

**An illuminative evaluation of foster carers' experiences of attending  
an Attachment Theory and Practice training programme offered by  
a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for Looked After  
Children.**

By

Mandy Marie Burton

The thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
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## ABSTRACT

### Background

In 2006, a review of the research and literature in relation to the mental health needs of children in care, led to the rationale for providing training to foster carers and the network of professionals surrounding the child, offered as an integral part of the service provided by a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for Looked After Children (CAMHS/LAC) in the South of England. Individuals who are prepared to become foster carers need solid mental health training to successfully parent children who have experienced severe trauma and present with a range of emotional and behavioural difficulties (Dorsey et al 2008). Foster carers expressed the need for more information and support to improve their understanding of mental health issues when caring for their looked after child. In order to meet this need and given the dearth of evaluation within the literature regarding foster carers' experience of attending mental health training, this research study provides an evaluation of the process and outcome of attending training. Understanding the experience of the training from a foster carer's perspective was paramount in order to target support to carers to both prevent placement breakdown, deterioration in childrens' health and emotional wellbeing and for service development

The overall objectives of this research study were to explore the experience of professional foster carers before, during and after receiving training; to evaluate the knowledge gained from the training and explore their perception of how this affected their practice and identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of the training.

### Methodology

An in-depth illuminative evaluation for two cohorts of foster carers used a mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to explore process and outcomes; with the main emphasis upon the comprehensive collection of qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected in the form of two validated questionnaires, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) (Goodman, 1999) and the Family Impact Questionnaire (FIQ) (Donenberg & Baker, 1993), a knowledge questionnaire which was piloted and devised by the researcher and a satisfaction questionnaire devised by the local City Council. Qualitative data took the form of a series of semi structured interviews pre training, immediately post training and twelve weeks follow up training. A diary interview method was also used to complement the data gathered within the follow up interviews (Zimmerman & Weider, 1977).

## **Results**

Results from the quantitative questionnaires suggest that foster carers provide care for foster children in the South of England with a high level of need in relation to their mental health. Overall the SDQ results did not reach statistical significance but suggest a trend towards reduced perceived emotional and behavioural difficulties presented by children in their care. The FIQ identified that both foster children and birth children have a high impact on several areas of family functioning which continued over the twelve week period of the study. Increased knowledge was measured and showed statistically significant differences from baseline, which were retained over time and led to the reported positive change in foster carers' levels of confidence, ability to advocate for their child in a school setting and a sense of empowerment for foster carers.

An interpretive approach to analyzing data was used through the aid of thematic content analysis using the *Framework Approach*. Findings from the qualitative data revealed ten themes and suggested that foster carers experience training as a journey of awareness in relation to understanding the mental health needs of the children in their care.

## **Conclusion**

Illuminative evaluation has provided description and interpretation to unravel the experience of group training, whereby foster carers negotiate, choose and create their own learning in relation to individual needs. There appears to be a move away from foster carers being passive recipients of knowledge towards the proactive creation and sharing of knowledge within which carers from all levels of experience contribute.

Recommendations include a review of the existing package of training, involving the aid of foster carers input, to co-develop appropriate training programmes.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Title page</b>	<b>(i)</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>(ii)</b>
<b>Table of contents</b>	<b>(iv)</b>
<b>List of tables</b>	<b>(ix)</b>
<b>List of figures</b>	<b>(x)</b>
<b>Abbreviations</b>	<b>(xi)</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>(xiii)</b>
<b>Dissemination</b>	<b>(xiv)</b>
<b>Declaration</b>	<b>(xv)</b>
<b>Dedication</b>	<b>(xvi)</b>
<b>Chapter 1    Project Background</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1            Introduction	<b>1</b>
1.2            Looked After Children	<b>3</b>
1.2.1          Profile of Children in Care	<b>3</b>
1.2.2          Outcomes for Children in Care	<b>5</b>
1.3            Mental Health of Children in Care	<b>7</b>
1.3.1          National Comparisons of the Mental Health Needs of Children in Care	<b>7</b>
1.3.2          International Comparisons of the Mental Health Needs of Children in Care	<b>9</b>
1.3.3          Mental Health and Stability of Placement	<b>10</b>
1.4            Government Policy	<b>12</b>
1.5            Foster care in the United Kingdom	<b>16</b>
1.5.1          Foster Care	<b>16</b>
1.5.2          Origins of Foster Care Training	<b>16</b>
1.5.3          Standards for Foster Care	<b>18</b>
1.5.4          Charter for Foster Care	<b>19</b>
1.5.5          Dedicated Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for Children in Care	<b>20</b>
1.6            Literature Review of Training Interventions	<b>21</b>
1.6.1          Search Strategy	<b>21</b>
1.6.2          Training Interventions	<b>22</b>
1.6.2.1        Training Groups: Cognitive Behavioural Programmes	<b>24</b>
1.6.2.2        Training Groups: Treatment Foster Care	<b>27</b>

