schofield presented at a national Secure Base conference in Edinburgh hosted by Fosterplus. In June, Mary Beek worked with Shining Stars in Croydon to train staff plus a group of carers who would go on to train and support others in using the model. In October, Mary introduced Secure Base to all 70 staff members at the Specialist Education Services (SES) Avocet House and Turnstone House Annual Conference, which was launching the Secure Base throughout their care and education services. In November Gillian and Mary presented at a national conference in Cardiff organised by the Association for Fostering & Adoption (AFA) Cymru to support Secure Base work in Wales. This programme was later repeated by Mary in Aberystwyth, to enable a wider range of professionals to access it.

An important new development this year has been the Providing a Secure Base in Schools project (2018-19), funded by the Alex Timpson Trust as part of a national initiative to promote attachment awareness in schools. The CRCF project will develop, pilot and make available on our website Secure Base materials for training and supporting staff in schools. The aim is to create school environments which support children’s learning and personal development,

through increasing staff awareness of the emotional needs of children and the importance of relationships which reduce children’s anxiety and provide a secure base. Although a key aim of the national project is to improve support in school for looked after and adopted children, there will be benefits for all children.

International developments include establishing Secure Base in new countries and further embedding it in areas where it has already been introduced. This year Secure Base was included in the India Foster Care Handbook, which was commissioned by the Commission for Protection of Child Rights, Government of India. This is a highly significant document as it will guide the development of foster care in India. Following Mary Beek’s training and consultation work in Ukraine in March 2018, the Care in Action charity, in partnership with local agencies, have developed Ukrainian training programmes with a view to training 4000 foster and adoptive parents, social workers and carers countrywide. Through Care for Children’s work with local staff, Secure Base training workshops have been provided to approximately 1310 carers and professional staff in China and 786 in Thailand.

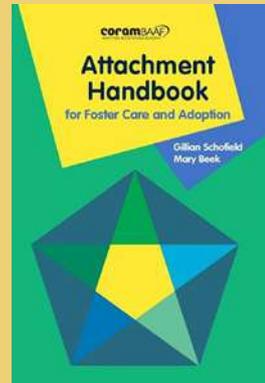
At our 3rd Secure Base Network Meeting in March 2019, agencies from the statutory and independent sector discussed their varied experiences of implementation. At this meeting there was strong representation from fostering and adoption agencies from all four countries of the UK plus the Netherlands, but also from residential care and those providing education.



We had three presentations from skilled and experienced practitioners describing implementation in local authorities, detailed supervision of foster carers, work in classroom settings and the usefulness of the Secure Base model alongside the Mockingbird model of support for foster carers.

Also of value to developments in Secure Base practice have been the opportunities to apply the model in research. It has, for example, proved a very helpful way to think about foster carers' tasks in caring for LGBTQ young people in care. We have also used the model, and in particular the Secure Base Developmental Checklists, in our Moving to Adoption practice development study, now funded for implementation by the Sir Halley Stewart Trust through to 2020. The Secure Base has also been used in research internationally this year by, for example, colleagues in Canada and Malaysia.

To support all of these developments, a second edition of the *Attachment Handbook for Foster Care and Adoption* (2006) was published in 2018, revised to ensure that it reflected the language and practice of the Secure Base model, as on the website [www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase](http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase) and in the practice guides (2014). The Handbook is to be translated into Japanese 2019-20, funded by the Nippon Foundation, to support the use of attachment theory in practice – another important cross-cultural application of the Secure Base.



## IMPACT | DEVELOPING TEAMS AS A SECURE BASE

In 2018, we have continued to provide our half day training on coping and developing teams as a secure base to frontline staff, supervisors and managers with local authorities, third sector counselling organisations and an NHS Leadership programme. In 2019, we are working with Thrive Tribe ([www.thrivetribe.org.uk](http://www.thrivetribe.org.uk)) a well-being at work company to create Train the Trainer materials for our Emotional Resilience and Team as Secure Base training. The training resources will become available on the Secure Base website after we have trialed them ([www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase](http://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase)).

The Team as a Secure Base model is included in the national *The Practice Supervisor Development Programme (PSDP)*. In social work, practice supervisors support and develop the practice of newly qualified social workers and social work students. The PSDP is a significant investment by the Department for Education (DfE) and will provide high-quality continuous professional development (CPD) to 1000 newly appointed social work supervisors by 2020 and an online repository of free resources.

In January 2019, Laura and team were shortlisted as finalists at UEA's Innovation and impact awards in the Health, Well-being and Welfare category for their development of Emotional Resilience and Team as Secure Base training.

**IMPACT TEAM**  
**LAURA BIGGART**  
**EMMA WARD**  
**LAURA COOK**  
**GILLIAN SCHOFIELD**  
**MARY BEEK**



**IMPACT TEAM**  
**GILLIAN SCHOFIELD**  
**AND MARY BEEK**



## IMPACT **FATHERS IN ADVERSITY**

The profile of our Nuffield Foundation funded research on fathers' experiences of child protection services and our study of fathers in recurrent care proceedings (in collaboration with Lancaster University) has been steadily growing. We are working hard to make a difference in the policy and practice arenas and we have been actively involved in impact activity for both projects: **Counting Fathers In**, and our current study **Up Against It**.

## IMPACT | COUNTING FATHERS IN

Georgia Philip has received further ESRC Impact Accelerator Award funding to develop research collaboration with Norfolk and Suffolk Probation. Since Autumn 2018 this project has involved delivering staff development events, building a local/regional stakeholder network, and developing a proposal for pilot research to explore the relationship between fatherhood, desistance to offending and men's mental health.

In addition to presentations at the international conferences listed earlier, Georgia gave a keynote address at a practitioner seminar organised by Menscraft in Norwich, in July 2018. The seminar was attended by practitioners from statutory and voluntary organisations.

The Continuing Professional Development Module 'Working with Men in Families' was delivered for the second time to social workers in Norfolk and Suffolk in Autumn 2018.

Georgia Philip delivered a workshop on working with fathers for CASCADE (Children's Social Care & Development Centre) in Cardiff in January 2019. Practitioners from statutory and voluntary sector agencies attended and resources from the workshop are freely available via the CASCADE website (see below).

This CASCADE Blog post summarises the workshop: [www.exchange.wales.org/single-post/2019/02/15/Counting-fathers-in-%E2%80%93-how-can-social-workers-build-better-relationships-with-fathers-involved-in-child-protection-services](http://www.exchange.wales.org/single-post/2019/02/15/Counting-fathers-in-%E2%80%93-how-can-social-workers-build-better-relationships-with-fathers-involved-in-child-protection-services)



## IMPACT | UP AGAINST IT

Georgia Philip presented early findings from our analysis of Cafcass data on fathers and recurrent care proceedings, at the European Sociological Association conference in Finland, June 2018.

**JUNE 2018:** Two Learning Network events for participating local authorities were delivered by the research team (one in London, one in Manchester). The aim was to share early findings from our analysis of Cafcass data on fathers involved in recurrent care proceedings and to conduct focus group interviews to discuss approaches to working with recurrent fathers.

**NOV 2018:** A stakeholder event for 25 policy makers, local authority and third sector practitioners/managers was held in London. Findings from our analysis of the Cafcass data and from the focus group work with participating local authorities were presented and discussed.

Our practitioner focused report 'Building a Picture of Fathers in Family Justice in England' was shared with all participating local authorities and key stakeholders. The report is free to access and download via ResearchGate. To date the report has 762 reads.

We continue to promote the project via the APPG on fathers (where John Clifton presented in July 2018), and Georgia Philip is working with the UK Parliament knowledge exchange team to explore other routes to impact for our research.

**IMPACT TEAM**  
**GEORGIA PHILIP**  
**JOHN CLIFTON**  
**MARIAN BRANDON**

# RESEARCH PROJECTS



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This year three new research projects began and two studies were awarded follow-up funding. Several longer term projects are continuing.



# CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT GANGS, DRUGS, VIOLENCE AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN NORFOLK?

