

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

Lunchtime Seminar

Trauma & Relationships in Foster Care

Fiona Templeton

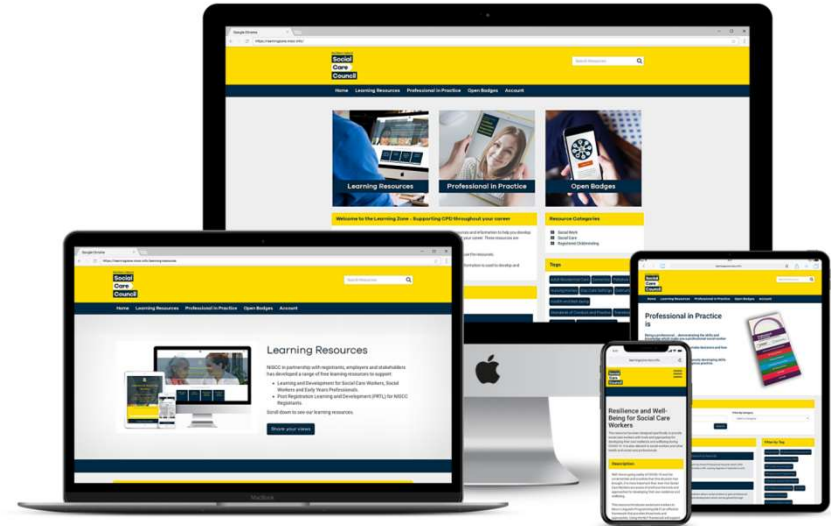
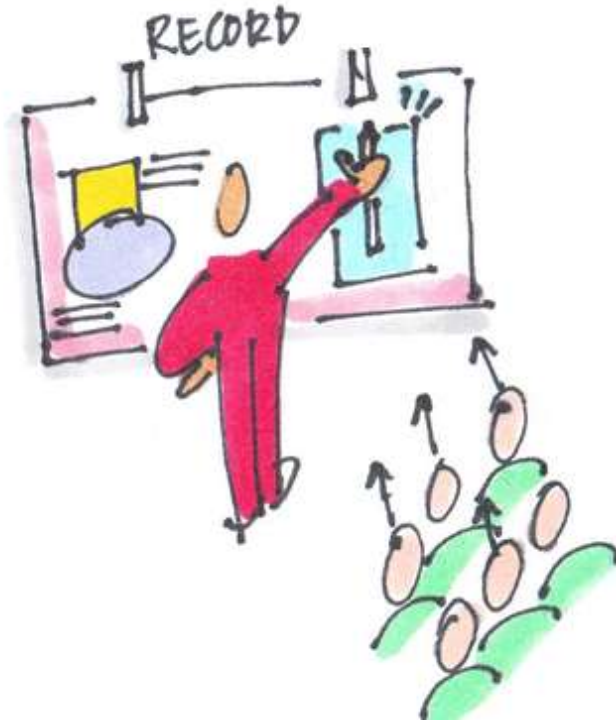
Elizabeth Lyttle

Laura Butler

**We make a difference to
thousands of people's lives**

Welcome

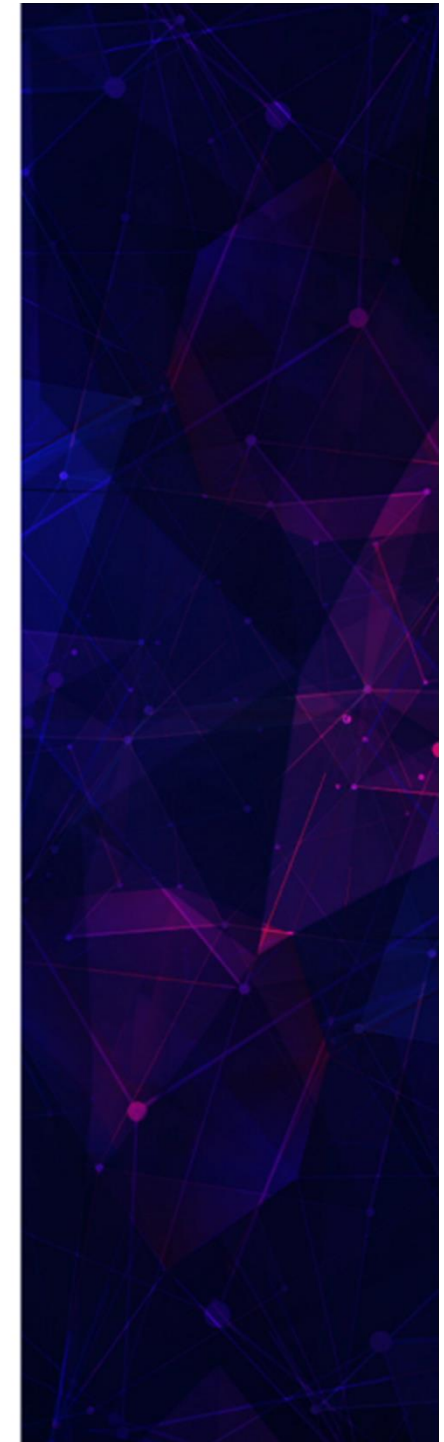
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Introduction



Lunchtime Seminar

Fiona Templeton



'My experience of
school'
The perspective of
adopted young people
aged 16-21 years

Fiona Templeton



I AM AWARE THAT I AM LESS THAN
SOME PEOPLE PREFER ME TO BE
BUT MOST PEOPLE ARE UNAWARE
THAT I AM SO MUCH MORE THAN
WHAT THEY SEE.