	Programmes	
1.6.2.3	Training Groups: Mixed model Programmes	28
1.7	Background to Research Project	33
1.7.1	Demographics of a Local Authority in the South of England	33
1.7.2	Children in Care for a Local Authority in the South of England	34
1.7.3	Role of a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for Looked After Children (CAMHS/LAC)	35
1.7.4	CAMHS/LAC Foster care training	36
1.8	Conclusion	38
<b>Chapter 2</b>	<b>Methodology</b>	<b>40</b>
2.1	Introduction	40
2.2	Evaluation	40
2.2.1	Illuminative Evaluation	40
2.3	Mixed Methodology	42
2.3.1	Qualitative Approach	42
2.3.2	Reflexivity	43
2.3.3	Quantitative Approach	45
2.3.4	Triangulation	45
2.4	Process of Research Design	48
2.4.1	Sampling Strategy	49
2.4.2	Recruitment	49
2.4.3	Participants	50
2.5	Ethical Approval: Process in Action	50
2.6	Conclusion	52
<b>Chapter 3</b>	<b>Quantitative Approach</b>	<b>54</b>
3.1	Introduction	54
3.2	Data Collection	55
3.2.1	Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	55
3.2.1.1	Administration	56
3.2.1.2	Scoring	56
3.2.1.3	Validation	57
3.2.2	Family Impact Questionnaire (FIQ)	57
3.2.2.1	Administration	58
3.2.2.2	Scoring	58
3.2.2.3	Validation	59
3.2.3	Knowledge Questionnaire	59
3.2.3.1	Construction and Pilot of the Knowledge Questionnaire	60
3.2.3.2	Administration	61
3.2.3.3	Scoring	61
3.2.3.4	Validation	61
3.2.4	Local Authority Evaluation Questionnaire	61
3.2.4.1	Administration	62
3.2.4.2	Scoring	62

3.2.4.3	Validation	62
3.3	Characteristics of the Research Participants	64
3.3.1	Combined Cohorts	64
3.4	Characteristics of Children	65
3.4.1	Foster Children in Placement	65
3.4.2	Birth Children in Placement	66
3.5	Analysis, Results and Discussion of Quantitative Questionnaires	67
3.5.1	Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)	67
3.5.1.1	Analysis	67
3.5.1.2	Results	68
3.5.1.3	Mean Scores	68
3.5.1.4	Individual SDQ Scores	71
3.5.1.5	Categories of Need	72
3.5.1.6	Discussion: Changes in Perception	75
3.5.1.7	Foster Children	76
3.5.1.8	Birth Children	79
3.5.1.9	Exploring the Data	82
3.5.2	Family Impact Questionnaire	85
3.5.2.1	Analysis	85
3.5.2.2	Results	86
3.5.2.3	Mean Scores	86
3.5.2.4	Discussion: Family Functioning	90
3.5.3	Knowledge Questionnaire	93
3.5.3.1	Analysis	93
3.5.3.2	Results	93
3.5.3.3	Discussion: Sustaining Knowledge over Time	95
3.5.4	Local Authority Evaluation Questionnaire	96
3.5.4.1	Analysis	96
3.5.4.2	Results	96
3.5.4.3	Discussion: High Satisfaction Achieved	98
3.6	Conclusion	99
<b>Chapter 4</b>	<b>Qualitative Approach</b>	<b>100</b>
4.1	Introduction	100
4.2	Data Collection	100
4.2.1	A Diary Interview	101
4.2.2	Semi-structured Interviews	102
4.2.2.1	Interview Schedule	103
4.2.2.2	Pre Training Schedule	103
4.2.2.3	Post Training Schedule	104
4.2.2.4	Follow Up Training Schedule	105
4.2.2.5	Venue	106
4.2.2.6	Audio-recording Equipment	107
4.2.2.7	Transcriptions of Interviews	107
4.2.2.8	Field Notes	108
4.2.2.9	Reflections on Interview Process	108
4.2.2.10	Participant Validation of Interviews	109
4.2.2.11	Validity	109