MAR 2019 – FEB 2020

RESEARCH TEAM Dr Jane Dodsworth, Dr Penny Sorensen

FUNDER Norfolk Constabulary



## NEW RESEARCH

### CONTEXT

*'County lines groups continue to pose a significant threat to vulnerable people and explore a range of opportunities to identify potential new victims.'*  
(National Crime Agency 2017:3)

The objective of the study is to explore issues pertaining to 'County Lines', or Criminal Exploitation, of children and vulnerable adults in Norfolk. Whilst there is no official definition of County Lines, the National Crime Agency (2016:5) note that 'typically county lines activity involves a gang (usually made up of young males) from a large urban area travelling to smaller locations (such as a county or coastal town) to sell class A drugs, specifically crack cocaine and heroin.' It is already known that vulnerable young people and adults in Norfolk are facing a significant threat from organised criminals from other areas of the country.

### AIM

The aim of the study is to inform the work of the Police and the Norfolk Safeguarding Children Board about the nature and extent of the problem and suggest effective interventions to deal with both perpetrators and victims.

### METHODS

The study will employ a qualitative methodology. A brief literature review will be undertaken so that learning from other areas can be summarized and shared. We will undertake narrative interviews with children, young people and vulnerable adults involved in County Lines activity, and known and supported by the Youth Offending Service or other relevant services. We will also undertake up to five interviews. Two focus groups with safeguarding professionals from statutory and voluntary agencies will be conducted. Focus groups will allow us to explore the concept of contextual safeguarding.

### FINDINGS

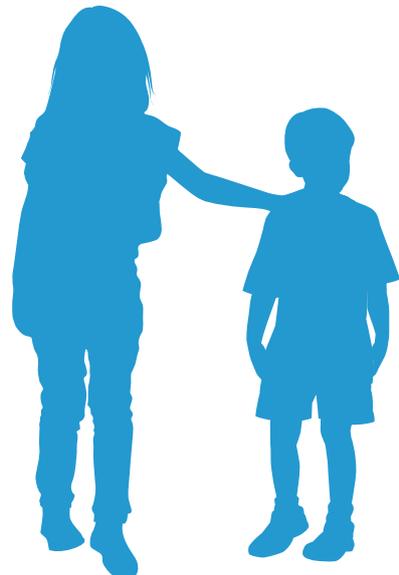
All data will be analysed using thematic analysis and case studies developed to support practitioner training.

### IMPACT

It is the aim of this research study, by drawing on the relevant data, on the expertise of professionals working with this issue and on the expertise by experience of those with direct involvement in 'county lines' activity to identify what a more consistent, efficient and effective approach in Norfolk looks like and to build on existing strengths.

### PUBLICATIONS

The report will be published in February 2020. Journal articles are also planned.



**"...typically county lines activity involves a gang (usually made up of young males) from a large urban area travelling to smaller locations (such as a county or coastal town) to sell class A drugs, specifically crack cocaine and heroin."**

# COMPLEXITY AND CHALLENGE: A TRIENNIAL REVIEW OF SERIOUS CASE REVIEWS 2014-2017

**APR 2018 – APR 2019**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Marian Brandon, Prof Jonathan Dickens, Dr Penny Sorensen, Dr Pippa Belderson (UEA). Prof Peter Sidebotham, Dr Jo Garstang, Prof Hedy Cleaver, Dr Julie Harris, Dr Russell Wate (Warwick University)

**FUNDER** Department for Education



## CONTEXT

Complexity and challenge provide an underlying theme in this review of SCRs from 1 April 2014- 31 March 2017. As we looked into the reviews of children affected by serious and fatal child maltreatment, we were struck by the complexity of the lives of these children and families, and the challenges – at times overwhelming – faced by the practitioners seeking to support them in such complexity.

This study builds on the ‘pathways to harm, pathways to protection’ model developed for our previous triennial review of SCRs from 2011-14. The model has helped us to explore the complexity of families’ lives within the central ‘pathways to harm’ component, and the challenges faced by practitioners in statutory and other agencies within the ‘pathways to protection’ component. We have been able to look beyond the complexities and challenges to consider the opportunities for prevention and protection, and the values, systems and processes that might help support this work.

## AIMS AND METHODS

The study’s primary aim was to understand the key issues, themes and challenges for practitioners and agencies, and to draw out implications for both policy makers and practitioners. A mixed methods approach was used, encompassing:

- Quantitative analysis of the full sample of SCR 368 cases, using information from DfE notification data for the specified time period.
- Analysis of more detailed data available through in-depth reading and coding of a sub-set of 278 SCRs.
- Qualitative analysis of 63 final reports, sampled from the 278 available SCRs, examining the themes of neglect, vulnerable adolescents, care and court cases, as well as the quality of SCR final reports.
- A national survey, distributed to all English LSCBs, about the implementation and impact of SCR recommendations, with follow up phone interviews with 20 survey respondents.
- Two regional practitioner/leader workshops to test emerging findings and gauge views about the impact of SCRs on child protection practice.

## FINDINGS

The increase in SCRs noted between 2011- 2014 has not continued into 2014-17. The numbers of children who die each year as a direct consequence of maltreatment have held relatively steady at an average of 28 cases a year. By contrast, SCRs for children experiencing non-fatal serious harm have increased from 32 per year across 2009-14 to 54 per year in 2014-17.

This plateauing of child death numbers is occurring in the context of year on year increase in child protection activity nationally, with a rise in both section 47 enquiries and child protection plans.

We found pressure points at the boundaries into and out of the child protection system, and the need for ongoing support and monitoring of vulnerable children and families. There are cumulative risks of harm when different parental and environmental risk factors are present in combination, in particular, the damaging impact of poverty. Learning from cases of neglect, from adolescent exploitation and from reviews of children in care and on special guardianship orders, a number of lessons for practitioners were highlighted. These build on previous lessons, and include recognition of the lived experience and the story of the child and their family; the importance of building lasting practitioner relationships with children and families; greater rigour in information sharing, assessment and planning at all stages of the process; and opportunities for building effective structures and promoting responsive cultures, even when constrained by limited resources.

## IMPACT

The report is the focus of the Annual CRCF Conference for 2019.

Research in Practice has updated their SCR website <https://seriouscasereviews.rip.org.uk> to include online downloadable summaries of findings for those in key practice roles and in different professional sectors. We are working with the Association of Child Protection Professionals (formerly BASPCAN) to disseminate findings to safeguarding professionals across the UK.

**We have been able to look beyond the complexities and challenges to consider the opportunities for prevention and protection, and the values, systems and processes that might help support this work.**

# ESTABLISHING OUTCOMES OF CARE PROCEEDINGS FOR CHILDREN BEFORE AND AFTER CARE PROCEEDINGS REFORM

**SEP 2015 – JUL 2018**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Jonathan Dickens and Julie Young, with colleagues from the University of Bristol: Prof Judith Masson, Dr Ludivine Garside and Kay Bader

**FUNDER** Economic and Social Research Council



## CONTEXT

Care proceedings have changed dramatically in the last five or six years. The number of care cases has risen considerably, the average duration has fallen by about a half, and the pattern of orders has changed substantially, with far fewer cases ending in adoption plans and more in kinship care. At the heart of these changes are major reforms to care proceedings introduced in 2013-14, and a series of high profile court case judgments. This study built on the UEA-Bristol team's earlier work on care proceedings to examine the impact of the reforms and the outcomes for children.

## AIMS

The main aims of the study were to compare care proceedings and outcomes before and after the reforms of 2013-14; and to evaluate the quality and usefulness of administrative data for tracking and evaluating outcomes for children.

## METHODS

The pre-reform sample was the children who were included in the team's earlier 'edge of care' study, who became subject to care proceedings in 2009-10 (170 cases with 290 children). The post-reform sample was drawn from proceedings taken in 2014-15 in the same six local authorities (five in England, one in Wales). This comprised 203 cases with 326 children, giving a total sample of 616 children.

Court data was used to compare the care proceedings on the two samples. The national 'looked after children' and 'child in need' databases were used for the information on outcomes, together with detailed case file data on a sub-sample of 118 children. Interviews with 56 key professionals across the six areas were undertaken to get a picture of policy and practice issues, and two focus groups with judges.