AYSAYAKO || TUMBLR

education is a
**top
priority**
for the majority of
established
adoptive families
Adoption Barometer'
(2019)

Adopted young
people can be
invisible
in the school
population



**permanently
excluded**
at a rate just over **20
times** that of the
general pupil
population.
Adoption UK, (2017)

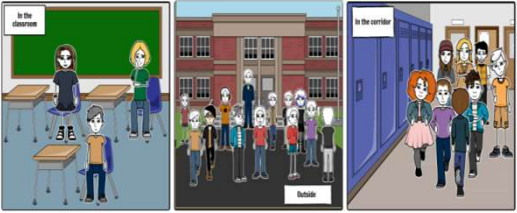
Systematic
narrative review
highlighted that
we need to hear
from the young
people
themselves

Conducted by the researcher

Home of the participant or Adoption Uk office

Face to face Semi-structured interviews

Visual prompts



Create your own at Storyboard That

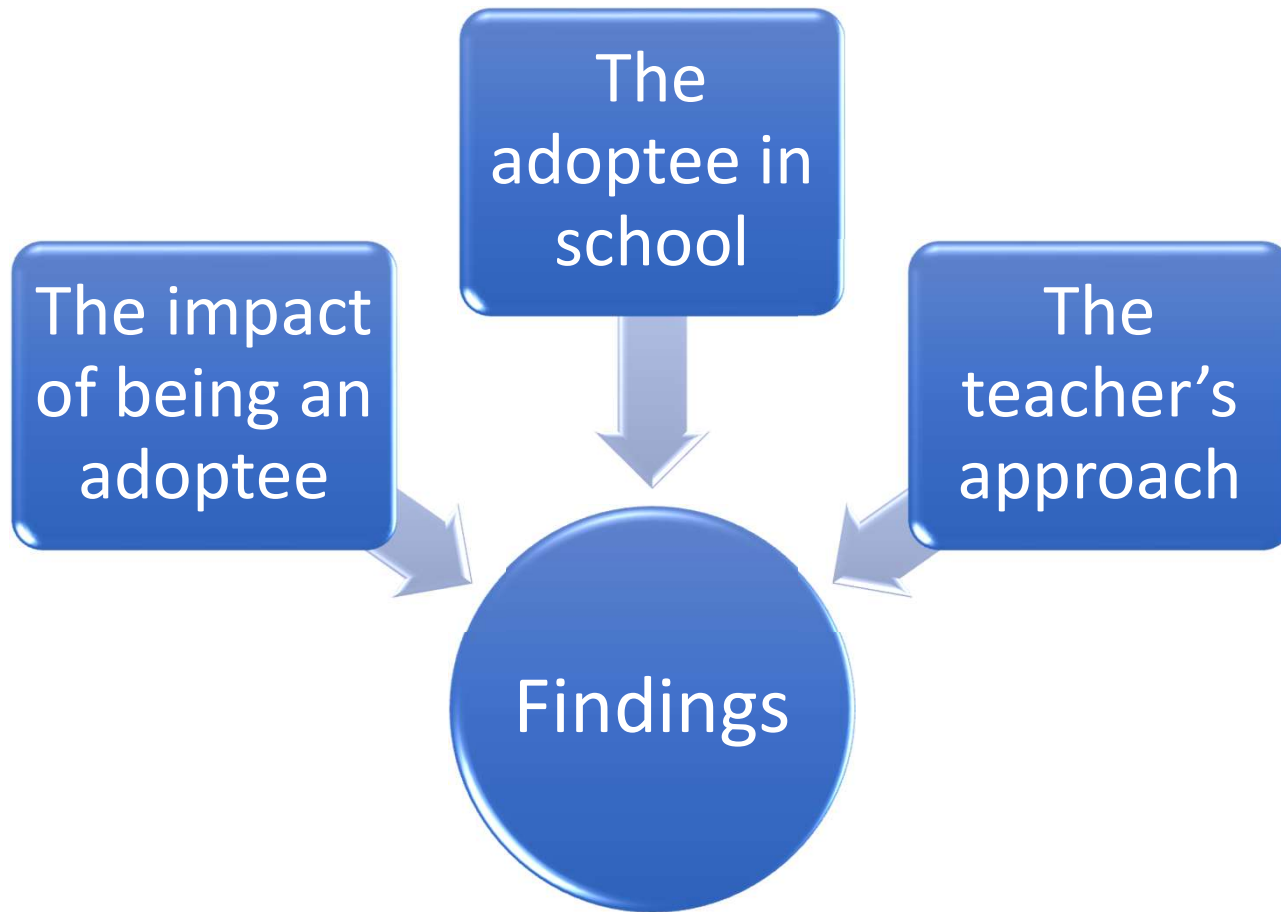
Aged 16-21 years

Adopted from care within UK

Attended main stream school in NI for at least one year

Not currently involved in a legal dispute with any school





The Impact of Being an Adoptee



Loss

Still to this day I wonder if my mum had more kids... I don't know about.'