4.3	Data Analysis	110
4.3.1	Diary Interview Analysis	110
4.3.1.1	Diary Interview Findings	110
4.3.2	Semi-structured Interview Analysis	111
4.3.2.1	Framework Approach	111
4.3.2.2	Stages of Data Analysis	112
4.3.2.3	Stage One: Familiarisation	113
4.3.2.4	Stage Two: Identifying a Thematic Framework	114
4.3.2.5	Stage Three: Indexing	117
4.3.2.6	Stage Four: Charting	118
4.3.2.7	Stage Five: Mapping and Interpretation	119
4.4	Findings from the Qualitative Data	122
4.4.1	Discovery of Themes	124
4.4.2	Starting Out: Pre Training Themes	127
4.4.2.1	Theme One: Motivations	127
4.4.2.2	Theme Two: Expectations	134
4.4.3	Travelling Through: Post Training Themes	140
4.4.3.1	Theme Three: Sharing the Experiences of Others	140
4.4.3.2	Theme Four: Knowledge to ‘Complete the Jigsaw’	146
4.4.3.3	Theme Five: Format and Content	151
4.4.3.4	Theme Six: Personal Issues	156
4.4.4	Moving On: Follow Up Training	158
4.4.4.1	Theme Seven: Understanding the Emotional Needs of Children in Care	158
4.4.4.2	Theme Eight: Personal Insights and the ‘Rippling Effect’	163
4.4.4.3	Theme Nine: Parenting Skills	170
4.4.4.4	Theme Ten: Experience of CAMHS Support and Training	175
4.5	Discussion of Qualitative Findings	179
4.5.1	Journey of Discovery: Ten Themes	179
4.5.1.1	Starting Out: Motivations and Expectations	181
4.5.1.2	Travelling Through: Instant Post Training Reactions	185
4.5.1.3	Moving On: Personal Growth and Reflective Practice	186
4.6	Conclusion	188
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Illuminative Evaluation</b>	<b>189</b>
5.1	Introduction	189
5.2	Discussion and Summary of the Illuminative Evaluation	189
5.2.1	Quantitative Results	190
5.2.2	Qualitative Findings	192
5.2.3	Key Findings	196
5.3	Limitations of the Study	197

