



Welcome to our latest newsletter sharing some of the research that the **Department for Children and Families at the University of Worcester** have been involved in over the last few months.



Huge congratulations to Angela Hodgkins on passing her PhD with amendments!

And also on her first of many publications from the research: Hodgkins, A., Gossman, P., Paige, R. and Woolley, R. (2023), 'We cry together every day' - expressing emotion in early childhood empathy research', Early Years, published online <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/>



## **The Black Pear Trust**

After a successful pilot of our staff wellbeing training at one of our schools, we are thrilled to announce that a training course for managers across all schools in the MAT will begin in December 2023. Led by University staff Angela Hodgkins (Department for Children and Families) and Rebecca Weston (School of Health and Wellbeing), this training aims to examine the staff wellbeing culture within schools and create actionable plans for genuine change in policy and practice.

We believe in a positive and supportive environment for all school staff, and this training is a crucial step toward achieving that goal. The outcomes from this initiative are anticipated to be extended to other schools in the future.



## Play Research, by Niki Stobbs

In July 2022 Niki Stobbs undertook research to ascertain the play preferences of children aged 4-11 years living in the city of Worcester in order to determine the future direction of Worcester Play Council, a charity with the objective to provide facilities for recreation or leisure time occupations for children under the age of 16 years who are resident in the City of Worcester (such facilities being that which the beneficiaries have need by reason of their youth, social or economic circumstances and which will improve the conditions of life of the beneficiaries by promoting their physical, mental and spiritual well-being).

Seventy-seven responses were received, analysed and written up in a report presented to Worcester Play Council. The report was also shared with Worcester City Council, who had recently commissioned a consultation into how play in Worcester could be improved. Niki's research contributed to the final report of this consultation after her findings were shared with the consultants.

Along with another member of Worcester City Play Council, Niki wrote to all 35 council members summarising the findings of her research and urging them to make play a priority. She also attended a Place and Economic Development Committee Meeting in July 2023 to press for this in person.



Image from Worcester News.

The Play Report was adopted and the City's first ever Play Plan was approved in July 2023. Following attendance at the Social Pedagogy Mini Event at The Hive, core members began an advocacy for play group, which currently has 21 members. The city council has consulted with this group to seek advice on how best to proceed with the facilitation of play throughout the city.

Worcester Play Council also plan to re-organise its constitution with a focus on advocacy for children's play, rather than providing play activities in the school holidays.

## International Conference on Educational Quality 2023.

From 25th-27th October 2023, Emma Bailey, a lecturer within the Department for Children and Families, attended the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Educational Quality held at the University of Ibn Zohr in Agadir, Morocco. The conference is held annually and this year the theme was "Transformational Leadership in Education" with attendees travelling from all over the globe. Emma presented her PhD research on general capacity building within cluster groups of primary school headteachers to an international audience.

Alongside presenting her PhD research, Emma joined one of the keynote speakers, Shaun McNerney in delivering a workshop for the student conference regarding the development of a framework for leading change. Students were incredibly engaged and explored the conditions required in order to unlock leadership capacity across an organisation.

Emma also had the chance to attend a range of symposia and keynotes delivered by renowned academics from across the world such as Blessed Ngwenya who spoke about "Performativity, Inclusion And Shaping The Knowledge Society For The 21 St Century: A Decolonial Turn", Wafa El Garah who spoke about "Transformational Leadership In Higher Education In The Age Of AI" and the University of Worcester's Shaun McNerney who delivered a talk entitled "Rethinking Leadership To Meet The Needs Of Our Time". Emma and Shaun are now collaborating on a publication which explores the development of adaptive leadership within educational organisations.

The conference provided an excellent opportunity to meet with other academics and educational professionals across the world and to understand more global perspectives of educational leadership.

Next year, the 7<sup>th</sup> ICEQ conference will be held at the University of Worcester in June 2024.