'... you don't really trust anybody.'

'If I'm going to the doctors, they're asking me about my genes...'

'It's a bit like you're the alien of the family.'

Trauma

'There was abuse and neglect and... there's a whole list of things.'

'You don't have a choice at all.'

'You never cared about being adopted as much as whenever you get into secondary school.'

Personal understanding of adoption

The Adoptee in school

Relationships

'I never really struggled with making (friends)... it was more maintaining friendships because I always had a distrust.'

'I always struggled to involve myself with friend groups.'

'Sometimes it can be hard for an adopted young person to ... manage lots of different relationships within school.'



The Adoptee in school

Behaviour



'I ...had a lack of respect for all of the school workers... except some... who ... **were able to recognise the signs of trauma.'**

My mum was in and out of the school every day for me being bad I was just a wee s--- in school. **But there was problems there.'**

'For about half the year my behaviour was quite horrific as in physical altercations every couple of days.'

4 out of 9 moved secondary due to issues with behaviour.

'Teachers never asked why. They never wanted to know the reason ... I was so upset... They always assumed I was being a brat... and so that led me to go mad and constantly argue and argue even more.'

The Adoptee in school

Lesson Content



Lessons on my life story

'There was a big argument with my mum about the homework because it turned into her having to tell me everything about adoption and her having to say, 'Actually... I don't know what you weighed.'



'Our science teacher was ...talking about genes and she was... asking parent's... hair colour... and eye colour, ... and I was like, I don't really know that.'

Lessons on genetics



The Adoptee in school

Environment



'I felt like actually taking in a **golf club** and pretending I was blind most of the time to **keep people away** from me...'

Crowded corridors

Banging doors

'**Every day** would be like 'I don't really like talking to strangers...'

Teachers' approach

'When teachers responded to me aggressively... that never worked.'

'(My parents) weren't able to cope... I think in one year I had ... 57 detentions.'



'Everything was working out really well for me... I got the contribution to community life award... I had all this positivity coming in...'



A controlling and punitive approach was ineffective and degrading

informed

empathetic

supportive

Discussion

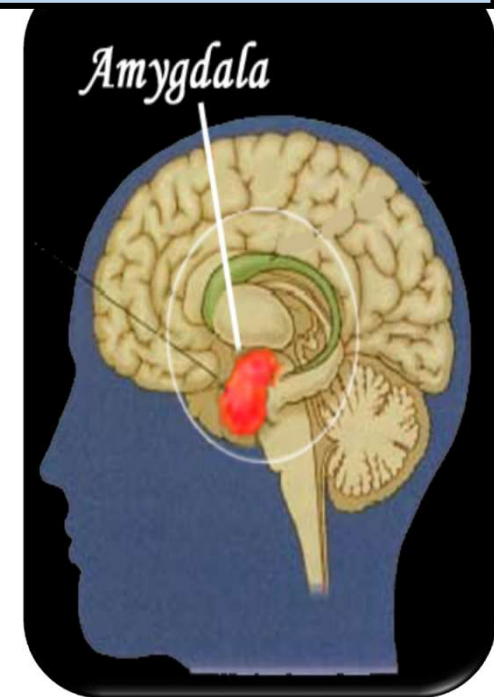
‘... nervous system is hardwired at an elevated level’ and these challenging behaviours ‘are demonstrative of the internal chaotic world churning inside.’

Forbes (2012)

‘Trauma affected children can ‘collapse emotionally when they feel overwhelmed or stressed. It does not take much for them to quickly unravel...’ *Bomber 2013*

‘This means that seemingly minor threats can cause dramatic changes in behaviour.’

Department of Education – ‘Putting Care Into Education’ (2018)



Department of Education Figures School year 2018-2019

980
GIRLS

3569
BOYS

Total suspensions - 4549

2321 suspensions (31.4%)

'Persistent infringements of school rules.'

www.education-ni.gov.uk

Total expulsions - 30

19 from **Key Stage 3** (Years 8 to 10)

The most common reason
(11 out of 30 expulsions)

'Persistent infringements of school rules'

www.education-ni.gov.uk



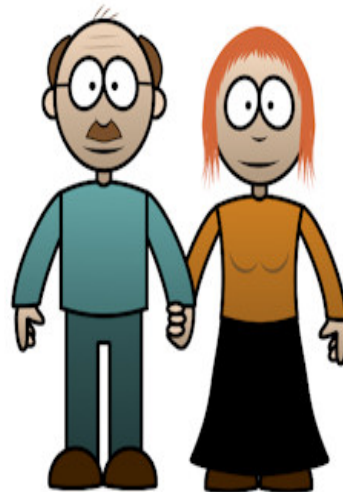
A policy of exclusion or isolation can encourage ‘... a child to go off into its own world and dissociate, exacerbating the type of emotional disconnection found in attachment disorders.’