<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Professional Relevance of the Research and Professional Reflections</b>	<b>202</b>
6.1	Introduction	202
6.2	Practitioner Researcher	203
6.2.1	Suggestions for Further Research	203
6.2.2	Suggestions for Future Professional Clinical Practice	205
6.2.3	Suggestions for the debate on Mental Health Training for Foster Carers	206
6.3	Review of My Professional Development	207
6.4	Future Goals and Aspirations	208
<b>References</b>		<b>209</b>
<b>Appendices</b>		
1	Map of Search Strategy	(xvii)
2	Format for Documenting Evidence Based Papers	(xviii)
3	Content of training Programme	(xix)
4	Satisfaction Questionnaires	(xx)
5	Copy of Quantitative Questionnaires	(xxi)
6	Letter of Introduction	(xxii)
7	Information Sheet	(xxiii)
8	Consent Form	(xxiv)
9	Copy of Ethical Approval	(xxv)
10	Summary of Outcome Tools	(xxvi)
11	Summary of Knowledge Questionnaire Scores	(xxvii)
12	Characteristics of Research Participants: Foster Carers	(xxviii)
13	Visual Comparison of Characteristics of Foster Carers, Foster Children and Birth Children	(xxix)
14	SDQ Tables	(xxx)
15	Copy of Diary	(xxxi)
16	Interview Schedules	(xxxii)
17	Sensitivity Tool	(xxxiii)
18	Example of Pre- Training Charts	(xxxiv)
19	Charts of Themes	(xxxv)
20	Mind Map of Ten Central Themes	(xxxvi)
21	Photograph of Central Chart	(xxxvii)
22	Audit Trail	(xxxviii)
23	ACAMHS Presentation October 2010	(xxxix)
24	Solent NHS Trust Presentation May 2011	(xl)
25	Proposed Research Stages	(xli)



## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1: Table 1:</b> Age of Children on First Starting to be Looked After 2007 to 2011	<b>4</b>
<b>3: Table 2:</b> Characteristics of Research Participants	<b>65</b>
<b>3: Table 3:</b> Characteristics of Foster Children in Placement	<b>66</b>
<b>3: Table 4:</b> Characteristics of Birth Children in Placement	<b>67</b>
<b>3: Table 5:</b> Comparison of SDQ Mean Scores of Foster Children at Pre Training and Follow Up	<b>68</b>
<b>3: Table 6:</b> Comparison of SDQ Mean Scores of Birth Children at Pre Training and Follow Up	<b>68</b>
<b>3: Table 7:</b> A Repeated Measure Two-Way ANOVA of SDQ Mean Scores	<b>70</b>
<b>3: Table 8:</b> Percentage of Responses for Level of Need Pre and Follow Up SDQ for Foster Children	<b>73</b>
<b>3: Table 9:</b> Percentage of Responses for Level of Need Pre and Follow up SDQ for Birth Children	<b>74</b>
<b>3: Table 10:</b> FIQ Comparison of Means for Foster Children at Pre Training and Follow Up	<b>86</b>
<b>3: Table 11:</b> FIQ Comparison of Means for Birth children at Pre Training and Follow Up	<b>87</b>
<b>3: Table 12:</b> A Repeated Measure Two-Way ANOVA of FIQ Mean Scores	<b>88</b>
<b>3: Table 13:</b> Paired Samples Test	<b>94</b>
<b>3: Table 14:</b> Satisfaction Questionnaire: Foster Carer Responses for each Training Cohort	<b>97</b>
<b>4: Table 15:</b> Five Stages of Data Analysis	<b>112</b>
<b>4: Table 16:</b> Observational and Reflective Field Notes	<b>114</b>
<b>4: Table 17:</b> Initial Index for Themes for Pre-Interviews	<b>115</b>
<b>4: Table 18:</b> Definition of Themes	<b>123</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter	Page
<b>2: Figure 1:</b> Triangulation	<b>47</b>
<b>2: Figure 2:</b> Research Design Flow Chart	<b>48</b>
<b>3: Figure 3:</b> Comparison of SDQ Subscales Pre and Follow Up For Foster Children	<b>69</b>
<b>3: Figure 4:</b> Comparison of SDQ Subscales Pre and Follow Up For Birth Children	<b>69</b>
<b>3: Figure 5:</b> Total SDQ Scores Pre and Follow Up of Individual Foster Children	<b>71</b>
<b>3: Figure 6:</b> Total SDQ Scores Pre and Follow Up of Individual Birth Children	<b>72</b>
<b>3: Figure 7:</b> Comparison of SDQ Total Difficulty Score Pre and Follow Up of Foster Children	<b>74</b>
<b>3: Figure 8:</b> Comparison of SDQ Total Difficulty Score Pre and Follow Up of Birth Children	<b>75</b>
<b>3: Figure 9:</b> Comparison of FIQ Subscales Pre and Follow Up of Foster Children	<b>87</b>
<b>3: Figure 10:</b> Comparison of FIQ Subscales Pre and Follow Up of Birth Children	<b>88</b>
<b>3: Figure 11:</b> A Significant Interaction FIQ Positive Feelings Subscales for Birth and Foster Children.	<b>89</b>
<b>3: Figure 12:</b> Comparison of Mean Knowledge Scores Pre Post and Follow Up	<b>94</b>
<b>4: Figure 13:</b> An Example of Pre Training Charts developed from the Index	<b>118</b>
<b>4: Figure 14:</b> Mind Map of Theme One	<b>120</b>
<b>4: Figure 15:</b> Photograph of Theme Nine in Original Format	<b>120</b>
<b>4: Figure 16:</b> Photograph of a Section of the Central Chart	<b>121</b>
<b>4: Figure 17:</b> Conceptual Framework: Over-arching Journey for Foster Carers Experiencing Mental Health Training	<b>125</b>
<b>4: Figure 18:</b> Photograph of Mind Map of Conceptual Framework in its Original Format	<b>126</b>
<b>4: Figure 19:</b> Stages Through Training for New Foster Carers	<b>180</b>
<b>4: Figure 20:</b> Stages Through Training for Experienced Foster Carers	<b>180</b>

