

Project Summary

Evaluation of *Head Heart Hands* – introducing social pedagogy into foster care, for the Fostering Network

Policy and practice background

The Fostering Network, the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in fostering, is leading an initiative to introduce social pedagogy into foster care, beginning with six demonstration sites in England and Scotland. Social pedagogy is a well-established approach to looking after children in many European countries. It focuses on three ways of working, using *Head* (theory and research knowledge), *Heart* (an emphasis on the emotional needs of children and the central role of relationships between children, their foster carers and the social care professionals who support them) and *Hands* (a focus on practical activities as opportunities for building relationships and learning). Social Pedagogy in fostering in the UK is a new initiative, and the demonstration programme hopes to support cultural and system changes in the six sites that will improve the quality of foster care as well as produce excellent outcomes for children and young people. The six sites include local authority fostering services as well as independent foster care providers, and each site will be supported by one or more trained social pedagogues.

Background to the project

The research is being carried out as a collaboration between Loughborough University's Centre for Child and Family Research, the Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation, and Catch 22's National Care Advisory Service (<http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/> <http://www.catch-22.org.uk/NCAS>), and is funded by the Fostering Network. The evaluation will focus both on the impact of the programme on children, young people and foster carers; and on implementation processes and outcomes for the demonstration sites, the areas in which they work, and for foster care more widely.

Project design

Between 2012 and 2016, the team will investigate outcomes for children's wellbeing using methods that will include peer research; impact on foster carers by means of on-line surveys and qualitative interviews; and mapping implementation processes and outcomes for the sites and the wider service systems in which they are situated using a method of case study and other methods. The implementation research is led by the Colebrooke Centre and is using theoretical frameworks and tools developed from the field of implementation science and practice to explore stages of implementation, drivers of implementation quality, and to understand the fit between implementation outcomes and outcomes for children and foster carers.

Publications and outputs

The team will report regularly to the Fostering Network throughout the four year project, with the aim of delivering practical and actionable feedback at key stages that can help the programme as it develops. There will be a final integrated report available at the end of the evaluation which will be published by the Fostering Network.

Contact

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See also: www.fostering.net/head-heart-hands

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