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| <b>Institution: Manchester Metropolitan University</b>  |
| <b>Unit of Assessment: C22 Social Work and Social Policy</b>  |
| <b>Title of case study: Influencing policy and service provision for disabled children and their families in the UK</b>   |
| <p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research in the area of Critical Disability Studies carried out at Manchester Metropolitan University has directly led to a change in government policy on the family finding process for 4,000 children in the UK currently awaiting adoption. At both national and regional level, the research has influenced the provision of services for disabled children and their families, ranging from the commissioning of short break services to funding decisions for charity. The research has also influenced the strategy of Scope, the disability charity, with regard to resilience in disabled people's lives, and contributed to the training of teachers for children with learning disabilities.</p>  |
| <p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Recent anti-discrimination legislation (notably the Equality Act 2010) has attempted to remove barriers experienced by disabled people, for example, in the workplace. It can be argued, however, that the removal of barriers alone is counter-productive in that it defines the disabled person as the focal point of the problem. Critical Disability Studies, a fairly young discipline, challenges that focus on barrier removal, advocating a fundamental shift in thinking towards a different concept of what is normal.</p> <p>Since 2008, Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) has undertaken a sustained programme of research in Critical Disability Studies, involving Dan Goodley (Professor of Psychology and Disability Studies, 2007-2011); Dr Rebecca Lawthom (Reader in Community Practice, since 1999); and Dr Katherine Runswick-Cole (Research Fellow, since 2008). The research fell into three distinct areas:</p> <p>The first project, Does Every Child Matter, post Blair? The interconnections of disabled childhoods ran from 2008 to 2011. Funded through external grants, it pioneered a Critical Disability Studies approach to reposition understandings of childhood and disability. Through repeated interviews with 30 families and allied professionals, as well as focus groups, the project explored the experiences of children aged 5 to 16 in areas including health, education, social care and leisure. Key findings included the fact that joined-up provision is required for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families [3.1] disabled children continue to experience discrimination, violence and educational exclusion [3.3, 3.4]; families of disabled children and young people value short breaks, yet barriers remain to accessing them; and that disabled children who participate in community arts develop positive identities and a sense of community [3.5]. The project also identified a shifting policy agenda for disabled children and young people [3.1, 3.2].</p> <p>The second project, which ran in 2011/2012 and was funded by the disability charity, Scope, examined resilience in the lives of disabled people across the life course. The study drew on the life stories of 42 disabled people aged 5 to 83, followed by focus groups and the development of a resilience toolkit. Findings included the insight that resilience is not a personal character trait, but is made in relationships with others and with access to resources; and that resilience can be developed through recognizing the interdependent nature of people's lives [3.6]. The toolkit, including a resilience map, was the main practical outcome.</p> <p>The third project, carried out in 2011/2012, examined the effectiveness of adoption activity days – days when children and their social workers have the chance to meet prospective adoptive parents over organised “fun” activities, without the prospective adopters knowing the children's history up front. The research involved Runswick-Cole participating as a volunteer and charting her observations, as well as interviewing prospective adopters, children and other participants. She found that adoption activity days are a successful means of family finding, particularly for children labelled ‘hard to place’. There was no evidence that parents and children matched up in this way are more likely to experience breakdown (Runswick-Cole, Hocking, Betts and Goodley (in</p> |

preparation). This model of working in commissioned research seem policy shift from project reports and dissemination.

### 3. References to the research

[3.1] Goodley, D. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2010) Emancipating play: Dis/abled children, development and deconstruction, *Disability & Society*, 25 (4): 499 - 512.

DOI:10.1080/09687591003755914

[3.2] Runswick-Cole, K. (2011) Time to end the bias towards inclusive education? *British Journal of Special Education*, 38 (3): 112-120. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8578.2011.00514.x

[3.3] Runswick-Cole, K. (2010) Living with Dying and Disabilism: death and disabled children, *Disability and Society*, 7 (1): 813 – 826. DOI:10.1080/09687599.2010.520895

[3.4] Goodley, D. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2011) The violence of disablism, *Journal of Sociology of Health and Illness*, 33(4): 602-17. DOI 10.1111/j.1467-9566.2010.01302.x

[3.5] Goodley, D. and Runswick-Cole, K. (2012) Reading Rosie: the postmodern dis/abled child, *Educational and Child Psychology*, 29(2): 53-66. DOI: 978-1-85433-708-5

[3.6] Runswick-Cole, K. and Goodley, D. (2013) Resilience: a Disability Studies and Community Psychology Approach, *Social and Personality Psychology: Compass* 7 (2): 67-78.

DOI: 10.1111/spc3.12012

### Grant funding (indicating quality of research)

D. Goodley (with Runswick-Cole) Does Every Child Matter, post-Blair? The interconnections of disabled childhoods. Economic and Social Research Council (RES-062-23-1138), September 2008-May, 2011.

D. Goodley (with Runswick-Cole and Lawthom) Resilience in the lives of disabled people across the life course. Scope, the UK disability charity. October 2011 – January 2013.

D. Goodley (with Runswick-Cole) Evaluation of Adoption Activity Days. British Association for Adoption and Fostering. October 2011- 2012.

D. Goodley (with Runswick-Cole) Time to end the bias towards inclusion? Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science, 5<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

K. Runswick-Cole. Finding a Family: the role of adoption activity days in the family finding process. Economic and Social Research Council Festival of Social Science, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2012.

D. Goodley (with Lawthom and Runswick-Cole) Big Society? Disabled people with learning disabilities and civil society. Economic and Social Research Council. June 2013-July, 2015.

