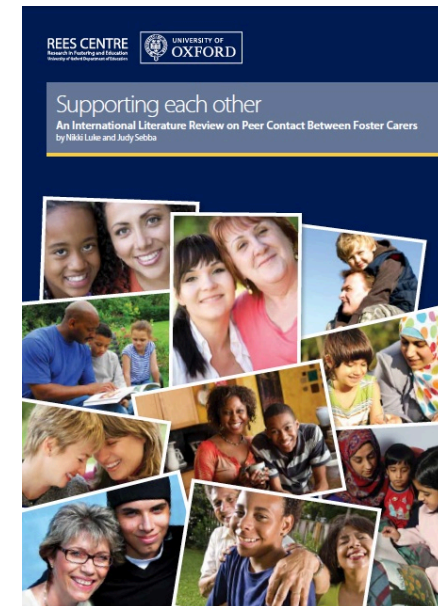


Increasing the benefits of foster carer peer support

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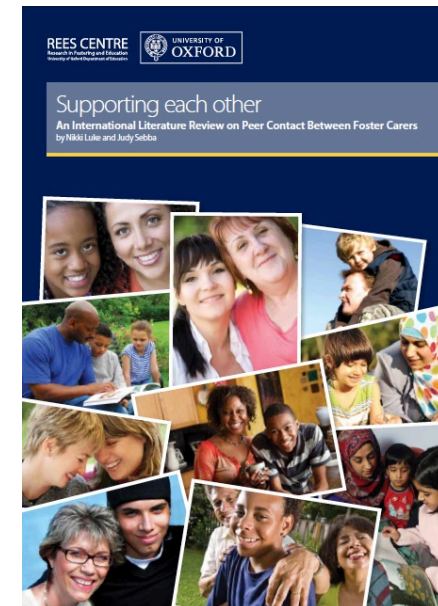
Overall aim of the Centre is to:

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

We are doing this by:

- reviewing existing research in order to make better use of current evidence
- conducting new research to address gaps
- working with service users to translate research messages into practice

Centre is funded by Core Assets, international children's services provider



Current research and reviews

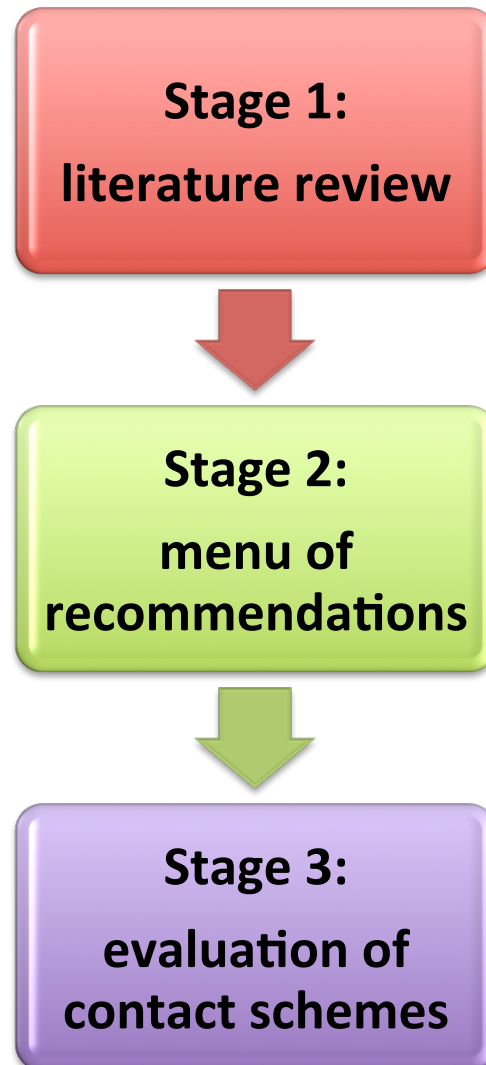
Research

- Increasing the benefits of foster carer peer support
- Investigating people's motivation to foster
- Siblings Together befriending project

