



CIRCY

Annual Report 2023/24

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The cover image was taken by photographer Ali Mohamed during a filming workshop with Safer London for the AHRC-funded 'Imagining Resistance' study (Grant reference AH/ T003685/1).

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About CIRCY

The Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (CIRCY) is a pan-university research centre at the University of Sussex, with a membership that spans social sciences, arts, humanities, psychology, and professional fields including social work, law, education and health.

CIRCY's research is innovative, interdisciplinary and international in scope, and aims to reflect and address real world concerns whilst developing new academic understandings. Our diverse research and scholarship are united by a critical engagement with children and young people's lives in time and place, and a focus on the rights, voice and welfare of the child or young person at the centre of inquiry. Considered together, the critical and multidisciplinary perspectives offered by CIRCY projects and outputs enrich understandings of childhood and youth within the fields of re-search, policy and practice.

Over this academic year, 2023-2024, the Centre has continued to grow, increasing our membership across disciplines, establishing new projects, and building academic and public engagement locally, nationally and internationally. We made the decision to move back to in-person events this year, but still offering hybrid

options where it felt appropriate. The support of research bidding and academic writing has continued apace, and we have continued to be successful in grant capture, the delivery of projects, and in publications, some of which we spotlight in this report.

CIRCY was awarded Centre of Excellence status by the University of Sussex last summer. The Centres of Excellence represent the University's 'pillars of strength', which are progressing highly innovative and potentially transformative research. Over this academic year we have been working to put in place our new plans to expand CIRCY's research capacity and international links. You can read more about some of these initiatives later in the report. The University has launched several videos highlighting the twelve new Centres of Excellence, and the video featuring CIRCY can be found here.

We're also pleased to share that our flagship BA Childhood and Youth: Theory and Practice remains retains its rank as one of the top two courses in the UK for Childhood and Youth Studies in the Complete University Guide 2025. Our undergraduate and postgraduate students play an important role in the research centre, and their work is featured in the student voice section of this report.

Our Research and Knowledge Exchange

Our annual reports do not seek to document the whole of CIRCY's work, but rather to highlight examples that help to convey the richness and variety of the activities we engage in while seeking to understand – and make a difference to – the lives of children, young people and families. A central feature are our 'Spotlights' – narrative discussions of some of our activities, including research projects, knowledge exchange activities, and doctoral research. These spotlights reflect the diversity of the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary work within CIRCY

that broadly follows under the below themes. You can learn more about CIRCY's research studies and research themes on [our website](#). These themes were established to inform and inspire our work and build synergies, not to categorise or set boundaries between studies or thematic areas. We conceive of our themes as underpinning concerns that intersect to inform the conceptualisation of childhood and youth across space and time, and to enhance the wellbeing and participation of children and young people in family, social and public lives.

Children's Participation

Digital Childhoods

Emotional Lives

Good Childhoods and (Extra)ordinary Childhoods

Methodological Innovation

CIRCY Leadership

CIRCY has been led this year by **Dr Liam Berriman** (Childhood and Youth), with **Dr Perpetua Kirby** (Education) and **Dr Simon Flacks** (Law) as Deputy Directors. We have also been greatly supported by **Emily Askew**, as CIRCY's new postgraduate research assistant, and **Eve Wilcox** as Senior Research Centre Co-ordinator.



Liam Berriman



Perpetua Kirby



Simon Flacks

We are lucky to have the advice and guidance of two important sources of support. Firstly, our **Steering Group** from across the University: **Robin Banerjee** and **Kathryn Lester** (Psychology); **Janet Boddy** and **Rebecca Webb** (Education); **Michelle Lefevre** (Social Work); **Dorte Thoreson** (Institute of Development Studies); **Hannah Field** (English); **Jo Moran-Ellis** (Sociology); and **Kirsty Patrick** (Mass Observation Archive). The Steering Group meets termly to guide CIRCY's work intellectually and practically. Members also contribute regularly to