**Total income = £532,315**

### 4. Details of the impact

The research has led to changes in government policy regarding adoption, and achieved direct impacts on the provision of services and practice for disabled children and their families.

As a direct result of the team's adoption activity day evaluations, the Department for Education (DfE) announced in December 2012 that these activity days would become part of the government's adoption reform agenda and be rolled out across England and Wales [A]. By June 2013, a total of 170 children had attended adoption days, and 29 children have been placed –

highlighting the life-changing significance of these events for these children and their adoptive families.

The DfE also used finding from another MMU project, *Does Every Child Matter, post-Blair?* as part of an on-line training package for teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities. **[B]** The package was made available online in 2012 (The DfE has been unable to confirm download figures).

As part of the same research project, the MMU team were invited by the Derbyshire Parent Forum to evaluate short break provision for disabled children in Derbyshire and present their findings at the Parent Forum conference in 2011. Derbyshire County Council acknowledged the importance of these findings and re-commissioned short breaks as a result, despite funding constraints. **[C]**

Another part of the same project involved evaluating the performance *Something in the Air?* for the Oily Cart Theatre Company – a play using multi-sensory approaches to engage even children whose disabilities normally prevent such engagement. Oily Cart used the MMU evaluation to secure a Children In Need grant of over £53,000 early in 2013 to enable them to deliver further such work to 800 disabled children per year over three years. **[D]** The evaluation also helped Oily Cart secure funding from other charities and the Arts Council of England.

The College of Social Work, a professional body that exists to ensure the highest possible standards in social work, quoted the *post Blair* findings on disabled children and identity in its 2013 *Curriculum Guide: Disability*, which provides guidance on the content of social work degree programmes. **[E]**

As a result of the *post-Blair* project, Goodley and Runswick-Cole were invited to speak at the first Office for Disability Issues Evidence Gathering Day in 2011, attended by around 100 delegates from different government departments. Goodley and Runswick-Cole's work **[3.5]** was also used by the Leeds Educational Psychology Team (part of Leeds City Council) in 2012 **[F]**, as part of their work supporting the professional development of practitioners. The Autism Education Trust cited the research in their pamphlet, *So what exactly is autism?* in 2012. **[G]**

The team published their *post-Blair* findings in a range of practitioner magazines and journals, including *Nursery World* (2009); *SEN* magazine (2010); and *Community Care* magazine (2010)). As a result, Runswick-Cole was invited to write a regular column on inclusion for *Nursery World* **[H]**, which attracts 103,000 on-line subscribers. Runswick-Cole and Goodley jointly authored an article for *Learning Disability Today* magazine (2011) with a 15-year-old who had been involved in the *post Blair* project.

The *Resilience* research for Scope has, in the words of the charity, “*become a core part of Scope's new strategy and it has also helped inform our plans around service transformation.*” (February 2013). **[I]** The toolkit developed as part of the project was used by disabled young people to develop a “*Guide to Life*” (April 2013) **[J]**. Early in 2013, the MMU team completed a feasibility study to explore how the paper-based tool kit can be made available on an accessible digital platform.

To raise awareness and understanding of disability issues and the research findings amongst the general public, the team launched a YouTube channel in 2008, which by the end of July 2013 had received over 7,252 views.

The research team have also discussed their findings in the local and national media (Goodley, *Meet the Prof*, BBC Radio Manchester October 2008; Runswick-Cole, *Today*, BBC Radio 4; *Radio 5 live Victoria Derbyshire* (including discussion with listeners); *BBC Radio Scotland Drivetime* and *The Times* newspaper (all 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2012).

The team actively engaged with the users of their research through 4 stakeholder workshops for

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

a total of 30 social workers, carers, adoptive parents and others between 2009 and 2012. Participant feedback was collected on film after one adoption workshop in 2012, with one social worker participant speaking for many when she said that it helped her decide to be part of adoption activity days in the future.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

**[A]** Statement from BAAF on the future of adoption activity days:

<http://www.baaf.org.uk/ourwork/activitydays>

**[B]** Department for Education on-line training package for teachers of pupils with profound and multiple learning disabilities (MMU reference on slide 6)

<http://www.education.gov.uk/complexneeds/modules/Module-2.1-Planning-to-meet-needs/All/m05p040d.html>

**[C]** Minutes from Derbyshire County Council dated 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2011. Available on request.

**[D]** Email from Oily Cart Theatre Company dated 11<sup>th</sup> April 2011. Available on request.

**[E]** Testimonial on file from Senior Lecturer in Social Work and Member of the College of Social Work corroborating MMU research influence on *College of Social Work, Curriculum Guide: Disability*:

[http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media\\_centre/CG\\_Disability\\_20Sept2012\\_proofed\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.tcsw.org.uk/uploadedFiles/TheCollege/Media_centre/CG_Disability_20Sept2012_proofed_FINAL.pdf)

**[F]** Email from Leeds Educational Psychology Team available on request.

**[G]** Autism Education Trust (2012) 'So what exactly is autism?'

[http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/1\\_So-what-exactly-is-autism.pdf](http://www.aetraininghubs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/1_So-what-exactly-is-autism.pdf)

**[H]** Runswick-Cole's column *Nursery World*

<http://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/article/1182747/benefits-cap>

**[I]** Email from Scope dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013 available on request.

**[J]** Guide to Life toolkit <http://www.scope.org.uk/help-and-information/young-disabled-people/our-experiences/guide-life>