## FINDINGS

Key findings include:

- There were very few differences between the two samples as a whole in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, and the circumstances giving cause for concern. Nearly all the children came from extremely troubled backgrounds. There was no evidence that the threshold for care proceedings had got lower over the time period.

- The 26 week time limit was not promoted as a way of changing the pattern of court orders, but there had been substantial changes. The proportion of cases ending in care and placement orders halved (30% to 15%). The proportion ending in special guardianship orders (kinship care) about doubled (13% to 24%). The proportion returning to or remaining with their parent(s) increased from a quarter to just under a third.
- In terms of longer-term outcomes, many of the children come with considerable needs, and the case file study showed the challenges they and their carers face. Most children in foster care showed good or improved well-being over the research period. Nearly all the special guardianship placements were continuing, but many of the carers were facing challenges, such as health, finances, the relationship with the child's parents, or the child's behaviour. The placements least likely to do well were with parents. About a quarter of children placed with parents under supervision orders returned to care within the follow-up period.

## 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 inform the plans and orders they make and approve.

## PUBLICATIONS

The research team have produced three short research briefings, all available for free on the CRCF website: one about the court proceedings, one about the longer-term outcomes and one about the challenges and benefits of linking court data and DfE data.

The full research report is due to be published later in 2019, and will be available free of charge on the CRCF website: *Child Protection in Court: Outcomes for Children*.

The researchers have had a paper published in *Child and Family Social Work*, free to access:

Dickens, J., Masson, J., Bader, K., Garside, L. and Young, J. (2019) 'Courts, care proceedings and outcomes uncertainty: the challenges of achieving and assessing 'good outcomes' for children after child protection proceedings', *Child and Family Social Work*, early view.

# 'UP AGAINST IT': FATHERS EXPERIENCES OF RECURRENT CARE PROCEEDINGS

**AUG 2017-JULY 2019**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Marian Brandon, Dr Georgia Philip and Dr John Clifton at UEA and Prof Karen Broadhurst, Dr Yang Hu, Dr Stu Bedston, and Lindsay Youansamouth from Lancaster University

**FUNDER** Nuffield Foundation



## CONTEXT

In the wake of a “national care crisis” in England, an increasing number of parents return to the family court as repeat respondents in care proceedings and lose successive children from their care. Despite considerable progress in understanding the trends and patterns of mothers’ (re)appearances in care proceedings, knowledge of fathers’ and of parents’ family relationships in recurrent care proceedings remains very limited. Fathers have legal party status in approximately 70% of s.31 proceedings each year, this is a sizeable population, about whom we know very little. This study aims to address this gap by building on two recently completed ground-breaking studies also funded by the Nuffield Foundation; firstly of fathers’ experiences of child protection (Brandon, Philip and Clifton, 2017) and secondly: mothers in recurrent care proceedings (Broadhurst, Mason, Bedston et al 2017). This produces an exciting collaboration between a team from the CRCF led by Marian Brandon and a team from Lancaster University, led by Karen Broadhurst.

## AIMS

The study aims to establish the scale and pattern of fathers’ repeat appearances in s.31 proceedings, together with a clear picture of the rehabilitative challenges that fathers face and present.

## METHODS

The mixed methods research involves three key elements:

- 1 An analysis of aggregated patterns and trends of fathers in care proceedings in England, along with an analysis of gender and life course factors that influence recurrence. The source of data used for this analysis is the administrative records held by Cafcass.
- 2 A national survey of men involved in care proceedings.
- 3 An in-depth qualitative longitudinal study of 25 fathers who have experienced recurrent care proceedings.

The project also involves a learning network of participating local authorities to test study findings, gain practice perspectives on working with men, share service models and encourage more confident and responsive practice with fathers.

## FINDINGS

The analysis of the Cafcass data has produced ground-breaking insights including the first estimate of fathers in recurrent proceedings. We have uncovered gender and life-course dynamics of recurrent parents and produced important insights about the significance of couple relationships for understanding recurrence. For example, we have found that unlike recurrent mothers, recurrent fathers are most likely to return to court with the same partner. Our early findings suggest a need for whole-family, gender-sensitive services with recurrent parents.

We have also successfully recruited 25 recurrent fathers into the qualitative longitudinal study and are developing both individual case studies and comparisons across the group. The integration of findings from all three elements of the project will provide important new knowledge and understanding of recurrence and of fathers’ experiences of losing children to care.

## IMPACT

Impact is built into the study design through the work of the two earlier studies, the learning network, as well as opportunities for continuing professional development activity (see impact section of this report). We have produced a first practitioner focused report, which is freely available via ResearchGate (see below) and have submitted our first journal article reporting on the analysis of the Cafcass data.

We are confident that this study will make a real difference by providing important new knowledge for both practice and policy.

## PUBLICATIONS

Philip G., Bedston, S., Hu, Y., Youansamouth, L., Clifton J., Brandon, M., and Broadhurst, K. (2018), Building a Picture of Fathers in Family Justice in England, University of East Anglia and Lancaster University.

[www.researchgate.net/publication/328957622\\_Building\\_a\\_Picture\\_of\\_Fathers\\_in\\_Family\\_Justice\\_in\\_England/download](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328957622_Building_a_Picture_of_Fathers_in_Family_Justice_in_England/download)

# A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: TRANS PARENTING THROUGH THE LIFE COURSE

**JUL 2017 – JUL 2018**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Dr Christine Cocker (UEA)

Prof Trish Hafford-Letchfield (Middlesex University) and colleagues

**FUNDER** Middlesex University



## CONTEXT

This project continues the interest in how lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and those who are transgender are involved in parenting. For trans individuals, their needs are often incorporated into the rubric LGB studies, often without sufficient focus or wide enough samples. The term transgender is inherently problematic, as it encompasses a wide range of social groupings with different interests and needs. Notwithstanding, this is a challenging and sensitive area to research. In 2007, the Equality and Human Rights Commission wrote guidance for the public sector on how to be more inclusive of trans people (EHRC, 2007). The challenges for social work, health and social care are significant, particularly in relation to social inclusion of the trans population (Burns, 2005). Literature about trans parenting focuses on the transition process for young people and their own experiences of being parented, rather than exploring the experiences of trans people themselves as parents throughout their lives.

## AIMS

The exploratory aims of the project are to:

- Synthesise the knowledge and evidence on trans parenting, kinship and caring in a way that can begin to inform our understanding and practice when working with trans populations in professional practice.
- To identify key international stakeholders and research themes in relation to trans parenting, kinship and caring with a view to designing an empirical study that might attract external funding.

## METHODS

This systematic review was based on a clear review protocol designed to answer the research questions on the theme of trans parenting, family kinship and care. The review captures and synthesises the findings from a range of disciplinary knowledge and sources in response to the review questions. The project team includes two people with lived trans experiences from different age groups. They have been involved in the design of the review protocol; the discussion of themes from the review; the design of the Delphi online survey; the discussion of findings from the Delphi survey and the final report.

## FINDINGS

Findings from the project were presented at the second international Sexuality and Social Work conference in Montreal, Canada in August 2018. In addition, the review has now been accepted for publication (see below).

## IMPACT

A second stage of the project has now been scoped, which will explore practice implications for social work and other allied health professionals. Further work is also proposed to complete future funding applications.

## PUBLICATIONS

Hafford-Letchfield, T., Cocker, C., Rutter, D., Tinarwo, M., McCormack, K. & Manning, R. (Accepted 11 Mar 2019 / In press) 'What do we know about Transgender parenting? Findings from a systematic review'. *Health & Social Care in the Community*.

## REFERENCES

Burns, C. (2005), *A Basis for Evaluating Care Approaches and Services for Trans People*, Stockport:

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2007) *Gender Identity and Employment Monitoring: A Transsexual/Transgender/Intersex Perspective*, London: Home Office



A close-up photograph of a person's arm and hand. The person is wearing a white t-shirt and dark trousers. Their right arm is resting on a concrete ledge. The arm is heavily tattooed with colorful designs, including a large, detailed tattoo of a figure's face and other intricate patterns. The background is a blurred, light-colored wall.

A second stage of the project has now been scoped, which will explore practice implications for social work and allied health professionals.