CIRCY activities. If you are interested in joining the steering group, please do get in touch with [Liam Berriman](#) for an informal conversation. Secondly, CIRCY has an **International Advisory Committee** – academic and professional stakeholders with particular knowledges and expertise in the field of childhood and youth. This group meets annually to reflect on CIRCY's activities and outputs and consider how to develop our public engagement and reach. Current members include:

Susannah Bowyer

Research and Development Manager, Research in Practice

Sara Bragg

Centre for Sociology of Education and Equity, UCL Institute of Education

Ros Edwards

Professor of Sociology, University of Southampton

Ann Phoenix

Professor of Psychosocial Studies, UCL Institute of Education

Heinz Sünker

Professor of Social Pedagogy, Begische Universität, Wuppertal, Germany

Saul Becker

Emeritus Professor from Sussex now joining Manchester Metropolitan University

Louise Sims

Professional officer at BASW – the British Association of Social Workers

Professor Helen Stalford

Director European Children's Rights Unit, School of Law & Social Justice, University of Liverpool

Julia Brannen

Professor of sociology, UCL Institute for Education and Visiting Professor at CIRCY

Helen Beckett

Director, Safer Young Lives Research Centre, University of Bedfordshire

Elsie Whittington

Youth Co-Creation Lead for the BeeWell project, Manchester

Anna Glinski

Deputy Director (Knowledge and Practice Development), Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

CIRCY Year in Review

It has been an exciting and productive year for CIRCY.

In summer 2023, CIRCY was officially confirmed as one of the University of Sussex's 12 Centre of Excellence. This year we have been consulting with members on what this means, and we have begun putting our five-year plan into motion. This includes developing CIRCY's research capacity through international links and bid development activities and growing our external engagement post-Covid by building our links with local and national organisations.

At the start of the Autumn, we welcomed our new CIRCY leadership team. Dr Perpetua Kirby, a Lecturer in Childhood and Youth, and Dr Simon Flacks, a Senior Lecturer in Law, were appointed as CIRCY's new Deputy Directors. With the arrival of the new Faculty of Social Sciences, we are particularly pleased to have a team who reflect some of the breadth of disciplines involved in CIRCY. The team was also joined by Post Graduate Research Assistant Emily Askew, who played a pivotal role in helping to organise CIRCY's calendar of events over the last year, alongside Eve Wilcox, the Senior Research Centre Coordinator for ESW.

During the Autumn, CIRCY hosted several talks and events. Dr Hedi Viterbo, from Queen Mary University of London, spoke at our Autumn term seminar on youth decarceration discourses. The Centre also hosted a film screening and exhibition of work from the Imagining Resistance project, led by Prof Kristi Langhoff and Becky Warnock. Our PGR network took part in a workshop on how to 'think with' children and young people, led by Dr

Rebecca Webb and Fliss Bull. Prof Lisa Holmes and Dr Jeongeun Park also shared work from the ReThink project as part of the Ideas in Action series. The term was capped off with the launch of Prof Janet Body's book *Thinking Through Family: Narratives of Care Experienced Lives*.

The Spring term was equally busy. We held several consultation meetings with CIRCY colleagues and PGRs about plans for Centre's future. One of our biggest events of the year was our CIRCY Annual Symposium, which was curated by three of our BACY students (Vianney Rubit, Alysia Goacher and Leona Cremnitz). The symposium was on the theme of 'creative methods' and featured presentations by Prof John Potter (UCL) and Drs Ellen Yates and Judith Szenasi (University of Derby). You can read more about this event in a spotlight written by the student organisers later in this report. A methods masterclass on 'visual methods' was held for PGT students and PGRs, led by Prof Wendy Luttrell (visiting from CUNY) and Dr Charlie Rumsby. We also held a screening of the film 'Hanging Out' by Dr Mari Korpela (Tampere University), which explored young migrants' friendships and experiences in a Finnish town.

