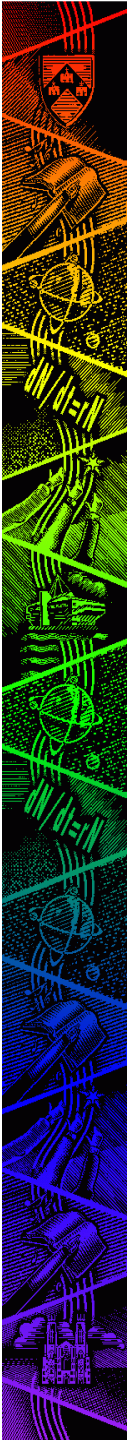


British Foster Care Research

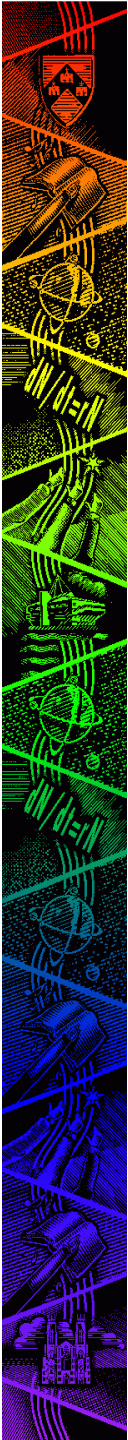
Professor Ian Sinclair
University of York

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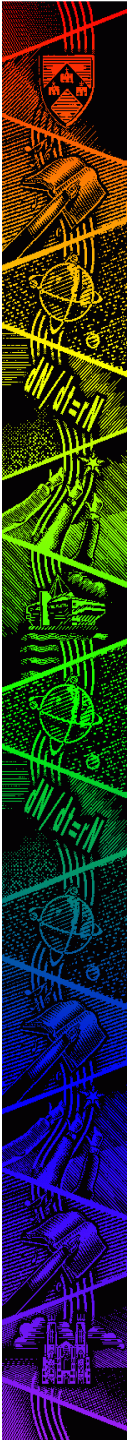
Main concerns

- What are the roles of foster care?
- What do children want from it?
- How does it compare with other provisions (adoption, residential care, kin care)?
- Why do placements go well or badly?
- What are the long-term outcomes?
- What helps support, recruit and keep foster carers?



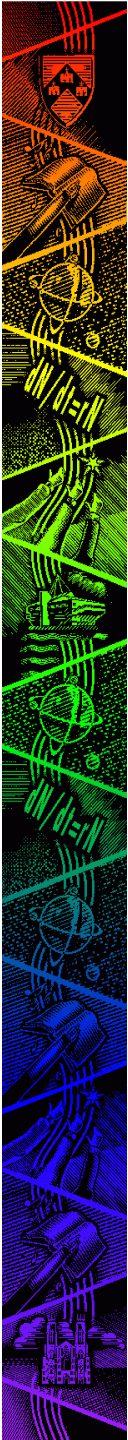
Who funds it?

- The funding mainly comes from the government
- There is some charity and foundation



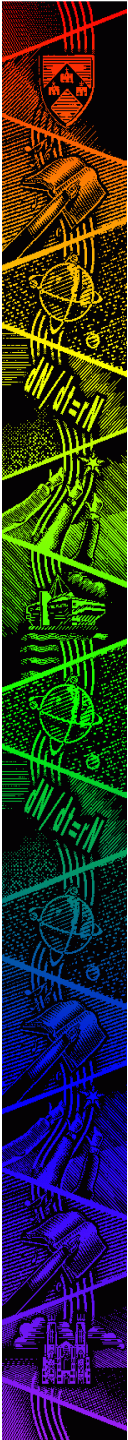
What methods does it use?

- Cross-sectional studies
- Longitudinal studies ('catch-up or prospective')
- Statistical controls
- Much reliance on interviews and questionnaires
- Some use of qualitative approaches
- Very little use of experiment



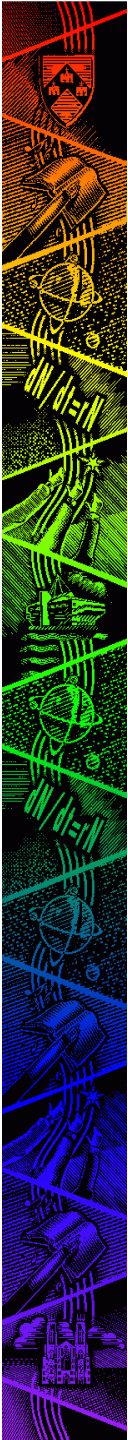
What are the key 'ideas'?

- Views on the value of families
- Perspectives derived from family research
- Attachment theory
- Ideas from social learning
- Ideas about 'identity'
- A concern with educational outcomes
- A high value placed on 'user views'



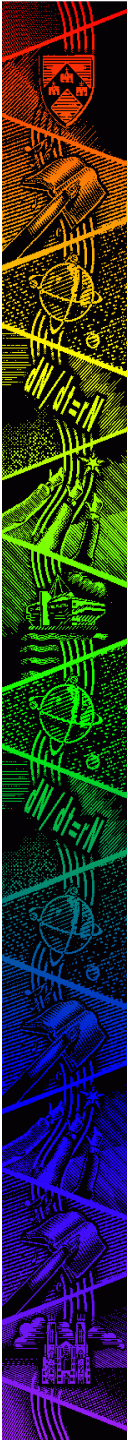
Role of foster care

- Predominant form of provision
- Provides 'short', medium and long-term care with some specialist options
- Further sub-divided by age and number of children per placement
- At any one point in time most foster children are not going home soon
- Most research has focussed on long-stay children