# Longitudinal Study of Blaenau Gwent Disability Service

Research team: Alison Prowle, Stuart Gallagher and Carla Solvason

The University of Worcester's Department for Children and Families (DCF) has collaborated with Blaenau Gwent Disability Service (BGDS) for several years, working closely with their staff and service users to help them to continue to develop their offer. DCF carried out a key evaluation of the service in Autumn 2020 which proposed significant changes; these changes were subsequently implemented. This was followed up in Spring 2022 with an investigation into the impact of these changes. This second evaluation was a positive one, and it was proposed that there now be a period of consolidation. However, this is not where our researching role ended.

As a forward looking service, BGDS were eager to discover how the changes that had been implemented over recent years were influencing children and young people (CYP) and, more indirectly, their families during their life course. There was a particular interest in the more challenging periods of transition. To this end our research team planned a study that would track a group of CYP with disabilities, and the support that they received, from their teenage years into adulthood.

## Research Aims


The aim of our current research is to paint a multifaceted picture of the support received from a range of Blaenau Gwent Disability Services by CYP, at various phases during their lives. It will do this through researchers building positive relationships with a small group children and young people of various ages (from 14 to 23) and meeting with them to review the support received at regular intervals. Our aim is to create a picture of the child's support experience across their transition from teenager to adult, illustrating 'constellations' of the support received by individual children/ families at various points in their lives. Although existing local authority data is useful when establishing context, the voices and experiences of children, young people and, where relevant their families, is central to this research. We are attempting to maximise opportunity to hear those voices by offering a range of innovative, multi-modal data collection methods (including digital/photography and 'scrapbooking') with the CYP and families.

## The research approach and the ethical dimension

The research team bring a wealth of experience to this project, not only in terms of research, but also through their hands-on work with children and families. This includes work both in, and with, schools (mainstream and special), local authorities, varied nursery and pre-school settings, children's homes (including those for children with disabilities), safeguarding teams and social services. This expertise was important when considering the complex needs that our participants brought to the project. CYP and families were encouraged to take part in the research with an easily accessible, illustrated, invitation to take part (shown below). All other information, including participant information letters and consent letters, were checked with specialist support workers for clarity, and discussed with participants to ensure comprehension.

Please share your experiences with us...


We are:



Ali Carla Stuart Niki

And we all work at the University of Worcester

Over the last few years, we've done lots of work with Blaenau Gwent and done lots of chatting to people about their experiences of working with the Disability Services. We may even have met you before!




They've listened to us and made some changes as a result.

So, what's next?

We are really interested in seeing whether the support that you gain suits you at all different stages of your life, right from being a child to being an adult. So, our next plan is to chat with you over a length of time, 5 years in all.

We plan to talk with people of all different ages, so we can see what your experience is like at all sorts of different stages.



We would love you to be involved, but what would that mean for you?

When?	What?
Before Christmas 2022	We will all get together so that we can get to know each other, and we can answer any questions about the research. We will chat with you about what you might like to do to collect your ideas...we thought perhaps some sort of photos...a scrapbook! We will also give you a questionnaire to read!
New Year 2023	One researcher will work with one family. We will meet with you and give you a questionnaire that you might need for the project. You can call or e-mail about your recent experiences, how Disability Services have helped you and anything else that you might need help with. After we've shared to you, we'll also have a chat with those in the service that you work with.
Spring 2023	When we last spoke with you we'll have discussed how you might like to keep in contact in different ways. We'll have shared some photos, some ideas, names... At this point we'll just have a quick 'catch up' so that you can update us with anything that we've missed. You might want to share with us how your scrapbook is coming along!
2024	Then each year we will do the same thing. We'll have a big catch up over a cuppa at the beginning of the year where you can tell us all about the things that you've been doing since we last spoke. Then later in the year we'll have a quick chat online or via telephone. After that we'll have a chat with the staff that you work with.
2025	Perhaps we'll do something fun when we meet up this time...what do you think?
2026	There's a quick chat later in the year. Some again this year...What do you feel like doing this time?
2027	Our last time together! Let's do something really special... As long as we finish with a cuppa!
2027-28	After our last meeting together we need to read through and focus on all of the information that we have collected...and see what we've found out along the way. And yes, obviously we will let you know...and the Disability Service of course!