The summer term began with a 'CIRCY Conversations' event, the first of a new series of public events on key issues in the lives of children and young people. In our first event of this series, we invited a panel of speakers to respond to the question: 'How do we change the way we talk about young people?' The event included CIRCY members Prof Kristi Langhoff and Dr Liat Levita and invited guest speakers Dr Beverley Barnett-Jones MBE, from the Nuffield Justice

Observatory, and Naqeeb Saide, from the charity Hummingbird. We also held a CIRCY research away day at Stanmer Park, where colleagues came together to discuss bid ideas and to explore possibilities for new collaborations.

In the new year we will be making some changes to our events structure, with the aim of creating more spaces for colleagues to talk about plans for research or to share work in progress. This will sit alongside our regular talks and workshops. Watch this space!



Figure 1: (left to right) Beverley Barnett-Jones, Naqeeb Saide, Liat Levita, Kristi Langhoff, CIRCY Conversations: How do we change how we talk about young people? 13 June 2024..



Figure 2: Kristi Langhoff, *Re(imagining resistance with young people*. 25 April 2024.

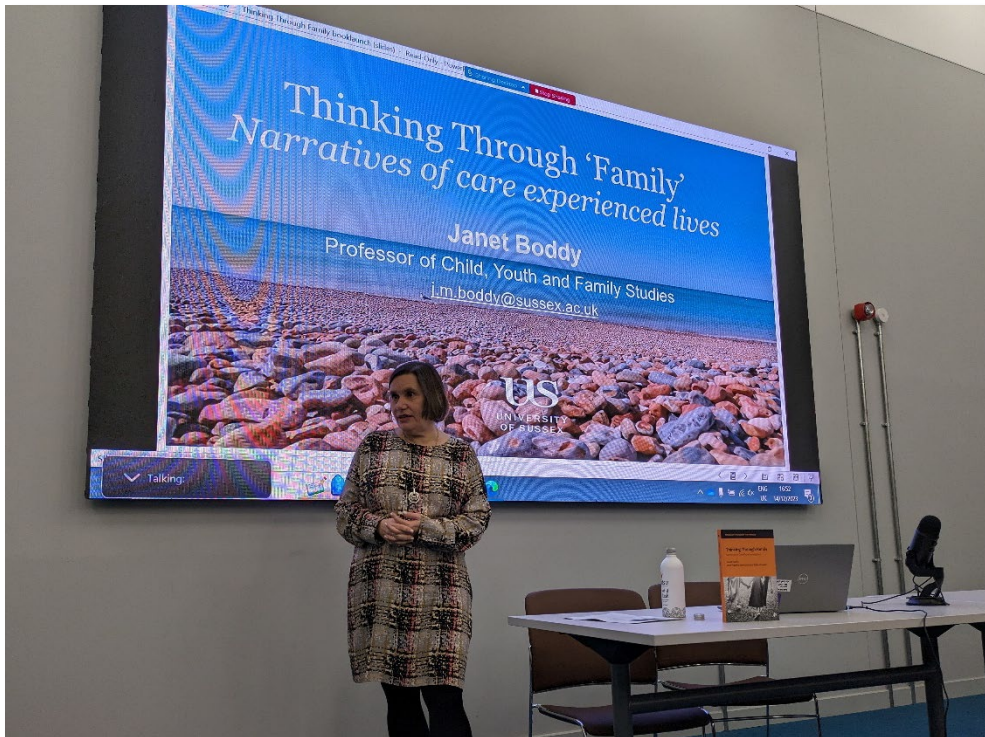


Figure 3: Janet Boddy, *'Thinking Through 'Family': Narratives of care experienced lives'* Book Launch, 14 December 2023.

Impact Activities

Roundtable on the voices of children, young people, and their families about their personal data and information

In November 2023, members of the 'Children's Information Project' research team hosted a roundtable at the Nuffield Foundation's offices in London. The event was organised by Dr Liam Berriman (Social Work) and Prof Elaine Sharland (Social Work), and included a contribution from Prof Janet Boddy (Education) who was a respondent at the event. Attendees included representatives from the Department of Education, Administrative Data Research, CoramBAAF and ParentZone. A blog about the event can be found here: <https://oxfordnuffieldstrategic.web.ox.ac.uk/article/children-and-families-voices-about-their-personal-information-and-administrative-data-notes>

Consultation on strip searching of children

Dr Simon Flacks (Law) took part in a consultation on proposals to amend the police Code of Practice A and C in relation to the strip searching of children. The consultation was organised by Stopwatch. He has also written a policy brief for the organisation.

