

CRCF ONLINE ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2023

SUPPORTING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLES' JOURNEYS THROUGH ADOPTION,

FOSTERING & RESIDENTIAL CARE: MESSAGES FROM NEW RESEARCH

THURSDAY 18 MAY 2023 | 10AM - 1PM | MS TEAMS

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

10:00 - 10:10 Welcome & Introduction

Dr Laura L. Cook (Acting Director of the Centre for Research on Children & Families)

10:10 - 10:45 Modernising birth family contact in adoption - a theory of change

Professor Beth Neil (UEA)

An increasing body of evidence has demonstrated the benefits associated with the maintenance of safe, meaningful birth family contact after adoption along with ongoing open communication about birth family history. Despite this, the majority of children being adopted today are unlikely to have direct birth family contact. Letter contact remains the standard plan, but numerous problems have been identified with this form of contact. This talk will describe work undertaken by a UEA team led by Prof Beth Neil to develop a theory of change around post adoption contact, identifying the goals of positive post adoption contact, the barriers and facilitating factors, and possible ways forward, including the use of digital methods to facilitate contact. The theory of change was developed through integrating relevant research with the perspectives of people with lived and professional experience. The work has also been informed by the UEA team's ongoing evaluation of 'Letter Swap' - a digital platform for post adoption contact.

10:45 - 11:20 Seeking Connections - the lifelong need of adults affected by adoption

Anne Murphy (UEA) & Gilli Bruce (Integrated Counsellor, Coach and adult adoptee)

Closed adoption models have left both adopted adults and their birth relatives wondering where and how their lost relatives are, exacerbating issues of loss and identity. It is therefore important to consider the support needed by adults affected by adoption, and how people can best be helped to find answers to their questions and to reconnect where this is desired. This talk will use findings from two recent UEA studies to discuss these issues. The first study analysed data from a survey of over 300 adopted adults and highlighted their needs and priorities around maintaining birth family relationships. The second study used freedom of information requests to explore how adoption agencies respond to requests from intermediary service providers to check adoption files in the course of putting adopted adults and their birth relatives in touch with each other. There will be a contribution from an adopted adult who will highlight the profound personal significance of the search origins and birth family connections.

11:20- 11:20 Break

11:35 - 12:10 Supporting young people's journeys from residential to foster care

Dr Kate Blake-Holmes (UEA)

This presentation explores young people's experiences of making the transition from residential to foster care. The research involved interviews with young people, their foster carers, social workers, Independent Reviewing Officers and residential workers. Four key stages were identified within young people's journeys from residential to foster care: assessing readiness, matching, making the transition and settling into placement. We consider what can be learned to enhance the support provided around the transition process and advance recommendations for best practice.

12:10 - 12:45 LIMITLESS: making low-intensity life story work more accessible to looked after teens

**Dr Simon Hammond (UEA), Katie Martinez-Thompson (a care-leaver representative)
& Dr Ella Mickleburgh (Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust)**

Life story work is commonly used to support positive mental health among looked-after children. However, this intervention relies on a poor-quality evidence-base and is currently delivered as a "high-intensity" intervention, meaning it relies on specialist professional input over a number of months. It also currently focuses on younger children, meaning there is minimal guidance available for adolescents. In short, there is no clear guidance on how or when life story work should be best undertaken, by whom and why it improves (or not) the mental health of adolescents looked-after. This talk introduces the LIMITLESS programme which has begun to address this gap. Working with care-experienced young adults and a range of health and social care stakeholders, we undertook an international literature review to understand when and how low-intensity life story work could work for adolescents looked-after. From this we advance initial practice recommendations.



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