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ACAMHS</b>	Association for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
<b>AMED</b>	Allied and Complementary Medicine
<b>ANOVA</b>	Analysis of Variance
<b>ASSIA</b>	Applied Social sciences Index
<b>BME</b>	Black and Minority Ethnic
<b>BNI</b>	British Nursing Index
<b>CAMHS</b>	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
<b>CBCL</b>	Child Behaviour Check List
<b>CINAHL</b>	Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Healthcare Literature
<b>CSA</b>	Care Standards Act
<b>CWDC</b>	Children's Workforce and Development Council
<b>DAAT</b>	Drug and Alcohol Action Team
<b>DCSF</b>	Department for Children, Schools and Families
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfES</b>	Department of Education and Skills
<b>DH</b>	Department of Health
<b>EBP</b>	Evidence Based Practice
<b>FIQ</b>	Family Impact Questionnaire
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>IBBS</b>	International Bibliography of the Social Sciences
<b>IMD</b>	Index of Multiple Deprivations
<b>KSF</b>	Knowledge and Skills Framework
<b>LAC</b>	Looked After Children
<b>MTFC</b>	Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care
<b>MRS</b>	Modified Rosenberg Scale
<b>MSC</b>	Masters of Science
<b>NHS</b>	National Health Service
<b>NICE</b>	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>NMC</b>	Nursing and Midwifery Council
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>PACE</b>	Playfulness Acceptance Curiosity Empathy
<b>PCC</b>	Portsmouth City Council
<b>PCT</b>	Primary Care Trust
<b>PICOT</b>	Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome, Time
<b>PSI</b>	Parenting Stress Index
<b>RAD</b>	Reactive Attachment Disorder
<b>RGF</b>	Research Governance Framework
<b>SCIE</b>	Social Care Institute for Excellence
<b>SDQ</b>	Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
<b>SHSSW</b>	School of Health and Science and Social Work
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

**SSCI**  
**UK**  
**USA**

Social Science Citation Index  
United Kingdom  
United States of America

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## DISSEMINATION

**Presentation: ACAMHS** Special Interest group for Looked After Children. London 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010 (see Appendix 23)

**Presentation: Solent NHS** Celebration of Good Practice. Portsmouth 25<sup>th</sup> May 2011 (see Appendix 24)

**Presentation: Nurses Forum.** My Professional Doctorate Journey. Portsmouth 7<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that whilst studying for the Doctorate in Nursing at the University of Portsmouth I have not been registered for any other award at another University. The work undertaken for this degree has not been submitted elsewhere for another award. The work contained in this project report is my own work.

Word Count: 53,213

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the memory of my baby sister Barbara who never got the chance to fulfil her ambitions.