From what we can see the people that you work with are already working hard doing a pretty good job...but who knows, by you sharing your experiences with us we might be able to make it even better.

We can't wait to meet with you!

Ali, Carla, Niki and Stuart

Due to the sensitive nature of the participants and the data involved in this project, a particularly thorough approach was taken to ethics. Meetings with families were arranged initially with colleagues in BGDS, and the researchers were led by these colleagues' knowledge of the individuals involved. Where appropriate, support workers joined researchers for their initial meetings with the CYP and families. In some cases, though, the CYP were happy to attend with a parent or carer. The researchers were also led by participants, or their support worker, as to where the CYP would be most comfortable meeting; the local coffee shop turned out to be a favourite.

## Where are we now?

Contact has now been made with the initial twelve families by their specifically allocated researcher. During the first meeting between CYP and researcher, researcher and participant got to know one another, and preferable ways of meeting up with, and collecting data from participants in the future were decided upon. For some these will take place in their place of education or employment, for others these will take place in their sheltered accommodation, accompanied by their support worker. The participant 'packs', including, instamatic camera and scrapbook were also passed on during the first meeting. During the project, each child, young person, and, where appropriate, family's needs, will be catered to individually, as the research tries to understand and authentically record their unique support journey.



## Refugee Workshop at the Hive with Year 10 pupils

### Alison Prowle and Janet Harvell

On Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March, Alison Prowle and Janet Harvell were privileged to lead a refugee awareness event with 30 year 10 learners from Blessed Edward School in Worcester. Level 6 ECIS student, Rosie Dempster kindly volunteered to help with the workshop and did a great job of welcoming the students and facilitating a groupwork activity.



The students had been considering refugee issues as part of their Religious Studies GCSE and they came to the workshop with open minds, wanting to learn more. We began the workshop with an interactive quiz, before students went into groups to explore the issues in more detail. There were four groupwork activities:

- A reflective exercise to help students imagine being forced to leave their home and to undertake a hazardous journey to safety, taking with you only the items you can store in a backpack.
- A short play exploring different reasons why people may need to flee their homes.
- An exercise to explore a child's life in a refugee camp, including making a menu from camp rations.
- A discussion activity focusing on what it is like to be a refugee in an unfamiliar country.

After the groupwork activity, Alison shared some findings from her PhD study on the experiences of refugee families in Wales. Students were introduced to the stories of two very different refugees; a woman escaping conflict in Iraq with three of her 5 children (the oldest children had to be left in Iraq with relatives) and a young woman who had been trafficked into modern day slavery and was now pregnant. Through the stories, the students gained insight into the home Office systems for asylum and refuge, the difficulties of arriving in a new culture, the prejudice they faced, and the longing for a place to call home. However, they also learned that refugees are resilient, talented individuals with much to offer to their new host country. The students then learned about Janet and Alison's visits to the refugee camps of North France. They were shocked by the living conditions and the experiences some of the families described. Finally, we ended the workshop with a reflective activity, where students were able to listen to music and see images of refugee experiences, allowing them to think about what they had learned and something they might do because of attending the workshop.

The students then went back to their school, where they have been tasked with working in threes to lead a refugee awareness session for 10 tutor groups the following week. We were delighted with the young people's engagement in the session. Here is a selection of their feedback.