Reviews

- The assessment and selection of foster carers
- The impact of fostering on carers' own children
- Factors contributing to educational outcomes

Increasing the benefits of foster carer peer support



Stage 1: literature review

- Role of foster carer: satisfaction and fulfilment but also stress
- Types of support:
 - informal (family and friends)
 - formal (practitioners, schemes for meeting other carers)
- Review questions:
 - What is the nature of peer contact between foster carers and what does it provide?
 - How far does peer contact improve outcomes for carers, children and placements?
 - What are the interventions that increase contact between carers and could thereby potentially improve outcomes?
- 33 studies from UK, USA, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Ireland

Stage 1: literature review

Key findings:

- Providers offer a range of forms of peer contact
 - e.g. local support and advocacy groups, social contact, training sessions, mentoring
- Peer contact can fulfil a number of important support needs
 - emotional, instrumental, informational and appraisal (Hinson Langford et al., 1997)
 - counters sense of isolation (Blythe et al., 2011)
- Less positive experience when group meetings become ‘gossip sessions’ or a forum for putting down social workers (Murray, 2007)
 - important role of group facilitator (The Fostering Network, 2009)
- Key factors: chance to meet with other carers, learn from each other, offload about problems, reduce potential social isolation, talk to those with a shared understanding of the issues

Stage 1: literature review

Key findings:

- Only four studies examined links between peer contact and benefits for carers, children and placements – they showed:
 - a greater likelihood of continuing a career as a foster carer (Rhodes et al., 2001; Sinclair et al., 2004)
 - a more positive attitude to fostering (Sinclair et al., 2004)
 - a lower likelihood of depression (Cole & Eamon, 2007)
 - increased availability of respite care might help to avoid placement disruptions (Northwest Institute for Children and Families, 2007)
- Intervention designs which directly relate pre- and post-test outcome measures to the experience of peer contact could increase the validity of the findings

Stage 2: menu of recommendations

- Working with three local authority/state providers and one private/independent company
- The providers chose the following schemes from the review:
 - Local carer support groups (3 providers)
 - Mentoring (1 provider)
- We produced detailed menus on these two options based on the research in the review
- Each menu contains:
 - practical questions on how the provider will operate the scheme
 - specific evidence-based recommendations
- Providers used the menus to design their new/revised schemes
- Examples of menu items...

Stage 2: menu of recommendations

Support group questions included...

- **What kind of groups will be offered?**
 - One group for all carers;
 - Specialist groups, e.g. for carers of different age groups, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, sexual abuse, or for male carers or those with English as an additional language.
- **When and where will they take place?**
 - Sessions during school hours for those with children in school;
 - Additional evening sessions for those with other jobs and to allow partners to attend;
 - Location within easy access for most potential attendees;
 - Offer childcare/crèche facilities;
 - Consider use of alternative venues for 'hard to reach' groups, e.g. sports clubs.

Stage 2: menu of recommendations

Mentoring questions included...

- **Who will be the mentors and who will coordinate?**
 - Coordinator of scheme;
 - Selection process (retired carers etc.);
 - Skills needed by mentors: establishing rapport, active listening, non-judgemental approach, helping to set goals and assess progress, motivating others;
 - Career progression for existing carers:
 - Training and ongoing support;
 - Accreditation.
- **How will mentors be matched to mentees?**
 - Ethnicity, culture and language;
 - Gender and relationship status?
 - Type of fostering;
 - Geography;
 - Personality?

Stage 3: evaluation of contact schemes

- Six-month pre- and post-test design to evaluate impact
- Currently collecting Time 1 data
- Semi-structured interviews (conducted by carer-consultants):
 - carers' perceptions of peer support
 - perceived impact of the scheme on relationships with others, attitudes to fostering and intention to continue in the role
- Questionnaires:
 - stress levels (Parenting Stress Index; Abidin, 1995)
 - parenting attitudes (Child-Parent Relationship Scale; Pianta, 1992)
- Fostering career:
 - carer retention
 - placement stability

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