# FROM BEING ADOPTED TO BECOMING A PARENT: WHEN ADOPTED PEOPLE BECOME PARENTS AND ADOPTERS BECOME GRANDPARENTS

**2018-2021**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Beth Neil, Dr Julia Rimmer and Dr Irina Sirbu  
**FUNDER** Economic and Social Research Council



## CONTEXT

In recent decades UK policy has encouraged the adoption of children from care, and tens of thousands are now of an age where they could become a parent. It is important to study the lifelong effects of adoption, including what happens when adopted people become parents to the next generation.

A child's birth is a key event in any family, bringing joys and challenges for both parents and grandparents. The majority of children adopted in the last 30 years will have experienced early adversities such as loss, abuse and neglect which may affect their subsequent wellbeing and development over time, including identity development. Studies of other potentially vulnerable parents (e.g. care leavers) show they are at risk of early parenthood, parenting difficulties, even their own children going into care. But for some, having a child is a positive choice and a healing experience. This study explores the positives and the challenges of becoming a parent from the perspectives of people adopted in the last 30 years. This study will provide a new understanding of the lived experiences and needs of adopted people who are now parents, and of adoptive parents who are now grandparents, drawing on narrative identity and risk and resilience frameworks.

## AIMS

The overarching aims of the project are to provide a new understanding of the lived experiences and needs of adopted people adopted who are now parents, and of adoptive parents who are now grandparents. These insights will be used to inform the support of adopted children and young people, adopted adults, the children of adopted adults, and adoptive parents who are grandparents. This will then inform future developments in adoption theory, policy and practice.

## METHODS

We will collect and analyse 80 in-depth narrative interviews (using McAdam's Life Story Interview Method) with adoptee parents and adoptive parents (now grandparents). Narrative and thematic analysis will be used to answer the research questions. The involvement of stakeholders (professionals, adoptees and adoptive parents) will inform the recruitment of participants, the data collection and analysis will help generate a sound understanding of practice and policy implications informing the future of adoption. The research is now underway. We have already met with the academic advisory group and three stakeholder groups to plan the study. Data collection will continue throughout 2019.

## IMPACT

Wider social benefits will come through building understanding of a particularly complex and challenging family form with a mixture of biological, legal and relational ties. The study is highly relevant for academics interested in narrative identity, adoption, vulnerable parents, grand-parenting, and resilience. Findings from the research will be disseminated and published in a range of formats addressing the key audiences (blogs, presentations, academic articles and policy/practitioner articles).

[www.ueaadoptedparents.co.uk](http://www.ueaadoptedparents.co.uk)



# EVALUATION OF THE ONE ADOPTION CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE ADOPTION SUPPORT ASSESSMENT PROCESS

NOV 2018 – NOV 2020

RESEARCH TEAM Prof Beth Neil, Julie Young

FUNDER One Adoption West Yorkshire



## CONTEXT

Many adopted children need ongoing help, and adoption agencies have responsibilities for assessing what support children and their adoptive families may need both before children are adopted, and after the adoption order when families request help. The regional adoption agency One Adoption West Yorkshire (OAWY) were awarded government funding in 2017 to establish a 'Centre for Excellence' programme of co-ordinated assessment, treatment and therapeutic support for adopted children and children in care. One Adoption West Yorkshire initiated the changes in their area with their new standardised assessment framework for adoption support becoming active in March 2019.

The UEA research team were brought in help evaluate the impact of the changes. The process began with the team's previous research (2016-18) which surveyed adoptive parents in the region to provide insight into the needs of adopted children, outcomes of adoption for children and families and families' experiences of using support services.

## AIMS

- To provide a baseline with regard to adoptive parents' experiences of adoption and support service provision.
- To provide insight into adoptive parents' experiences of the new OAWY standardised framework for adoption support assessments (pre and post adoption).
- To provide insight into practitioner experiences of the new OAWY standardised framework for adoption support assessments (pre and post adoption).

## METHODS

- 1 Further analysis of data from the research team's previous 2016-7 adoptive parent survey will be undertaken, looking at how children's needs match up to the diagnoses and services they received and the families' experiences of these services. Anonymised case studies from the data will illustrate children's needs, outcomes, and service provisions and make suggestions for practice.
- 2 With the help of practitioners and administrative staff from OAWY and social media/networks a short anonymous online survey will be distributed to families who:
  - have approached/are approaching OAWY for new support or help since 1st April 2017.
  - had a child placed with them for adoption by OAWY after 1st April 2017.

The surveys will be informed by the views of the adopter forum in the region and will focus on a 'target child' in the family. They will be kept active until around March 2020 to cover an approximately two year period prior to and one year subsequent to the new standardised assessments being made active. Respondents will be given the opportunity to supply contact information if they are interested in taking part in a telephone interview. A small number of interviews will explore themes raised in the surveys in more detail.

- 3 Three developmental workshops will be conducted with staff involved in the new assessment processes. OAWY will be provided with ongoing feedback from these activities.

## IMPACT

A report, research briefing and presentation of the findings will be provided at the end of the project to OAWY to inform policy and practice.



# PLANNING AND SUPPORTING PERMANENCE IN LONG-TERM FOSTER CARE: EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF REGULATIONS AND GUIDANCE

**NOV 2018 – MAY 2020**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Gillian Schofield, Dr Birgit Larsson, Prof Elsbeth Neil, Julie Young

**FUNDER** Nuffield Foundation



**NEW  
RESEARCH**

## CONTEXT

Although long-term foster care has been recognized as a legitimate permanence option since the 1980s, it was not until 2015 that the Government introduced the first regulations and guidance for long-term foster care. The aims of the guidance were to define long-term foster care, to ensure effective care planning and to promote successful long-term foster care placements. Local authorities have been required to identify children in long-term foster placements in their SSDA903 submissions to the Department for Education. However, in 2018, for the third year in succession, the Department for Education was not able to publish the data on long-term foster care placements by local authority because of concerns about data quality.

This study builds on a series of CRCF long-term foster care projects led by Gillian Schofield since 1997.

## AIMS

- Investigate the implementation in England of the Government regulations and guidance for long-term foster care (2015).
- Identify which children are in long-term foster care placements and explore their pathways to long-term foster care in different local authorities.
- Determine how long-term foster care as a permanence option is being implemented.
- Identify what is working well in care planning procedures and practice in order to provide models of good practice for other local authorities.
- Identify any aspects of the regulations and guidance that are causing concern and may affect care planning or outcomes for children negatively.
- Provide up to date information and practice guidance to support policy makers and a range of stakeholders in developing effective care planning and practice in long-term foster care.

## METHODS

The project is supported by an advisory group which includes academics and a range of stakeholders from fostering and child welfare agencies. The design for this study combines quantitative and qualitative methods and has three main elements:

- An analysis of the national data on children in long-term foster care and their profiles and pathways in different local authorities compared to other children in care, using Children in Need (CIN) and CLA / SSDA903 data.
- A survey of all local authorities and independent fostering agencies regarding their procedures and practice for ensuring that care plans for long-term foster care and support for long-term foster care placements are being implemented as required by the 2015 Regulations and Guidance.
- Telephone research interviews with managers from a target sample of up to 30 local authorities which represent different profiles and procedural systems.

## FINDINGS

Findings and implications for practice will be discussed in early 2020 with the project advisory group.

## IMPACT

A range of impact strategies, including a launch conference, will make findings available to policy makers and practitioners

## PUBLICATIONS

Articles, research reports and summaries for practice will begin to be made available from August 2020.



# PATHWAYS AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN NEED, AT RISK, IN CARE AND ADOPTED FROM CARE

**2015–2019**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Prof Beth Neil, Prof Gillian Schofield, Birgit Larsson, Prof June Thoburn  
Working with ESRC Business and Local Government Data Research Centre and Dr Lianne Gitsels (CMP). Collaborating with Prof Ruth Hancock, Dr Heather Parr and Amanda Burke (MED)

**FUNDER** Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)



## CONTEXT

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, including data on 'vulnerable people'. 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.

## AIMS

To use the administrative data available from local authority children's services to gain some understanding of the pathways 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 will link the data about children in need and in care. We are interested in a number of questions that this linkage could address such as:

- What are timescales of children's journeys towards adoption, what characteristics of children determine their chances of being adopted and time taken to adoption?
- Which children stay long term in care?
- How many children return home, and how successful are reunifications?
- What is known about the care trajectories of looked after young people involved in crime?