1 thing I learned	1 thing that surprised me	1 thing I might do to help
I've learned to appreciate what I have. That refugees don't always live in good conditions. The way refugees are treated. How lucky I am. Poor countries accept the most refugees. That refugee families are often separated and can't contact family. That a refugee could be anyone and can have any background possible, all they want is a better life. The struggle of being a refugee That families could be in refugee camps for years before they are welcomed into another country. The struggles of being a refugee That refugees have a very different experience to how it is portrayed in the media. Food shortages in refugee camps	The harsh reality many refugees live in How long it can take for asylum to be approved. How many people are refugees. How desperate they get. That human trafficking is a lot more common than you think. That other families can live on the camps all their lives and not find a permanent home. When refugees seek safety, they sometimes end up in more danger. How many refugees are children. That a lot of children get separated from their families when fleeing from their homes To see the picture of a child soldier	I will try to spread awareness about the experiences of refugees. Protest I will donate to charity to help. Tell people about the stories of real refugees so people know the stories. Donate and volunteer to help when I'm older. Give to charities. I can give the little donation. Support charities that help refugees Tell my parents and friends not to discriminate. I can donate food and give money





## Call for Papers for the Department for Children and Families Annual Conference.

### Voices of Progress: Nurturing Children, Families, and Communities of Social Action

**Date:** Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup>

**February**

**Location:** University of  
Worcester, St Johns  
Campus

The Department for Children and Families is thrilled to announce its annual conference, "Voices of Progress: Nurturing Children, Families, and Communities of Social Action." We invite researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and advocates to join us in exploring innovative approaches to, and inspiring stories of, meaningful social change with and for children, families and communities.

Our theme, "Voices of Progress," reflects our commitment to nurturing the capacities of people and their communities for advancing positive social change in a way which has real impact for Children and Families.

This conference celebrates the positive changes being made in the lives of children, families, and communities through social action and offers a chance to forge relationships with likeminded professionals.

We encourage submissions that focus on the following topics:

1. Strengths-based approaches to supporting Children and Families
2. Community Engagement for Social Justice
3. Creating Cultures of Change
4. Sustainable futures for Children and Young People
5. Power in Education and the Early Years
6. Social Equity and Inclusion

#### Submission Guidelines

We invite you to submit abstracts for paper presentations, workshops, podcasts and panel discussions that align with the conference theme and the topics mentioned above. Please make it clear which of the above formats would be your preference as well as whether you would prefer to deliver as part of our face-to-face provision or online.

• **Abstract Submission Deadline:** Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December

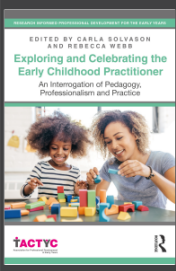
• **Notification of Acceptance:** Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> December

Please submit your abstract (250-300 words) along with a brief bio (100 words) to Emma Bailey: [emma.bailey@worc.ac.uk](mailto:emma.bailey@worc.ac.uk)



## New publications

Hodgkins, A., Gossman, P., Paige, R. and Woolley, R. (2023), 'We cry together every day' - expressing emotion in early childhood empathy research', *Early Years*, published online 27<sup>th</sup> October 2023.



**EDITED BY CARLA SOLVASON AND REBECCA WEBB**  
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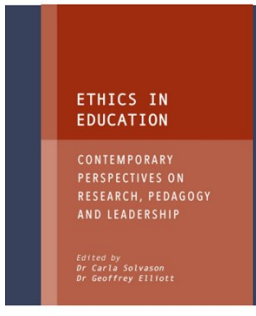
**Exploring and Celebrating the Early Childhood Practitioner**  
An Interrogation of Pedagogy, Professionalism and Practice  
Edited by **Carla Solvason** and **Rebecca Webb**  
Series: TACTYC

This exciting new book celebrates, interrogates and re-imagines the complex and demanding role of the Early Childhood Practitioner. Exploring the many different facets of the ECP role, it challenges normative constructions of practitioners and how they have been shaped by assumptions of history, culture and policy. This latest addition to the TACTYC series will be valuable reading for Early Years students - particularly on Masters level courses - as well as those working and researching in the Early Years sector.

**About the Editors**  
**Dr Carla Solvason** is Senior Lecturer in the Department for Children and Families at the University of Worcester. She has a keen interest in ethical practice and respectful and sensitive approaches to research, areas in which she has published and presented widely.  
**Dr Rebecca Webb** is Senior Lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education and a member of the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth, at the University of Sussex. Her research interests focus on pedagogies and practices of 'not knowing' and 'uncertainty'.

