

University Launches Ground-breaking Research in to Foster Care



Thursday, 18 January 2018

A major piece of research is launching to discover why there are so few disabled foster carers in the UK.

The research, led by the University of Worcester, will try to find out what barriers there are which stop disabled people from applying to become foster carers, and how these can be overcome.

"It's no secret that we need more foster carers to come forward," said [Dr Peter Unwin](#), Principal Lecturer in [Social Work](#) at the University of Worcester and Lead Researcher for the project. "The Fostering Network estimates that we need 7,000 more carers in England, and yet when we surveyed almost 500 foster agencies to ask if they had any disabled foster carers on their books, only 6 responded, and only a couple of those had some very limited experience of working with disabled people."

The research, which is entitled 'Mutual benefits: the potential of disabled people as foster carers', will be funded by a £142,574 grant from the DRILL programme - Disability Research on Independent Living and Learning – a £5 million research programme funded by the National Lottery.

"Disabled people can often offer a stable and supportive environment but are not thought of as obvious candidates for fostering. This project should help identify why that is and what we can do to change it," Dr Unwin added.

Shaping Our Lives and The Foster Care Cooperative will work in partnership with the University of Worcester to help support the project. Shaping Our Lives is a think tank and national network of disabled service users who will help to ensure the views of disabled people form a central part of the research process. The Foster Care Cooperative is a

not-for-profit ethically based foster care agency that will provide the industry perspective and an employer's voice to support Dr Unwin and his University of Worcester team.

"There's a stigma attached to disability that determines how agencies view disabled people who might apply to be foster carers," Dr Unwin said. "They tend to see only the disability and what you can't do. It's a very negative mind-set that is robbing children in need of a caring environment and a potential new home."

Becki Meakin, General Manager of Shaping Our Lives said, "We are delighted to be a partner in this innovative project. Disabled people have an insight into successful parenting from their own lived experience and can apply strategies to fostering that would be very beneficial to looked after children."

The University of Worcester research is part of a larger programme administered by The DRILL programme. The DRILL programme is fully funded by the Big Lottery Fund and delivered by Disability Rights UK, Disability Action Northern Ireland, Inclusion Scotland and Disability Wales. DRILL is funding more than 30 research and pilot projects over a 5 year period, all led by disabled people.

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