



PERMANENTLY PROGRESSING?

Building secure futures
for children in Scotland



Phase One (2014-2018)

The Permanently Progressing? study is a collaboration between the Universities of Stirling, York, and Lancaster, and Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland. Phase One was funded by a legacy, and concludes in December 2018. This is designed to be the first phase in a longitudinal study following children's progress into adolescence and beyond.

Since 2014, the research team have been investigating decision-making, permanence, progress, outcomes and belonging for a large cohort (**1,836 children**) of *all* children in Scotland who became looked after in 2012-13, when they were aged five or under. Using national data from the Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) over four years (2012-2016), the study is the first to compare pathways and outcomes for such a large cohort of young children in Scotland.

The study has five different strands and these are set out below:

Children's pathways to permanence

This analysed data from Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS) provided to the Scottish Government by all 32 local authorities on children who became looked after in Scotland in 2012-2013 when they were aged five and under, **n=1,836**. Of the 1,836 children, **481** children were looked after at home and **1,355** children were looked after away from home.

This strand of the study tracked the pathways of the children over four years from **2012-2016**, including the route and timescales to permanence.

Linkage of Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS data) with data from Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

Each year data on children who are looked after is collected from all local authorities by the Scottish Government (CLAS data). Data is also collected by SCRA on all children who are involved in the Children's Hearings System. For the first time, these two data sets have been linked through the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN). Within the ADRN's Safe Haven we were able to safely and successfully link SCRA and CLAS data on **1,000** children. This enabled a more complete picture of the experiences of children, as well as testing the feasibility of linkage.

Decision Making for Children

Between 2015 and 2017 we interviewed **160** 'decision makers' across Scotland, mainly in groups, but some individually. These included social workers and allied professionals, members of Children's Hearings, Reporters to the Children's Hearing, independent consultants, members of Permanence Panels, and a Sheriff. This enabled us to identify, from a range of perspectives, the factors which influence decision making for children.

Outcomes for children

In 2012/2013, 1,355 children aged five and under became looked after away from home across Scotland. In nineteen participating local authorities we gathered detailed information on those children who remained looked after away from home, or who were with adoptive parent(s) by the end of Year 2. In depth questionnaires were sent to the kinship carers/ foster carers/adoptive parents and social workers of 643 children. We asked about children's experiences, how children were progressing, and what helps carers and adoptive parents. We had **433** social worker and **166** carers/adoptive parent responses. After analysing the data we have detailed information on where children are, and how they are faring in relation to their relationships, health and education.

Children and carers/adoptive parents: Their experiences

Although the children in our cohort are young, we wanted to hear about their experiences. We were able to have play and talk sessions with a sample of **10** children aged between three and nine years. We also interviewed **20** kinship carers, foster carers, and adoptive parents. We heard (and saw) what helped children feel secure, and what carers/parents said they needed to enable them to meet children's needs.



Key Findings:

- Decision making for children is intellectually and emotionally demanding. Decisions are made in a context which is complex and contested.
- The early experiences of the majority of children who became looked after away from home included neglect and abuse.
- Geographical differences in routes to permanence remain despite local and national changes to address this.
- Although Permanence Orders have increased for older children, for younger children they are relatively rare.
- Where adoption is the most appropriate route for a child, there is no evidence that in Scotland this decision is taken hastily, rather the opposite.
- Although legal security was important to adults, for young children who are with kinship carers, foster carers, or adoptive parents, it is the 'day to day' routines and rituals which appear to help them feel secure.

Full reports on each strand, set in the context of existing research and literature, will be available on our website once Phase One concludes in December 2018. Summaries for children, for carers and adoptive parents, for professionals and policy makers will also be available.

We are in the process of seeking funding for Phase Two to follow up the children in our study 7-8 years after they became looked after, and will then reconnect with participating children, kinship carers, foster carers, adoptive parents, and local authorities.

You can sign up to our mailing list to receive the latest news and developments relating to the project here: eepurl.com/ducBOv.

Further information about Phase One or plans for Phase Two:

Dr. Helen Whincup (PI), University of Stirling

E: helen.whincup@stir.ac.uk

T: +44 (0) 1786 467713

W: stir.ac.uk/ccwp/researchanddevelopmentprojects/permanently-progressing/

Current Research Team:

Dr. Helen Whincup, University of Stirling

Prof. Nina Biehal, University of York

Dr. Maggie Grant, Adoption and Fostering Alliance (AFA) Scotland and University of Stirling

Dr. Linda Cusworth, Lancaster University

Dr. Alison Hennessy, University of Stirling

Ms. Jade Hooper, University of Stirling



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