Purvis, Cross, Lyons Sunshine, (2018)



‘...care-experienced children tend to struggle with the ... demands of school and... **they do better in some schools than others.**’

Department of Education – ‘Putting Care into Education’ (2018)



How do we know which school will suit best?

Education

- Training on the impact of developmental trauma and how it can impact on a child in the school environment for all student and established teachers
- Review of school discipline policies in light of the findings.
- Education, Training and Inspectorate (ETI) to include a report of how attachment aware a school is following inspections.
- Identified advocates for adopted young people in schools.



Health and Social Care

- On going training of social workers in the delivery of life story material
- On going training of social workers on the impact of trauma
- Training of prospective adopters on the impact of early life trauma and loss, a therapeutic approach to managing behaviour and importance of life story work.
- Ongoing support to adoptive families particularly on the approach of adolescence.



TAKE AWAY

- Be curious
- Recognise that it can be hard to trust you
- Work to create an emotionally safe environment
- Record information carefully
- Learn more about the impact of trauma
- Remember there is more to the person than you are currently seeing

References

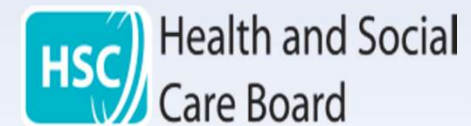
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 - Bridging the Gap
<https://www.adoptionuk.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=e460b99a-4ebb-4348-bd23-64a50d747901>
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 - Keck G C (2009) *Parenting adopted adolescents*, USA: NavPress
 - Purvis K B, Cross D R, Lyons Sunshine W (2007) *The Connected Child*, New York: The McGraw Hill Companies
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- ❖ Fiona Templeton, Anne McGlade & Lelia Fitzsimons (2020) 'My experience of school': the perspective of adopted young people aged 16–21 years, *Pastoral Care in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2020.1855675

Lunchtime Seminar

Elizabeth Lyttle
Service User and Carer

Experiences of adoption disruption in Northern Ireland: the parents' perspective

Elizabeth Lyttle
(service user and carer)





Adoption

Research

Selwyn, J., Meakings, S. and Wijedasa, D. (2015) *Beyond the adoption order: challenges, interventions and adoption disruption*. London: British Association of Adoption & Fostering.

Palacios, J., Rolock, N., Selwyn, J. and Barbosa-Ducharne, M. (2018) *Adoption Breakdown: Concept, Research, and Implications*. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 29, 130-142.

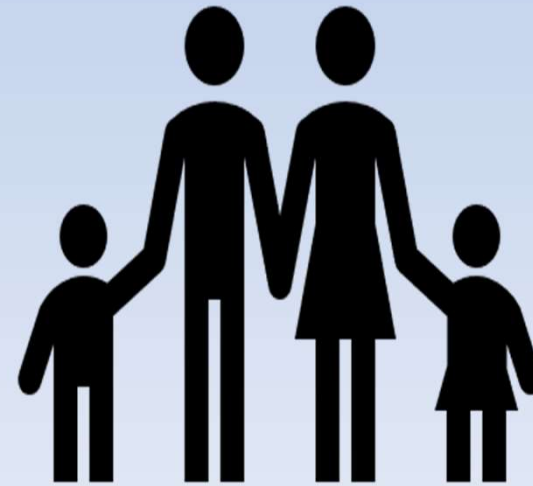
Palacios, J., Adroher, S., Brodzinsky, D.M., Grotevant, H.D., Johnson, D.E., Juffer, F., Martinez-Mora, L., Muhamedrahimov, R.J., Selwyn, J., Simmonds, J. and Tarren-Sweeney, M. (2019) *Adoption in the service of child protection*. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 25 (2), 57-72.

13 families

At least one parent in each family originated from NI

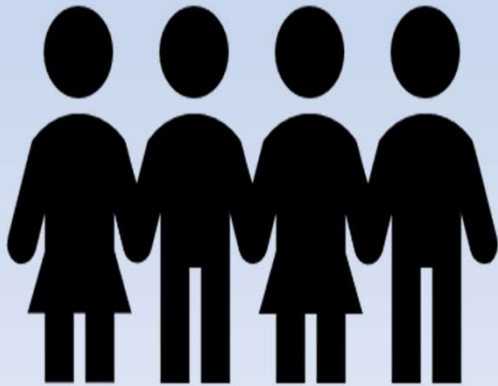
The children were adopted from ...

