



PERMANENTLY PROGRESSING?

Building secure futures
for children in Scotland



An important research study in your area

During the year 2015-16, 11,447 children in Scotland were looked after by local authorities away from home and were 'accommodated' in foster care, residential placements or with relatives due to concerns about their welfare. Many of these children return to their parents, but for some the decision is taken to permanently place them with adoptive parents, long-term foster carers or kinship carers. Until now we have known little about the pathways to a permanent substitute home taken by children in Scotland.

How are decisions made and how are they implemented? What influences the choice of permanent placement? How long do children wait? What promotes feelings of belonging? What contact do they have with their birth families, if any? Also, and crucially, how do children fare in relation to their health, social relationships and educational progress?

Since 2014, the Permanently Progressing? study has been investigating these questions in relation to a large cohort of children in Scotland who were accommodated during the year 2012-13 before they were five years old. The study team is led by Dr. Helen Whincup at the University of Stirling and Professor Nina Biehal at the University of York in collaboration with the Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland, and is funded by a legacy. It will be completed in 2018.

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This ground breaking research is the first to compare pathways and outcomes for young children in Scotland who are permanently placed away from home. Due to the differences in law and policy between Scotland and the other countries of the UK, it is essential to investigate these issues in the Scottish context. One strand of the study is the impact of parental substance/alcohol misuse on decision making and outcomes for children, as this is a factor in the lives of many children placed away from home, and has been the subject of considerable debate.

Phase One

The five components of the first stage of the study:

The Policy and Decision-Making Study

This involves interviews and focus groups with managers and staff in 9 local authorities, to explore policy issues, the permanency planning process and the impact of recent legislative changes.

The Pathways Study

This is using national data (Children Looked After Survey [CLAS]) to investigate the care pathways, over four years, of all under-5 year olds who were accommodated in 2012-13.

The Outcomes Study

This is being undertaken in 19 local authorities. Social workers, foster or kinship carers and adoptive parents of approximately 500 children selected for the study are being asked to complete brief online questionnaires.

The Qualitative Study

This involves interviews with carers and adoptive parents about their views and experiences. With consent, and where it is appropriate, children will also be invited to take part in short play-session interviews. Brief phone interviews will be conducted with the social workers of the children.

Literature Reviews

They are being carried out to examine the research evidence on stability and outcomes for fostered and adopted children and the impact of parental substance misuse.

Sharing the study's findings:

The researchers plan to produce a book and a series of reports and papers outlining the range of findings, as well as summaries of key messages for policy and practice. There will also be a conference, seminars and other opportunities for further discussion and reflection on what can be learned for anyone working with, or supporting, looked after and accommodated children in Scotland. The findings will also be embedded into the postgraduate courses run by University of Stirling and AFA Scotland, as well as future training and workshops.

Phase Two

The Permanently Progressing? study will make an important contribution to research on decision-making and outcomes for children permanently placed away from home and will have an impact on policy and practice in Scotland, across the UK, and internationally. However, it has the potential to offer an even greater contribution if it could serve as the first phase of a longitudinal study. Policy changes including the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007, have led to an increase in the number of children adopted from care, while the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 supports the place of kinship care, so it is particularly important to investigate the longer-term impact of legislative and policy developments on outcomes for children. The research team are seeking funding, initially for a second phase, to follow up the children 7-8 years after they were accommodated, and will reconnect with participating local authorities in 2019/2020.

Further information:

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