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Recent publications, reports and on-going research in the Making Research Count Universities

JANUARY 2013

Making Research Count is a collaborative national research dissemination network based regionally in the social work departments of the Universities of Bedfordshire, Brighton, Central Lancashire (UCLAN), East Anglia (UEA), Keele, King's College London, Northumbria in association with Teesside, Salford, West of England (UWE), York and The Open University.

All twelve social work departments are actively engaged in research activity, generating research publications, reports and journal articles, as well as in the education of social work professionals, both at qualifying and post-qualifying level. This *RESEARCH NEWS* highlights some recent or current research undertaken in the departments in our network. There are electronic links to the published reports or departmental resources.

Connecting People study

Funded by the NIHR School for Social Care Research and led by Martin Webber from the University of York, the Connecting People study used ethnographic methods to collect data from over 150 people, including health and social care professionals, and mental health service users and their carers, to identify the best ways to help people develop their social networks. The findings have been developed into practice guidance which accompanies a practice framework called the Connecting People intervention.

The study found that there is no clear way, that you can't engineer people's networks. Therefore, rather than being prescriptive, the Connecting People intervention focuses on giving health and social care workers the techniques they need to work collaboratively with each individual to help them identify their personal interests and social goals. The role of the worker is to know what's going on in the neighbourhood and then help each individual engage in activities so they can eventually build their own personal community with people who have shared interests. The emphasis is on the worker and the service user working together, in an equal partnership, to try to make each individual's plan happen.

For more information about the Connecting People study, please visit www.connectingpeoplestudy.net.

Shared Expectations? Reforming the Social Work Qualifying Curriculum in England

We are beginning to know more about how different 'actors' try to influence decisions. Jo Moriarty from the Social Care Workforce Research Unit at King's College London recently investigated the evidence base that was used to reform the social work curriculum. She found that research was only one of the competing influences in this debate and that employers, practitioners, and people using services were able to affect decisions on the basis of their views. She concluded that we know very little about the process by which one viewpoint assumes more importance than another and how people judge research when offered other opinions. In the absence of a strong research evidence base on the social work curriculum, submissions to the Social Work Task Force appeared both to shape and create the evidence base for some of its decisions. This article is the first to expose this contentious area.

Jo Moriarty & Jill Manthorpe, Social Work Education, 2012 (online)

New Learning from Serious Case Reviews in England 2009-2011

This is the fourth biennial analysis of serious case reviews, commissioned by the Department for Education, and published by the University of East Anglia (UEA) and looks in detail at 184 reviews which relate to incidents which occurred in 2009-11. In addition to building on our previous knowledge of the characteristics of cases which led to a review, this latest biennial study explored in greater depth the prevalence and impact of neglect in the lives of the families, and the extent to which families had been known to Children's Social Care prior to the incident. Over the eight years of the study we have been able to build up a database of over 800 cases, and have collaborated with medical researchers at the University of Warwick to extend the analysis.

Dr Marian Brandon, Sue Bailey, Dr Pippa Belderson, University of East Anglia (UEA)

https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR226

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Making Research Count: School of Social Work University of Central Lancashire

Evaluation of Children's Independent Domestic Violence Advocacy Service (KIDVA)

Researchers at the University of Central Lancashire have completed the first stage of an evaluation of a children's independent domestic violence advocacy service. This innovative service provides support for children and young people aged 11 to 25 who are living in situations of domestic abuse. In addition to providing one-to-one support, the service provides a range of group activities for these children and young people. The evaluation of the first year suggests that the support has reduced the social isolation children and young people feel, and having someone on their side has made a difference to how they are able to cope with their chaotic home life. The advocacy service promotes children's voices in safeguarding forums and enables them to make choices and decisions. The evaluation is now in its second phase and will report later this year on the findings of interviews with children and young people.

Westwood, J., Larkins, C., Vart, A. and Stanley N. (2012) *An Evaluation of the HARV Children and Young People's Independent Domestic Violence Advocate (KIDVA) Service*. Preston: University of Central Lancashire. Report available from: JLWestwood@uclan.ac.uk

Looked After Children and Offending

Professor Gillian Schofield, and a team at UEA, have recently completed a study on young people in the care system who are at risk of offending. Outcomes for young people in the care system continue to raise concerns at national and local level. Looked after children are on average twice as likely as other children to be cautioned or convicted of offences, and 40% of children in custody and 25% of adult prisoners have been looked after.