- Care system Northern Ireland (8)
- Care system other parts of UK (3)
- From abroad (2)



16 children

5 boys 11 girls



- 11 individual disruptions
- A sibling group of 2
- A sibling group of 3

Age at disruption

Youngest

8

Oldest

16

Most common age

14

Children's journey to adoption

At home with birth family

Range 0 – 60 months:

- 7 children 13 months or less with birth family
- 7 at home between 2 and 3 years
- 2 brothers left their family when they were 5

Reasons for leaving

- Neglect/abuse reported
- one – relinquished at birth



Children's journey to adoption

1 move

1 child was placed for adoption at birth
2 siblings went to concurrent foster carers

1 foster placement

8 children stayed in one foster placement for periods between 17 – 52 months

Multiple moves/carers

2 children had multiple moves in foster-care, one of these had a failed adoption placement

A sibling group of 3 lived in an orphanage for 3 years



Age at placement for adoption

Birth



Between 18 and 26 months



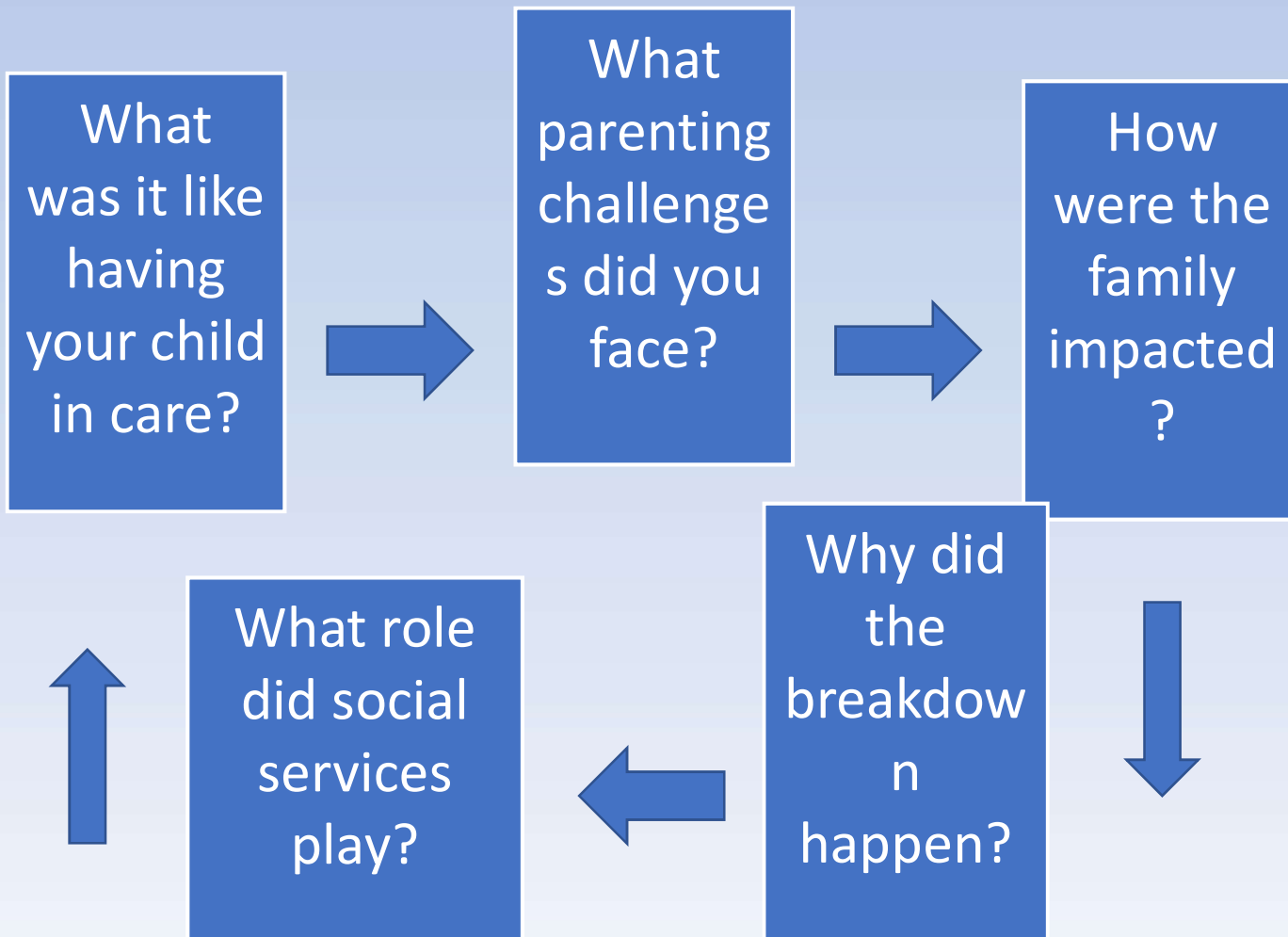
Between 33 and 40 months



Between 5 and 8 years



Semi-structured interviews



Findings

- Safety issues
- Support networks
- Searching children
- Social Services
- Stress and strain

Findings

Safety issues



“she’d destroyed the house... the police had come over the last two weeks and they said to the social worker that day... ‘you take her because she’s going to kill somebody’”

“we didn’t realise how it was affecting (brother’s) mental health ... it got to the point where we could have lost him”

