CHILDREN’S MINISTER LAUNCHES NEW CENTRE FOR RESEARCH IN FOSTERING AND EDUCATION

Children’s Minister Edward Timpson MP officially launched a new and innovative research centre at the University of Oxford last week (27/9/2012) that sets out to improve the lives of children and young people in foster care.

The Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education, based in the Department of Education, is thought to be the only dedicated research centre in the world to examine how policy makers and agencies can improve educational outcomes for children and young people in foster care. The Rees Centre will involve carers, fostered children and young people and service providers in identifying urgent areas for research.

Edward Timpson MP, Minister for Children and Families, said: “Foster carers make a massive difference to the lives of vulnerable children by helping to give them a loving and caring home, and the much needed stability for them to succeed at school. We need to know what works and why, so that we can give more children in care a better chance to succeed. That is why the work of Rees Centre is so important to children across the country. I very much look forward to working with the centre.”

Centre Director Professor Judy Sebba said: “Fostering is an under-researched area and my ambition is that the Rees Centre begins to fill the gap. Children in care deserve only the best and the centre will promote its research findings to inform carers and providers.

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“Existing research shows there is a huge gap in educational attainment when comparing the GCSE grades of looked after children with the general population. We need to raise the expectations in schools, and support foster carers so they in turn support their fostered children’s education. Research can provide new insights into this area and the new centre is unique in bringing education and fostering together for the first time.”

Coinciding with the launch, the centre has published an international review of research on why people become foster carers. The next research project to be implemented by the centre will examine ways of tackling the current recruitment crisis of foster carers in England. Researchers from the centre will study carers in England specifically, asking them why they started fostering children. Why people foster is a topic of urgent interest to policy makers and practitioners because the current number of available foster carers lags behind the increasing number of children and young people seeking placements. The research will be guided by carers, some of whom will also receive training to interview other carers as part of the research.

The Rees Centre is named after Jan Rees, founder and non-executive director at Core Assets. Core Assets, a major provider of children’s services in the UK and internationally, is giving financial support to the centre.

Jan said: “I am enormously excited to put my name to such an august endeavour; practice-based research into the mechanics of fostering is an undeveloped area. We hope it will discover more about what makes the best foster parents, what constitutes the most efficacious support and what conditions children need to flourish in order to maximise their academic, social and emotional potential. To have Oxford University support our efforts is beyond my wildest expectations and we hope that this centre will grow into a worldwide resource.”

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The new centre will draw on the world-leading expertise of the Department of Education at the University of Oxford, which carries out cutting-edge, policy-related research into how disadvantaged children and young people can be helped to achieve. Its researchers will also include academics working in related disciplines and faculties at the University, particularly in the Department of Social Policy and Intervention, as well as from other institutions both in the UK and in other parts of the world.

Ends

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Notes for Editors:

*The Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education will be led by Professor Judy Sebba. Professor Ian Sinclair, Emeritus Professor of Social Work at the University of York, will be a consultant to the centre. Much of his research work focuses on why and how foster placements are effective or break down. The centre will also draw on the expertise of other leading researchers from Oxford Department of Education including Professor Kathy Sylva, an expert in early years provision and Professor Anne Edwards, an expert on different approaches to multi-professional learning. See http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/research/rees-centre/about-the-rees-centre/

*Professor Judy Sebba is the inaugural Director of the Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education and Professor of Fostering and Education. From 1997-2003 Judy was Senior Adviser (Research), Standards and Effectiveness Unit Department for Education and Skills, responsible for advising ministers on the research strategy and quality of research relating to schools. She also worked on the relationship between special educational needs and the standards agenda. During this period, on behalf of ministers, Judy commissioned the ‘EPPI centre’ to develop systematic reviews in education and subsequently was involved in extending this to social work and social care. Prior to being a government advisor, Judy was a Lecturer at the University of Cambridge undertaking teaching and research on school improvement, assessment, inclusion and continuing professional development (across professions). Drawing on a major grant from the National Curriculum Council, Judy co-authored three books and six international journal articles on the national curriculum and learning difficulties, which were the basis of Government guidance on the national curriculum for pupils with special educational needs (1992) and with colleagues from local authorities she drafted the first Ofsted handbook for training on the inspection of special needs and special schools. http://www.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/directory/professor-judy-sebba/
Core Assets Group is a leading independent provider of children’s services with headquarters based in Bromsgrove. Established 17 years ago, the international group now operates in 10 countries, delivering a range of social care services. Companies within the Group include Foster Care Associates, Core Children's Services, Outcomes UK and Fostering First International. With a growing portfolio, Core Assets provides services ranging from foster care and adoption support, educational provision, disability services, children's domiciliary care and contact services, through to consultancy, training, health and social care recruitment and resourcing. The founder-owned Group aims to 'make a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and families'. http://www.coreassets.com