## METHODS

We have carried out an analyses of 8 years of data on all looked after children in one local authority. We used the presentation of descriptive statistics and regression analyses to explore where children in care end up according to their age at entry, who stays long term in care, how successful are reunifications with parents are, and which children have unstable reunifications. We now have access to data on looked after children and children in need for the whole of England over many years. We are exploring questions about long term foster care, adoption, and care and crime using these data.

## FINDINGS

In our analysis of data of care entrants in one local authority (n=2208) age at entry was a key determinant of which of the main 'permanence' options were followed (return to a parent, special guardianship or residence order, adoption or long-term foster care). Only a minority of entrants (mainly those entering care in their middle years) remained in longer term care. Children entering care under age two were the age group most likely to be adopted, 41% of entrants of this age were adopted. Return to parents was the most common route out of care (36% of children had returned home), but 25% of these returned to care. Those entering care in adolescence were most likely to have unstable reunions.

## IMPACT

This project has the potential to benefit the partner local authority by providing them with a detailed analysis of their service users and the impact of their interventions. The project will also benefit other local authorities through the demonstration of data analytics. The national analysis will add to our understanding of the care system and can inform future service planning and delivery.

## PUBLICATIONS

Key findings from the research will be published in a range of formats addressing the key audiences (academic articles and policy/practitioner articles). Two journal articles are currently under review.

[www.blgdataresearch.org](http://www.blgdataresearch.org)

# MOVING TO ADOPTION: THE DEVELOPMENT, PILOTING AND DISSEMINATION OF A PRACTICE PROGRAMME

**2016-2020**

**RESEARCH TEAM** Dr Mary Beek, Prof Elsbeth Neil, Prof Gillian Schofield  
**FUNDER** Sir Halley Stewart Trust



## CONTEXT

In the UK most adopted children are very young (under 5 years) when placed for adoption. They will often have lived in foster care for 18 months or longer before being matched with new parents. Typically, the move from foster to adoptive family takes place in 7–14 days, depending on the child's age. After the move, children may have little or no contact with their former foster carers. Although these moves can go well, in other cases they can be abrupt and distressing for children and for adopters and foster carers. Professionals are uncertain about how to plan and support these transitions in a more child focussed way.

## AIMS

This project aimed to develop a practice programme to support positive moves for children from the foster to the adoptive family. Follow on funding was awarded to extend the project until 2020 to enable the learning to be disseminated more widely.

## METHODS

### Phase 1 (2016-18)

A review of theory and research was carried out. In consultation with stakeholders the project team developed a practice programme, underpinned by the Secure Base model. The model suggests that secure base relationships in foster care can support the child to gradually build trust in the adopters and to establish secure base relationships in the adoptive family.

The practice programme is not prescriptive about how children's moves should be planned, but instead suggests an individualised approach to each move, with consideration given to the following key principles:

- Opportunities for the foster carers and adopters to build a positive relationship should be promoted at an early stage in the moving process, as this is helpful to the success of the move.
- The child and the adopters should be given opportunities to become familiar with each other through play and observation prior to adopters undertaking any caregiving tasks.
- All arrangements and timescales should focus on the needs of the child.
- The child's feelings about the move should be held in mind, and responded to sensitively.
- Some continuity of foster family relationships and environment will support the child in managing the loss of the foster family and building trust in the adoptive family.
- There should be flexibility in the planning, in consultation with the child, the families and the social workers, to allow for emerging circumstances and needs.

The programme was piloted in two adoption agencies (about 45 cases) and practice development workshops were held with key staff. Online feedback surveys collected data about each child's move from the perspectives of social workers, foster carers and adopters. A final stakeholder workshop discussed next steps following the pilot.

### Phase 2 (2019-20)

The existing practice programme will be refined into a coherent and comprehensive 'Moving to Adoption Practice Model', providing clear practice guidance and training materials addressing issues arising from the pilot and consultation. This will be made widely available via a website, and through workshops, publications, and social media. Agencies wishing to implement the model will be offered support.

## FINDINGS

The project demonstrated that the UEA model has the potential to improve the experience of moving to adoption for children and their foster and adoptive families, and also that agencies could implement the model within existing procedures and legislation. However, the feedback from the pilot sites also highlighted the complexity of this area of social work.

The pilot agencies reported a wide range of practice whilst adhering to the key principles of the practice programme. From these reports we were able to describe three key stages of the moving process (the UEA model): stage 1 – Getting to know each other; stage 2 – making the move; stage 3 – supporting relationships after the move.

In contrast to traditional practice, moves made using the pilot programme tended to extend the overlap between foster and adoptive families. This was primarily through allowing for more familiarisation before the move was made and more contact after the move, with the period of intensive contact usually completed in about two weeks, as before.

## IMPACT

The project has been presented to a range of audiences in workshops and conferences in the UK, Europe and the USA. A research briefing was published in the autumn of 2018, including practice implications for all parties. A book chapter discussing the project will be published in the forthcoming Handbook of Adoption (Routledge) and other publications are planned.

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**“Our baby’s feelings were put central. Each day, every adult concerned evaluated how well she was doing -whether we needed to slow things down or speed it up. Brilliantly flexible, but very careful too.”**

ADOPTIVE PARENT



# EVALUATION OF STUDENT EXPERIENCE OF TWO STATUTORY PLACEMENTS ON SOCIAL WORK PROGRAMMES

MAY 2019 – MAY 2020

**RESEARCH TEAM** Dr Christine Cocker; Anna Wright, Dr Pippa Belderson (CRCF) and Heidi Dix (University of Suffolk)

**FUNDER** Suffolk and Norfolk Social Work Teaching Partnership



## NEW RESEARCH

### CONTEXT

As part of the work undertaken by the Suffolk and Norfolk Social Work Teaching Partnership begun in 2017, all social work students completing their qualifying training at UEA or University of Suffolk have had two statutory placement experiences. This project will evaluate this experience.

### AIMS

The research question is: What is the impact of students undertaking both placements within a statutory setting as part of their qualifying social work education?

### METHODS

The views of each stakeholder (local authority, student, service user and university) will be gathered as part of the research. A steering group will be established with representation from all stakeholders.

We propose using mixed methods to evaluate the outcomes, and these include:

- Analysis of all the anonymised Quality Assurance of Practice Learning data collected from all students, practice educator, and university tutor for placements in 2017-18 and 2018-19 for students in the cohort we are including in this study.
- Focus groups with up to 8 students per group, and per course/cohort (two at UEA and one at UoS) after final placement and repeated 6 months into employment.

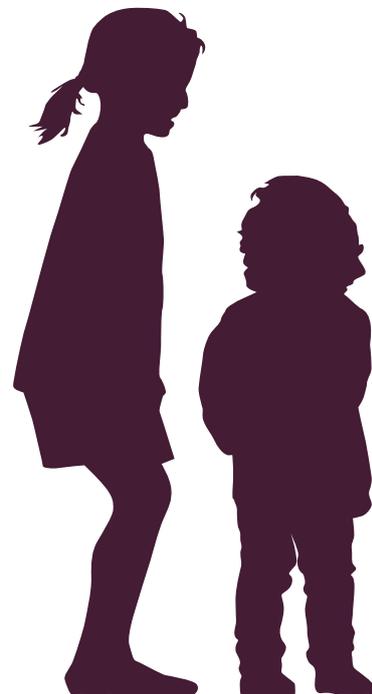
- Semi structured interviews with the Principal Social Worker or nominated person in Norfolk and Suffolk; Practice Educator Leads in Norfolk and Suffolk; Practice Educators in each authority (2 adults, 2 children); team managers in Norfolk Institute for Practice Excellence and equivalent in Suffolk; course leaders in UoS and UEA.
- Documentary analysis of key documents, including examination of information about students who fail placements.

### FINDINGS

Findings from the project will be reported in 2020.

### IMPACT

A final report of the project will be prepared in 2020, including practice implications for social work education. Publications will target social work education audiences.



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What is the impact of students undertaking both placements within a statutory setting as part of their qualifying social work education?