“she’d regularly run away ... to be with boys, obsessed with boys from an early age, very overtly sexual”

Findings

Support Networks

“it’s like it’s nearly your shameful secret we didn’t get into the detail of it really at all, sitting in the police station for the fourth time”

“We became kinda isolated family-wise cause you couldn’t tell anybody anything because it would be ‘wise up sure she’s only a teenager’ or you know, things like that”



Findings

Searching Children



“she wanted to be in care like her sister... she had said she would rather have a bad family than this family... before she’d even left home she had changed her Facebook page to her birth name so she’d already made preparations in her head”

Findings

Social Services



“we certainly weren’t prepared for the kind of stuff we were facing”

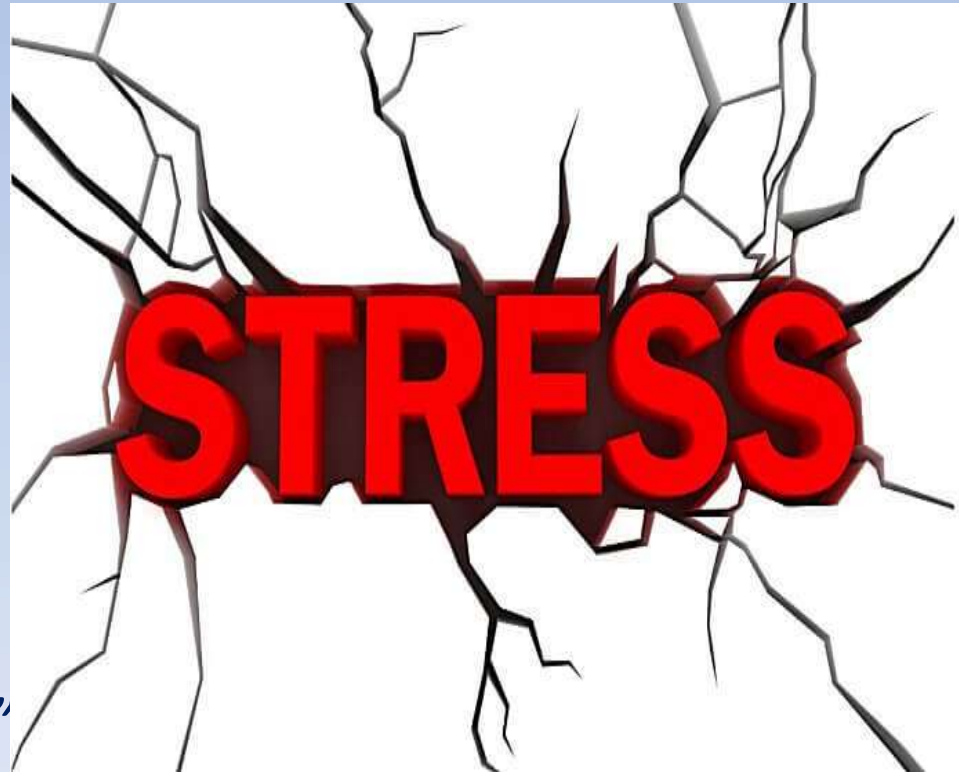
“you need continuity, the last thing you need in crisis and trauma is a new bubbly person who comes into your life and thinks that it’s all fine and dry and it’ll be sorted out in three months’ time”

“you feel that all the time you’re being judged”

“we’d relinquished her into care because we couldn’t keep her safe and then when she’s in care she’s actually less safe”

Findings

Stress & Strain



"I had to give up my job"

"we were walking on eggshells constantly ...as soon as you heard (child's) foot on the stair you were on high alert"