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**ETHICS IN EDUCATION**  
CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH, PEDAGOGY AND LEADERSHIP  
Edited by **Dr Carla Solvason** and **Dr Geoffrey Elliott**

**1/3 OFF**


It is critically important for emerging professionals in education to be sensitised to the ethical and moral responsibilities of their practice throughout their training and beyond. There is a wide disparity in contemporary practice in this regard, which points to a need for greater clarity and consistency in our thinking about ethics within education. Ethics in Education attempts to meet this need, and will be a valuable resource for students, teachers and researchers in education, health and social sciences. Most significantly, the increasing awareness of the importance of ethics, diversity and social pedagogy in the teacher education curriculum will ensure that this book becomes essential reading or recommended reading for initial teacher education and CPD courses in education.

The editors have gathered together an exciting and dynamic group of contributors across many fields of English education, and asked them to help rethink the role of ethics in education in the 21st century. The types of questions that are addressed include: Do we have a shared view of ethical practice? What are the values that underpin ethical practice? What are our ethical responsibilities as pedagogues?

Dr Carla Solvason is Senior Lecturer in Education and Dr Geoffrey Elliott is Professor of Post-Compulsory Education, at the University of Worcester, UK

"This collection of works could not be more timely. Whilst technocratic approaches to areas such as education, politics and social and health care dominate current discourse and policy enactment, this work acts as a critical reminder that at the heart of all public life, human interaction requires significant care. This book critiques perfunctory approaches to ethical considerations and opens up current discussions regarding the need for a purposefully caring approach to research, teaching and learning. A highly engaging and beautifully crafted collection that needs to become foundational material for all involved in education whether as teachers, researchers or indeed, policy makers."  
- Gary Husband, Chair of the Association for Research in Post-Compulsory Education, UK

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 Leadership	 Parent Partnership	 Pedagogy
 Play	 Professional Ethics	 Safeguarding
 Social Pedagogy	 Special Educational Needs	 Studying in Higher Education & Practitioner Development

## Supporting the Health and Wellbeing of Education and Care Practitioners

Dr. Carla Solvason, Niki Stobbs and Samantha Sutton-Tsang from the Department for Children and Families met with Robin Walker, MP on Friday 21<sup>st</sup> April to discuss a research report they had written about the wellbeing of early years practitioners and teachers.

The report focussed particularly on the impact of Covid-19 on practitioners' well-being and found that although early years practitioners are dedicated to the children that they educate and care for, they feel unappreciated by the government and the general public, which is resulting in them leaving the sector in large numbers.

Robin Walker was very interested in the findings, taking time to try to understand the issues and propose solutions. He stated that early childhood education was high on the government's agenda, as indicated by the inclusion of childcare as key infrastructure in the latest budget. He also reported that he was involved in a number of working parties and committees to find ways to attract more people to become early childhood professionals.

A Blog published by the University of Worcester is available here: <https://uwstaffnews.wordpress.com/2023/04/25/supporting-the-health-and-wellbeing-of-education-and-care->



## What study opportunities do we have for you this year?

The Department For Children and Families offers a range of courses from undergraduate to postgraduate. Click on the links for further information.

### *Undergraduate*

[EARLY YEARS \(0-8\) FOUNDATION DEGREE - FLEXIBLE DISTRIBUTED LEARNING PATHWAY](#)

[EARLY YEARS \(0-8\) FOUNDATION DEGREE](#)

[EARLY CHILDHOOD IN SOCIETY \(GRADUATE PRACTITIONER\) BA \(HONS\)](#)

[INTEGRATED WORKING WITH CHILDREN & FAMILIES BA \(HONS\) TOP-UP DEGREE](#)

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Contact [Admissionsb@worc.ac.uk](mailto:Admissionsb@worc.ac.uk) for further information about applying.

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