# PHD RESEARCH

We welcomed three new Phd students this year – **Cassian Rawcliffe, Rose Hutton and Emma Speer**

## HARD TO TELL: HOW MALE SURVIVORS OF FEMALE PERPETRATED INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE TELL THEIR STORIES

**PhD STUDENT** Cassian Rawcliffe  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Beth Neil, Dr Georgia Philip  
**FUNDER** ESRC SeNSS Funded PhD Studentship

The important work of the last half century to raise awareness of violence against women has put domestic abuse firmly on the agenda of social policy and legislation. What has been less talked about are the experiences of male victims. Stereotypes of men as strong and invulnerable, and the widespread understanding of domestic abuse by men against women, means male victims can feel their experiences are not accepted. This can stop them from talking about their abuse. Abuse that is not recognised can continue for longer, increasing the risk of harm and fatal injury. Children who see and hear abuse between their parents are at greater risk of harm and are at increased risk of entering abusive relationships when they grow up, perpetuating an intergenerational cycle of abuse and violence.

Research in the field of Narrative Identity Theory shows us that how people talk about their experiences and tell their stories is important for recovery. Some ways of telling stories are linked to positive wellbeing, and others correlate with poorer mental health outcomes. For men who suffer violence and abuse from their female partner, there is little opportunity to talk of their experiences. When they do speak about it, they are often not taken seriously. The possible consequence of this is they have little opportunity to explore and make sense of their own stories.

Building upon a successful pilot study, this research uses in-depth auto-biographical narrative interviews to enable male victims and survivors to tell their story. Understanding how male survivors speak about their experiences, and what it means for their identity and mental health, is crucial to being able to support them and their families, potentially helping men to understand their experiences, leave abusive relationships earlier, work to protect their children, and help them to rebuild their lives.

Listening to the stories of male survivors in this way can help inform a deeper understanding of Intimate Partner Abuse of all genders, enriching public discussion, better informing the work of those who provide support, and making it easier for others to make sense of their own experiences.

## EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF OLDER MEN IN PRISON

**PhD STUDENT** Rose Hutton  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Jonathan Dickens, Dr Penny Sorensen  
**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

Older men are the fastest growing prison population in the UK, with the number of men over 50 almost trebling in the last 15 years. Although this can partly be explained by rising life expectancies, this has generally been attributed to increases in sentence length and late-in-life prosecutions. Despite this population rapid increasing, prisons can fail to meet older prisoners' often complex needs and there remains no national strategy regarding the care and management of older prisoners (Prisons & Probations Ombudsman, 2017; Public Health England, 2017). Existing research has described older prisoners as receiving a 'double burden' where they are not only deprived of their liberty but also experience an additional punishment from not having their needs met (Turner et al., 2018).

This study aims to develop our understanding of the lived experiences of older men in prison, whilst also exploring the experiences of staff working with them. The research will draw on semi-structured interviews with older male prisoners and a small number of prison staff in prisons across the East of England. Data will be analysed using Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory. This research will provide a much needed contribution to the limited base of academic qualitative research in this area. It is also hoped that the findings will also be able to inform policy and recommendations for front-line practice within the prison system. The research also has wider theoretical implications, raising questions about what constitutes justice and the purposes of prison.



## ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMITMENT: EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT ENTRANTS TO FOSTER CARE AND FOSTER CARERS

**PhD STUDENT** Emma Speer  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Gillian Schofield, Dr Christine Cocker  
**FUNDER** ESRC SeNSS Funded PhD Studentship

Adolescents continue to be the largest group of young people in the care system (DFE, 2018) however, there is a lack of research acknowledging the challenges of fostering adolescent entrants (who enter, or re-enter foster care) in particular. There is limited research relating to the experience of foster carer commitment to adolescent entrants and the experience of the young people, though there is general evidence of the importance of supportive relationships in adolescence (Schofield et al., 2011).

The nature of enduring relationships and commitment have been researched with regards to foster carers' experiences of caring for young infants (Dozier and Lindheim, 2006), or adolescents who have grown up in foster care (Schofield and Beek, 2009; Biehal et al., 2010; Oke et al., 2013). The differences in levels of commitment between foster carers and residential care providers who care for adolescents has also been examined (Lo et al., 2015). These concepts, however, have not been examined specifically in relation to the experiences of adolescent entrants and foster carers. This research aims to develop conceptual and theoretical insights into how relationships and commitment are experienced by adolescent entrants and their foster carers, building on MRes research which explored the experiences of foster carers caring for adolescent entrants.

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with 10-15 adolescent entrants and the same number of foster carers. Some matched pairs of foster carers and adolescent entrants may be interviewed; however, the aim of these interviews is not to triangulate information between young people and the foster carers who care for them, rather it is to explore their individual experiences of the adolescent entrant/foster carer relationship, which could include past relationships. Grounded theory will be used for analysis and to yield new theory from the data generated.

This exploration of an undervalued and under-researched area of foster care practice will assist in broadening, reframing and reconceptualising the notion of foster care for adolescent entrants by positioning caregiving and outcomes through the lens of committed relationships.

## HOMELESSNESS NOW: INSIDER ACCOUNTS FROM THE 'AGE OF AUSTERITY'

**PhD STUDENT** Christina Carmichael  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Jonathan Dickens, Prof Gillian Schofield  
**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

The formation of the Coalition government in 2010 saw a series of shifts in relation to housing and welfare provision across England. Presented as a necessary outcome of economic crises, the austerity programme of the last nine years has included drastic cutbacks to local authority budgets and services, the removal of various welfare benefits, and a decrease in the availability of social housing. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the numbers of individuals and families facing homelessness, with the official number of rough sleepers more than doubling since 2010 (Crisis, 2017).

This research project, now in its final stages, aims to further the understanding of how homelessness is being experienced and responded to in the 'age of austerity'. A total of forty semi-structured interviews were conducted with (a) individuals experiencing homelessness, (b) frontline professionals working in relevant third sector organisations and (c) frontline professionals working in relevant local authority teams. The choice of these three participant groups reflected the belief that the combination and comparison of these perspectives would provide a robust picture of homelessness 'on the ground', and represents the inclusion of perspectives that have often been overlooked by existing academic commentary. Data were analysed using Kathy Charmaz' Constructivist Grounded Theory framework.

As well as adding to a limited body of academic publications on contemporary homelessness, it is hoped that the findings of this research will inform current policy debates and assist front-line advocacy and local authority workers in better understanding the nature of this client group.



## HOW DO SOCIAL WORKERS USE SUPERVISION TO MAKE SENSE OF THEIR WORK IN CHILD AND FAMILY TEAMS?

**PHD STUDENT** Mark Gregory  
**SUPERVISORS** Dr Jeanette Cossar, Dr Laura Biggart  
**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

Decision-making in child and family social work is difficult: the work is emotionally demanding and social workers regularly find themselves making judgements under pressure in anxiety-provoking situations. The opportunity to process the emotional labour of the work provides social workers with the headspace to think clearly, whilst time for reflection enables social workers to unpick their intuitive judgements, to construct and question case-level narratives, and to consider the significance and meaning of emotional responses to encounters. This is the process of sensemaking.

Supervision is a growing area of interest in social work research, with approximately half of the total empirical research output in the field having taken place in the last 10-15 years. Despite the increasing interest, still relatively little is known about how discussions between social workers and their supervisors influence the way that social workers think through and make judgements about their cases.

My research uses a broad conception of supervision, seeing it as a situated practice that takes place not just in formal one-to-one meetings but within everyday conversations in social work teams. My research is ethnographic, using participant observation alongside audio recordings of supervision sessions and semi-structured interviews. My fieldwork has taken place across four teams in two local authorities, with five supervisors and seventeen social workers participating.

This research will further our understanding of what happens within the supervisory relationship and within peer supervision that enables social workers to process and make sense of their work.

## WORKING WITH FEMALE OFFENDING AND CARE: THE PERSPECTIVES OF PROFESSIONALS FROM YOUTH OFFENDING TEAMS

**PHD STUDENT** Donna-Maree Humphrey  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Gillian Schofield, Dr Birgit Larsson  
**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

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 are or 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 also of their 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 (Prison Reform Trust, 2014). Given that statistically there are more male offenders over all, this raises questions around what the relationship is between gender, care and offending behaviours. However to date no research has been done on youth offending practice with this specific population.