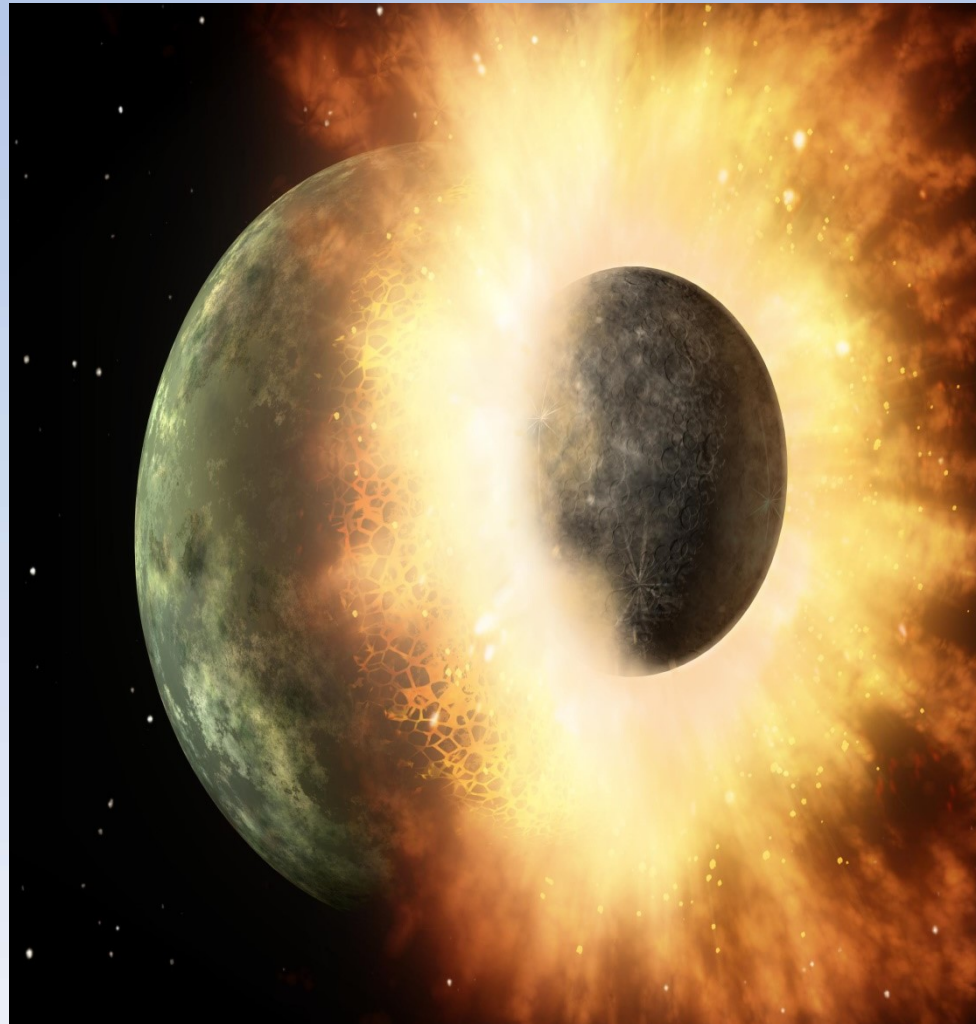
"you have to become numb ... you just have to shut it all down within you because otherwise how do you get through it? How do you get through it?"

"an enormous strain on the whole family, an enormous strain on the marriage"

“It’s like two
worlds
colliding”

- The world of
the child
- The world of
the parents
- The world of
Social
Services

***fear.. trust..
control***



Recommendations

Honesty and openness at all stages of the adoption process

- *recruitment and preparation*
- *matching and placement*
- *post-adoption support*

Competent and trauma-informed workers

- *non-judgemental and kind, will listen to and believe parents*
- *assess carefully in consultation with parents*
- *work in partnership with parents to plan support*
- *stay with the family throughout their adoption journey*

Trauma Informed Care

“In recognising the impact of childhood adversity on child and adult outcomes, Trauma informed services strive to build trustworthy collaborative relationships with children and the important adults in their lives, as well as improve consistency and communication across linked organisations and sectors, with the aim of enhancing child and family capacity for resilience and recovery, and reducing organisational practices that may inadvertently exacerbate the detrimental effects of severe adversity.”

Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland & Queens University
Belfast (2018)

ACEs Evidence Review Developing Trauma informed Practice in Northern Ireland

Lunchtime Seminar

Trauma & Relationships in Foster Care

Laura Butler

Social Worker
Family Placement Team
NHSCT

Trauma & Relationships in Foster Care

Based on findings from the 2019 study: 'Foster Carers' Experiences of the Role of their Personal Support Networks in Helping Develop Resilience.'

Laura Butler, Social Worker
Family Placement Team
NHSCT

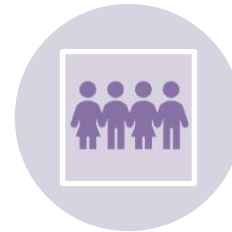


"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Context & Background



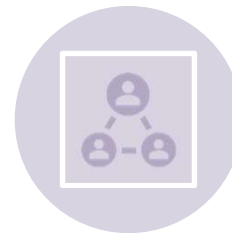
Foster carers – provide a vital role in caring for children who cannot live with their own families, (Randle et al., 2017)



Children entering care rises annually.



Caring for distressed children is stressful - affects recruitment & retention of foster carers



Need to evaluate and utilise natural support systems.



“To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community”

Study Focus

- Semi-structured interviews with foster carers – 9 to 30 years' experience.
- Explored thoughts, feelings & perceptions of:
- Challenges of fostering,
- Role of the support of family & friends' in building resilience to continue to foster.



"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Findings

- Foster carers used ‘trial and error’ & therapeutic approaches with trauma-experienced children.
- Determination not to give up on children despite extremely challenging behaviour.

...It just depends how you look at your role...I look at it as providing them with as normal a family as what I would have had and that wasn't about sending them anywhere every time, they caused a bit of disruption...



"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Findings

Foster carers shared
common goal to
protect children's
well-being.

Missing cues from a
child was upsetting.

Child placement
endings, especially
breakdowns
traumatic - impact
on foster carers'
resilience



*"To deliver excellent integrated services in
partnership with our community"*

Findings



Experienced foster families - self-contained, coping alone - informing professionals afterwards.