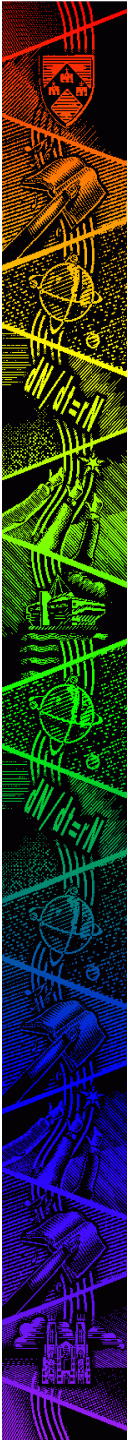
What children want

- Normality
- Good family care
- Respect for their origins
- Control or influence over key choices
- Opportunity



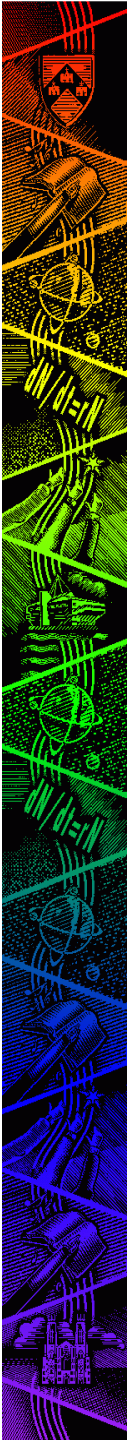
How does foster care compare?

- Return home – some evidence long-stay foster children do, in some respects, better than those who go home
- Adoption - on balance adoption a more stable and secure option than long-stay foster care, but often not practicable
- Foster care less costly and more 'normal' than residential care but little evidence on effectiveness



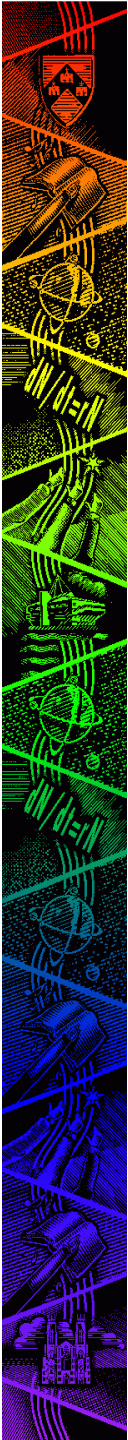
Kin care

- There are great variations in the extent to which it is used
- 'Formal' kin care is mainly used for long-stay care
- It has various advantages
- But it also has disadvantages
- The evidence suggests its use could be expanded but not indefinitely



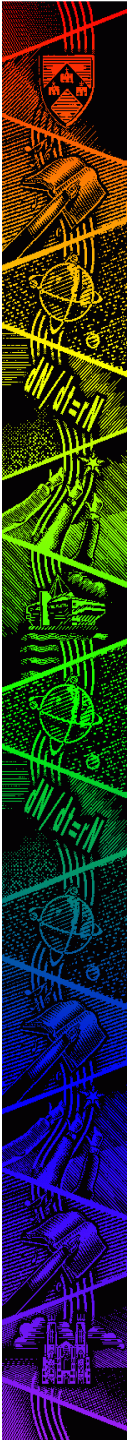
Why do placements succeed or fail?

- The way they are made
- What the children want
- Their other characteristics
- Family contact
- Carer characteristics
- Matching and interactions
- Schooling
- Possibly other support



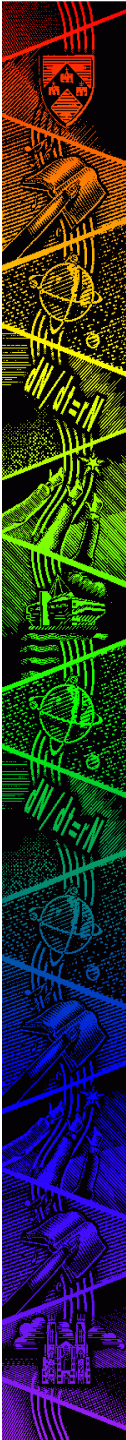
Long-term outcomes

- Long-term outcomes of short and intermediate care little studied but probably depend on subsequent environments
- Foster care can provide a family for life, but it rarely does so
- Initial outcomes of those leaving at 18 not very encouraging



Recruitment

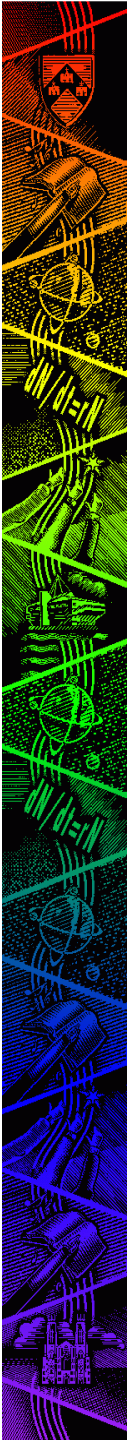
- There is little evidence on recruitment
- It probably depends on local reputation (many carers recruit others)
- It may also be influenced by nature of remuneration, and specific features of recruitment campaigns (efficiency, use of carers and children, appropriate targeting)



Recruiting and supporting carers

Retention and support varies with:

- Family situation and aspiration of carer
- Support, including social work visits, finance, training, 'groups'
- Events (particularly breakdowns and allegations)
- Hassles (e.g. issues over insurance)
- Acceptance as part of team



Conclusion

- Foster care is in many ways a very impressive form of provision
- It copes with a wide variety of children, who mainly speak highly of their carers, who are mainly committed to them
- However, it is rarely a cure for poor family care or a full substitute for it
- Its Achilles heel lies not in what it provides but in what comes after it