This research project aims to gain a better understanding of frontline youth offending practice with female offenders from care. In order to achieve this, 20 semi structured telephone interviews were conducted with youth offending team workers across three local authorities. The interviews have explored the role of relationship based practice with female offenders from care, the role of the youth offending service in addressing complex welfare needs and how associated multi-agency practice is managed. Findings from this research contribute to a deeper understanding of professional identity in youth offending practice, the ethics of a welfare focused youth criminal justice system and the nature of gendered practice.



## STAYING IN TOUCH: THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

**PHD STUDENT** Andrew Sach  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Beth Neil, Prof Jonathan Dickens

Andrew is a qualified social worker and lecturer in the school of social work. His PhD research explores social media use by young people in care. The use of social media (using smart phones and computers to communicate via applications such as Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp) has grown at an exponential rate in the last few years, particularly amongst young people. The relatively recent emergence and growing popularity of social media mean we are just beginning to understand its impact on society and the development of children and adolescents. Research suggests social media is used by young people to explore themselves, their relationships and place in the world. Social media may be popular amongst young people, but there is a growing awareness of risks associated with its use, such as cyber bullying, sexting and grooming.

Young people in care represent some of the most vulnerable in society, and how this vulnerability influences (and is influenced by) their experience of social media is of interest. Disconnections in relationships with family and friends are also common – can social media help people maintain supportive networks, or might it mean that it is difficult to restrict birth family contact, even when such contact is unhelpful? These young people also find themselves in a situation whereby multiple adults, including social workers, foster carers and birth parents share responsibility for their welfare. How can young people be supported in managing the risks of social media, and what are the respective roles of these various adults who have parenting responsibilities for them in providing boundaries, support and guidance?

It is such questions that drove the development of this mixed methods project. The project took place within two local authorities in England. Data collection consisted of 5 focus groups (3 with social workers and 2 with foster carers), an online survey with young people in care aged 11–18, and 25 interviews with young people in care. The emerging findings suggest a challenge for social work practice appears to be found in how the young people, their carers and social workers come together to agree and determine the use of social media by young people in care.

## THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL ASSISTANCE ON RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN DISABLED PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

**PHD STUDENT** Nicola Jones  
**SUPERVISORS** Prof Jonathan Dickens, Dr Ann Anka  
**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

Parenting with the support of personal assistance is a growing phenomenon, yet there is scant research into the impact of this type of support on family life. Little is currently understood about the experiences of both parenting and being parented with personal assistance, or how the relationships between disabled parents and their children are shaped and influenced by the ongoing presence of personal assistants (PAs) who provide care to both parent and child.

This study addresses the research gap through empirical research with people who have lived experience, using a constructivist epistemology approach. Qualitative methods have been used to examine how individuals experience personal assistance, and the impact upon parent/child relationships. 29 participants were recruited across three sample groups: disabled parents, children, and PAs. Views were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews; discussions with children were based around age-appropriate activities. Verbatim transcripts were produced and shared with adult participants as part of ‘member checking’ process. Rigorous thematic analysis was used to identify key findings.

The findings shed light on the intricate and constantly evolving interplay between parents, children and PAs, and reveal the intensity and complexity of relationships. Evidence suggests that PA support can meet parents’ practical needs, enrich family life and support the development of close bonds of attachment between parents and children. Employing a PA can prevent children from becoming carers and alleviate some of the anxieties children hold about their parents’ wellbeing, enabling them to focus on important learning and social activities. Nevertheless, parents and children can worry about the long-term sustainability of their support arrangements and they may experience significant disruption to their lives when PAs leave their employment.

The study provides a comprehensive and nuanced picture of the varieties of experience and promotes a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of personal assistance in enabling disabled people to express their parenting choices. Important new insights into the views of children who have disabled parents and do not identify as ‘carers’ are also revealed. Details of this study will be disseminated to social work audiences and user-led organisations, thereby making a valuable contribution to improving practice and shaping policy.



## GRANDPARENTS' EXPERIENCES OF BECOMING AND BEING A SPECIAL GUARDIAN: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

**PHD STUDENT** Paul McGrath

**SUPERVISORS** Prof Beth Neil, Dr Laura Cook

**FUNDER** UEA Funded PhD Studentship

The use of Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs) by the Family Court to formally secure the legal status of children living with family and friends, as well as with some foster carers, has increased significantly since their implementation in 2005, and grandparents are the largest group of special guardians. Local authorities are now regularly recommending SGOs at the end of care proceedings for children who cannot live with their parents. However, there is a relatively small research base informing these decisions.

The current research shows that special guardianship orders can often lead to positive outcomes for the child and the carer; this is especially true when the special guardians have support from their wider family. However, the research also demonstrates that there are challenges and complexities which are not well understood. Paul's study aims to support the development of the understanding of the lived experience of being a grandparent who is special guardian.

Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) the study will analyse how grandparent special guardians make sense of their experiences. Paul has completed 18 interviews with 27 grandparents. Nine interviews were with single carers, nine were with couples. Nine of the interviews were with maternal grandparents and nine were with paternal grandparents. The small sample size, although large for an IPA study, allows for an in-depth interpretation of the special guardians' sense making of their experiences.

**The grandparents experienced the court proceedings as adversarial which impacted on the trust and ongoing relationships between the grandparents, the parents and children's services.**

The early findings indicate there are five key areas that made up the experience of becoming and being a special guardian:

The first area was the grandparents' experiences of the child protection and court processes. The grandparents experienced the court processes as adversarial which impacted on the trust and ongoing relationships between the grandparents, the parents, and children's services.

The second area was the grandparents' relationship with their adult child who was their grandchild's parent. The grandparents often found this relationship difficult because of their adult child's choices. This made parenting them into the future more challenging.

The third area was the grandparents' experience of parenting their grandchildren. This was an extremely complex parenting role which involved having to manage the impact of trauma on the child, having to manage contact and ongoing family relationships and the grandparents having to manage their own vulnerabilities such as poverty, social isolation, ill health and aging.

The fourth area was the grandparents' transformation from grandparent to grandparent special guardian. The grandparents found it hard to switch roles from being the child's grandparent to raising them full time. Although there were joys in bringing up their grandchildren they also could experience the loss of their future plans, free time and employment.

The final area was the grandparents' experience of support. The grandparents often had to overcome many barriers to accessing support. These barriers were either internal (e.g. a reluctance to trust children's services, or a feeling that they should be able to cope), or external to them (e.g. not knowing their entitlements to support, or no appropriate services being available).

Implications for social work practice and future research are currently being considered.

Paul has shared his early findings with the rapid review into SGOs being undertaken by CoramBAAF, the parliamentary working group into kinship care, the East of England IRO conference and several local authority social work teams.

# WHAT'S IT LIKE TO BE A PhD STUDENT IN CRCF?

Doing a PhD is a challenging but rewarding experience. Here in CRCF we feel part of a close-knit research community and have easy access to world-leading academics across a range of research interests. We are all struck by CRCF's embedded ethos of being impact-focused; research needs to make a difference to professional practice and to the lives of vulnerable people, so we know that we too can make a genuine contribution through our PhD research. We value the autonomy we have been given to develop a research project that fits with our interests and that can also benefit the profession.

We are part of a community of PhD researchers and meet formally every two weeks during term time to develop skills and share ideas. We have a dedicated research space within the Centre which provides not only a well-resourced workspace but also a place to talk about our research with colleagues and support each other. This year most of us have taken advantage of support through the Courage Project, a UEA-wide initiative designed to promote the well-being of postgraduate research students.

## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

Our research is helping us to develop a range of skills that will benefit us in future, whatever we choose to do post-PhD. Targeted support is offered to PhD students through the UEA Careers Centre, which offers a wealth of information on possible career paths as well as practical tips on how to improve employability. As PhD students we are many things: project managers, public speakers, data analysts, interviewers, writers, critical thinkers, reflective practitioners – the list is almost endless!