The study discusses risk and protective factors which increase or decrease the likelihood of offending, how resilience in looked after children can be promoted, and the key transitions/turning points which present opportunities for interventions to divert children from offending.

The research (funded by the Big Lottery) was a partnership between UEA and TACT (The Adolescent and Children's Trust).

Both the Executive Summary and Full Report can be downloaded from:
http://www.tactcare.org.uk/resources.php?section=research

When Care Ends, Lessons from peer research: insights from young people on leaving care in Albania, The Czech Republic and Poland

In the four countries peer researchers interviewed a total of 338 young people - 200 young people who had left care and 138 young people who were still living in care. On the basis of their findings the main recommendations included: the need for improved preparation and readiness for leaving care; opportunities to address educational deficits and the development of formal links with employees; better financial support; having a choice of accommodation matched to their assessed needs; having opportunities for sustainable leisure activities; and, involving young people in identifying support networks that may be helpful to them while they are living in care and once they have left – such as former carers, professional staff, family and friends.

Mike Stein and Raluca Verweijen-Slamnescu. 2012, SOS Children's Villages International, EU funded project

Diversity in Older People and Access to Services

Age UK published an Evidence Review on Diversity in Older people and Access to services written by Jo Moriarty and Jill Manthorpe of King's College London at the end of 2012. The review used the Equality Act 2010 as a framework for looking at older people's access to, and experiences of, five major services: falls prevention, home from hospital, handyperson, befriending, and day opportunities, in terms of the protected characteristics. The review concludes that although we are now much more aware of the need to ensure that factors such as a person's age, disability, sexual orientation, gender and transgender status, ethnicity, and religious belief do not influence their experiences of services, we continue to lack research evidence on how to achieve fully inclusive services. Researchers, policymakers and practitioners need to work together on finding ways of ensuring that we begin to reduce inequalities.

The report will be invaluable for practitioners seeking evidence and trainers looking to update resources.
http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/Research/Equalities_Evidence_Review_Moriarty_2012.pdf?dtrk=true

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Good support for people with complex needs: what does it look like and where is the evidence?

This study explored features of social care support desired by people with complex needs and evidence to support these. People with complex needs (and those close to them) valued individually-tailored approaches to social care, typified by having time to get to know a person and flexibility to manage changes in circumstances, but a review of research literature found no evidence of how best to achieve this.

The findings also highlighted the importance of good practice in service organisation, including flexible systems and coordination via case management, and here some robust research evidence of effective services was identified. Getting it right at this level could be the key to achieving true personalisation for people with severe and complex needs.

The study had three stages: (1) consultation with people with complex needs, their carers, and members of specialist organisations; (2) a review of research literature; and (3) identification of case examples with the desired features.

A summary of the project and details of the ten case examples can be found at:
http://php.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/2225/

Caroline Glendinning, Kate Gridley, Jenni Brooks (Social Policy Research Unit, University of York)

Social Work Practices: Report of the National Evaluation

This independent evaluation was carried out by a team led by Nicky Stanley at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) that included staff from UCLan, the Institute of Education and King's College London.

Five Social Work practice (SWP) pilots were commissioned by English local authorities to provide services for looked after children and care leavers. They were introduced to discover whether smaller independent social work-led organisations could increase continuity for looked after children and improve staff morale.

The evaluation found that the pilots remained dependent on local authorities for various services and functions. The nature of the relationship with the commissioning local authority emerged as key to the success or otherwise of the pilots. SWPs' reliance on local authorities make it unlikely that they will be able to replace the functions of local authority children's services.

The achievements of the SWP pilots included increased opportunities for direct work with children; good quality support for carers and small integrated teams offering a personalised service; and, in some cases, creative work with birth parents and/or user-friendly premises. SWP staff and other stakeholders identified reduced caseloads as salient and a clear focus on the looked after/care leaver population without responsibility for child protection work also contributed to increased opportunities for direct work.

However continuity of key worker was not consistently achieved also the lack of information and choice children reported in relation to transfer into SWPs was concerning and SWP children did not appear to find staff more responsive or accessible than their counterparts in the comparison sites. Higher levels of staff morale in the SWPs were offset by the increased risk of job insecurity in the context of a short term contracted out service.

The full report and summary are available at:
https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-RR233