



University of  
Massachusetts  
Amherst

## Facilitating Peer Support between Foster Carers in the UK

Item Type	event;event
Authors	McDermid, Samantha
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.7275/R5QR4VB0">https://doi.org/10.7275/R5QR4VB0</a>
Download date	2025-03-22 13:21:07
Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43012">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14394/43012</a>

# Facilitating peer support between foster carers in the UK: An overview of three studies

Sam McDermid

Research Fellow

Centre for Child and Family Research,  
Loughborough University



# Some context setting

- Around 75% of children in out of home care in England are placed in foster care
- Long term foster care recognised as a suitable option for some children
- The local authority as the ‘corporate parent’
- Delegated authority
- Recruitment and retention rates of foster carers
  - Improving the capacity of foster care



# Different avenues for peer support

- Peer mentoring or one to one support
- Groups
  - Coffee mornings
  - Support groups
  - Local Foster Carer Associations
- Online peer support
  - Facebook
  - Online forums



# What does the literature tell us?

- “*Supporting Each Other: An International Literature Review on Peer Contact Between Foster Carers*”, Luke and Sebba, 2013
- Peer support can fulfil a number of support needs
  - Shared learning, advice and information
  - Emotional support and shared understanding
  - Appraising and reflecting on practice
- Some links to foster carer retention
  - Strain
- Less positive aspects:
  - Gossip
  - Negative conversations about social workers or fostering service

# The studies

- London Fostering Achievement
  - Mayor of London's Schools Excellence Fund
  - Aimed to improve the ability of carers and teachers to raise the educational outcomes of children in the care
  - 'Education Champions'
  - 'Hard to reach' carers
- Head, Heart, Hands
  - Introduce social pedagogy into UK foster care
  - Underpinning principle of co-creation and equality of practice
  - Shared learning and practice groups

# The studies

- Made to Measure
  - Families with children with disabilities
  - 'Pooling' personal budgets
  - Parent led commissioning through peer relationships
  - Online forum
- The Mockingbird Family Model
  - Constellations supported by a hub home
  - Due to report Summer 2016



# Key findings: Peer Mentoring

- Undertook a range of activities
  - Development of tools and training materials
  - Trips with an educational element
  - Awareness raising
  - Guidance and advice on key issues
  - One to one support
- Key source of information and empowerment
  - Pupil Premium Plus
  - Personal Education Plan (PEP) meetings
- Improved access to services for the children





# Key findings: Peer Mentoring

- Very well regarded
  - Foster carers and Children's Services staff
- 'Someone who understands'
  - Provision of advice that works
  - Sympathetic rather than judgemental support
  - Focussed on strengths rather than difficulties
- Took time to establish
  - Engagement with Education and Social Care Staff
  - Very few referrals
- Access through groups
  - Reaching the hard to reach?

# Groups

- Groups run by foster carers are generally well regarded
- Open non-judgemental environment
- Sharing experiences and advice
  - What works
- Attendance problematic
  - Low numbers
  - Practicalities



# Online support

- Alternative and convenient space for carers or parents
- Limited uptake
  - Generally a source of information rather than dialogue
  - Discussions primarily initiated by the staff
  - Clarity about their use
- Low use of online services
  - Less convenient than initially anticipated
  - Use of Facebook and other social media platforms
- Gap in the evidence identified by Luke and Sebba, 2013

# The challenges

- Accessing peer support
- Avoidance of the virtuous circle
- The limits of confidentiality
- Interface with the wider system
  - The corporate parent vs delegated authority

# Questions for consideration

- What might facilitate more foster carers making use of peer support?
  - What are some of the practical steps that might be necessary?
- What models are available that have been found to be effected in other countries?
  - What models have been found to be ineffective?
- How can the interface between foster carers and the wider system be improved to facilitate peer support?

Sam McDermid

Research Fellow, Centre for Child and Family Research,  
Loughborough University

[S.Mcdermid@lboro.ac.uk](mailto:S.Mcdermid@lboro.ac.uk)

+441509 228 365

[www.ccf.org.uk](http://www.ccf.org.uk)

Twitter: @CCFR\_SMcdermid