As PhD students we get the opportunity to be Associate Tutors and to develop skills in teaching students on the qualifying programmes. Additional training at Masters level is available to Associate Tutors in the School, meaning many of us are now accredited as Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. We are encouraged to present our work internally through CRCF seminars and externally through attending academic conferences in our field of expertise. Sharing our work amongst the wider research community can feel daunting, but it also helps us to test out our ideas and sharpen our arguments.

Being a PhD student is challenging at times; you need to be highly motivated to manage your time and you need to be prepared to work independently. Most of us have worries about the financial side of doing a PhD and there are times when managing a research project feels stressful. However, the rewards of completing a PhD make it worthwhile. The support we receive from our supervisors, colleagues, and the UEA community more widely make the challenges of doing a PhD manageable and the sense that we can make a difference through our research makes the experience both enjoyable and rewarding.

## LIFE AFTER THE PHD – DR IRINA SIRBU

'What are your plans for after you submit?' A question I was asked innumerable times and the one that haunted me in the last stretches of my PhD, especially given the sacrifices and financial commitments made to study. I have to admit I did not have a definitive answer at the time and that worried me. You are kind of/supposed to know by the end of your PhD, or better – even earlier. But I didn't. Yet, I was sure about one thing, I knew my future career would be in research, maybe working in the third sector as this was an ambition I kept from volunteering for international NGOs and charities in the past.

To my astonishment, I was quickly offered a position as a Data Analysis Officer in a large London-based charity that helps children from underrepresented backgrounds to enter highly selective universities in the UK. I moved to London and started the job whilst completing and submitting my PhD thesis (yes, that was not easy)! In less than a year, I was 'up-to-speed' about debates concerning social mobility and access to higher education, both in the UK and internationally.

Although I was learning useful skills and doing important work, I was always keen to return to academic research and spotted a new, exciting opportunity within CRCF. This was to work as a Senior Research Associate on an adoption project exploring the later lives of adoptive families when adoptees become parents and adopters become grandparents. Like my PhD, this new qualitative study is interested in identity, risk, and resilience in families. I was particularly fascinated and intrigued about the narrative life story interview method where participants' identities are explored through their stories. It clicked. And it worked. I am now six months into my research post and I could not be any happier. My job involves long hours of travelling and interviewing participants and I am loving every bit of it. I am loving the diverse skills I acquire while working within a small team. At the same time, I am supported to develop as a researcher and publish from my PhD.

This initial stage of my journey from a PhD into a researcher's career has not been straightforward or without doubts and insecurities. However, it has helped me to mature professionally, re-assess my potential and consider how to best apply myself in the right context. Most importantly, it made me realise that not knowing or seeing a clear path ahead is okay and should not preclude you from taking a journey – embrace the uncertainty and explore!

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# OUR MEMBERS

**ANN ANKA** (BA, MA, PGCE, PhD) is a Lecturer in Social Work. Her research interest is in the involvement of people who use services in the assessments of students and working with those deemed as marginal or failing students.

**CHRIS BECKETT** (BSc, CQSW, MA, PhD) is an Associate Tutor in Social Work and has research interests in court proceedings concerning children, perceptions of risk, the use and abuse of language.

**MARY BEEK** (BA, CQSW, MA, PhD) is a Research Fellow. Her research and practice interests are in foster care and adoption and particularly in supporting children and their caregivers.

**PIPPA BELDERSON** (BA, MMedSci, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate in the Centre.

**LAURA BIGGART** (BSc, PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences Research and Psychology. Her research interests are in Emotional Intelligence, youth offending and work-life balance.

**MARIAN BRANDON** (BA, MA, CQSW, PhD) is Professor of Social Work and Director of the Centre. She is a children and families specialist and has research interests in family support, child protection and multi-agency working.

**JOHN CLIFTON** (MA, CQSW PhD) is a Senior Research Associate. His main research interest is in men and fathers in adoption and child protection.

**CHRISTINE COCKER** (BSW, MTh, OXON, PG Dip, PhD, HSSM) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work. Her research interests are lesbian and gay fostering and adoption and social work with looked after children.

**SARA CONNOLLY** (BA, MPhil, DPhil) is a Professor in Personnel Economics. Her research interests are in gender and the labour market.

**LAURA COOK** (BA, MA, MA, PhD) is a Lecturer in Social Work. Her research interests include the concept of professional judgement and the role of emotion in social work practice.

**NEIL COOPER** (BSc, PhD) is a Professor of Psychology with research interests in qualitative psychology, disciplinary boundaries, family relationships and technological change.

**JEANETTE COSSAR** (BA, MA, DipSW, PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work and has research interests in children and young people's perspectives on abuse and neglect and their experiences of child protection services; the experiences of LGBT young people in care.

**JONATHAN DICKENS** (BA, MA, CQSW, MSc, PhD) is Professor of Social Work, and Head of the School of Social Work. His research interests include child care law, care proceedings, planning and decision making for children in care and the character of social work in its wider social policy and international contexts.

**JANE DODSWORTH** (BA, MA, CQSW, PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work with particular research interests in child protection and child sexual exploitation.

**SIMON HAMMOND** (BA, MSc, PhD) is a Lecturer in Education. He is interested in life narratives and the applications of digital life story work, including for young people in care.

**RUTH HANCOCK** (PhD) is Professor of the Economics of Health and Welfare with research interests in the economic, health and social policy implications of individual and population ageing with a particular focus on financial provision for later life and provision for long-term care needs.

**DAVID HOWE** (BSc, MA, CQSW, PhD) is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work. His interests are in attachment theory, social work theory and practice, child abuse, neglect, rejection and trauma, and relationship-based practice.

**PETER JORDAN** (BSc, MA, DipSW, PhD) is a Lecturer in Child and Family Social Work. His research focuses on the relationships between key professionals engaged in child protection work, with a particular emphasis on the ethical stances taken.

**BIRGIT LARSSON** (BA, MSc, PhD) is a Lecturer in Social Work. Her research interests are offending, restorative justice and justice issues.

**BETH NEIL** (BSc, MA, DipSW, PhD) is a Professor of Social Work. She is interested in adoption and other permanent family placements, and in the pathways of children through the social care system. She has particular research interests in contact after adoption; birth families, post-adoption support; adoptive parent recruitment, linking and matching; and children's transitions from foster care to adoption.

**GEORGIA PHILIP** (MA, PGCE, PhD) is a Research Fellow and Lecturer. Her research interests include: fathers, gender and care, qualitative and feminist research, the feminist ethics of care, parenting interventions and family policy.

**JULIA RIMMER** (BSc, PGCE, MA, PhD) is a Research Fellow working on the new ESRC two generation adoption study.

**GILLIAN SCHOFIELD** (BA, MA, PGCE, CQSW, MSW, PhD) is Professor of Child and Family Social Work. Her research interests are in attachment, care planning, long-term foster care, and looked after children and offending.

**CLIVE SELICK** (JP, CQSW, MSW, PhD) is an Emeritus Reader in Social Work. His research interests are in foster care. He is a lay judge in the Norfolk Family Court.

**IRINA SIRBU** (BSc, PhD) is a Senior Research Associate at the CRCF. She works on a project titled 'From being adopted to becoming a parent: when adopted people become parents and adopters become grandparents'.

**PENNY SORENSEN** (BSc, MA, PhD) is a Research Fellow and Lecturer. She has an interest in family research, particularly the experiences of older men in families and visual methods.

**JUNE THOBURN** CBE (BA, DipPSA, MSW, LittD) is an Emeritus Professor of Social Work and founding Director of the Centre. Her research interests are in family placement, collaborative practice with families with complex problems, and international child welfare. She is the Chair of Norfolk Family Justice Board and a member of the Ethics Committee of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse.

**JUDI WALSH** (BSc, PhD, C.Psychol., AFBPsS) is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology and has research interests in relationships and psychological well-being, particularly in the perinatal period.

**EMMA WARD** (BSc, PhD) is currently a Senior Research Associate in the Norwich Medical School.

**JULIE YOUNG** (BA, PGCE) is a Senior Research Associate in the Centre. Her interests are in child protection, care proceedings, the care system and adoption.



# 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 well-being of children and families.

**crcf**

Centre for Research  
on Children & Families

## **CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

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