Interventions not always helpful



Some thought their self-sufficiency was relied upon.



Foster carers spoke either *very* positively or *very* critically of professional interventions.



One professional could have immense impact on motivation.



Some received support from their friends or family, others were reluctant to involve them.



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Findings

Protection of children's 'social image' & privacy.

Understanding of the fostering role crucial to family/friend support being beneficial.

Additional responsibilities of fostering not always recognised

Some family/friends distanced themselves from fostering role.

Some foster carers experienced negative attitudes from friends/family.



"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Findings



“...we could never turn to her for support... it was like we went into this on our own and we found that...You could never discuss the children with her...”

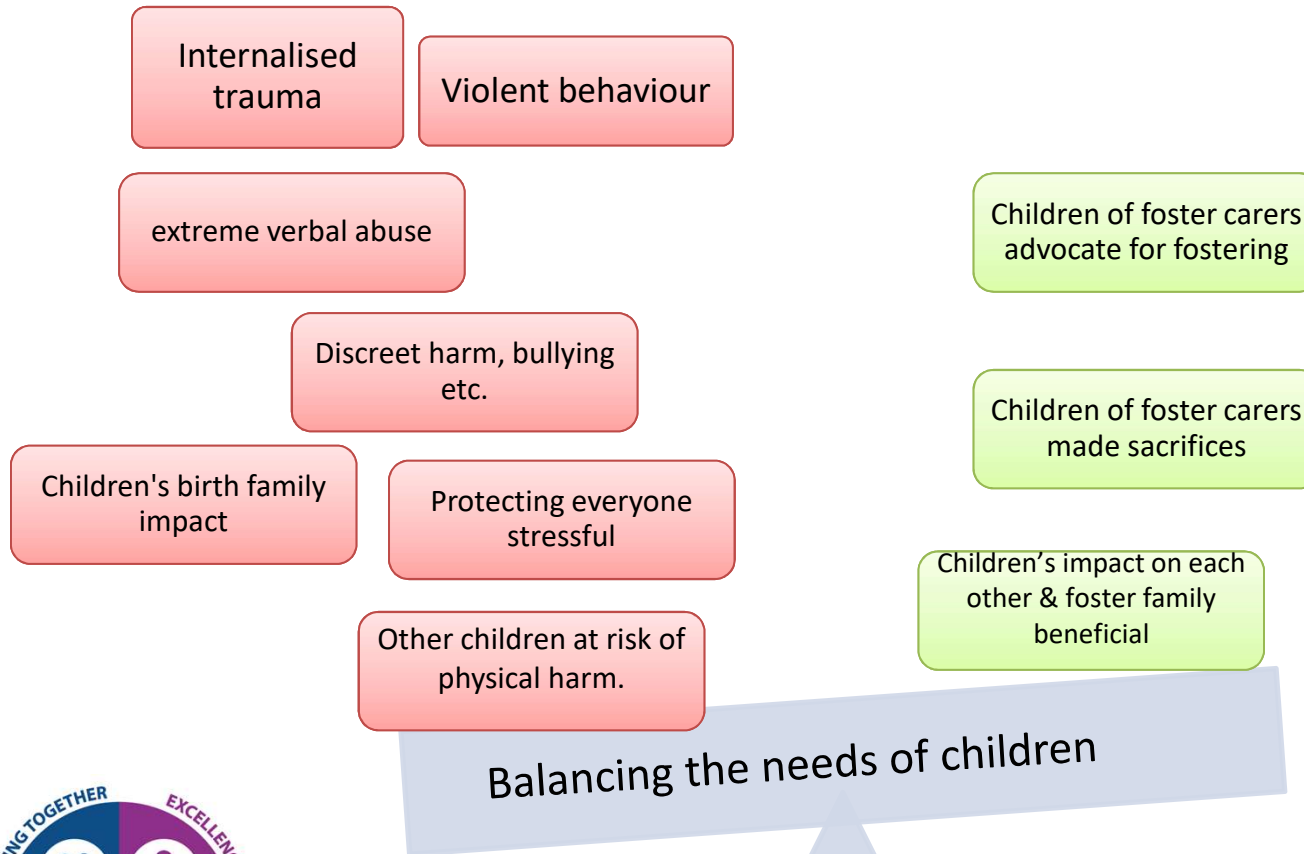


“...after (my husband) died everybody thought that I'd just give up and I was very disappointed about that...”



“To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community”

Findings



"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Conclusions & Recommendations

Recognise value of people with insight into fostering to promote support for foster families.

Encourage networking between foster carers.

Recognise unique stresses of fostering, review expectations on foster carers to cope alone & provide more support around placement breakdowns.

Provide creative support & reduce input gradually.

Ensure means to report deteriorating relationships with professionals.

Promote positive relationships between birth parents and foster carers.

Explore promotion of 'connectedness.'



"To deliver excellent integrated services in partnership with our community"

Any Questions?

- Thank you!



*"To deliver excellent integrated services in
partnership with our community"*

Feedback

Thank You

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