Webinar series to disseminate learning from the Innovate Project

A series of eight webinars took place as part of Professor Michelle Lefevre's (Social Work) Innovate Project from 14 June 2023 – 25 October 2024 to engage with the policy and practice context in the UK and overseas under the following

themes: (i) 'What helps innovation flourish and sustain in social care?', (ii) 'Tailoring contextual Safeguarding systems to meet local conditions and contexts', (iii) 'Building collaborative, reflective structures to enhance innovation', (iv) 'What works in helping young people at risk of extra-familial harm', (v) 'Introducing a trauma-informed approach to addressing extra-familial risks and harms', (vi) 'International opportunities for contextual safeguarding', (vii) 'How can young people's safety needs be better supported at the transition to adulthood', (viii) 'Promoting ethical and effective innovation in social care'.

ACoRNS turns sensory!

For Neurodiversity Awareness week, the Autism Community Research Network Sussex (www.acorns-sussex.org.uk/) converted their lab space into a hosted sensory experience. Autistic people can often experience hypo- or hyper-sensory sensitivity to sensory stimuli. Many families use materials and techniques to help their children manage these sensitivities. We endeavoured to try out experiences to help with sensory regulation. We ran galaxy light sessions with calm relaxing music, texture sessions with kinetic sand and tactile materials and provided a range of 'fidget' toys for people to try. Over the three days we had many visits from students and staff. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback. Many felt that having a pop-up or permanently available room that ran similarly would be beneficial to have on campus, especially around exam season. They found it a great experience which had a positively calming effect. ACoRNS staff are also evaluating an exciting sensory classroom

project at Carden Nursery and Primary School, with professional designers and staff.

Creating with Uncertainty resources and impact case study development

Dr Perpetua Kirby and Dr Rebecca Webb (both from Education) are further developing their work on how schooling can be reconfigured to embrace a creative engagement with uncertainty within sustainability education. They will be collaborating with two new schools to expand their teaching aimed at transforming sustainability education. This work will be developed as a written case study of teachers' engagement with the project, as well as feeding into additional topics for the forthcoming second edition

of Creating with Uncertainty resource. The work is being funded by a Knowledge Exchange & Impact (KEI) Fellowship.

Lines of Inventive Connection

In June, Fliss Bull (Education) hosted an exhibition of research, photography and children's art at the Phoenix Art Space in Brighton. Titled 'Lines of Inventive Connection', the event was an exhibition of pedagogic documentation with photography by Ainoa Burgos and young children's original artforms around the theme of nature, gathered within Fliss Bull's PhD research project. The project has been a collaboration with Goldstone Primary School and Bee in the Woods Forest School and Kindergarten.



Figure 4: (Left to right) Dez Holmes, Rebekah Pierre and Lisa Holmes, Closing Plenary of the EuSARF Conference.

Events & Conferences

EUSARF Conference 2023

In September 2023, Prof Janet Boddy (Education) and Prof Lisa Holmes (Education) co-organised the annual EUSARF conference at the University of Sussex. Researchers from across the world came together to share research on the theme 'Equity and Social Justice in Child, Youth and Family Welfare'. The conference was hybrid, with over 450 presentations over the three days, and included 600 delegates from 36 countries across the global – representing every continent (except Antarctica!) Highlights from the event included a keynote by CIRCY colleague Prof Lisa Holmes on 'value' in children's social care and a closing event involving a critical discussion of the idea of the 'care experienced voice' involving writer Rebekah Pierre and Dez Holmes (Research in Practice).



Figure 5: Rachel Thomson, Funore Conference, Helsinki, June 2024.

CIRCY colleagues attend Funore conference in Helsinki

In June, a group of CIRCY colleagues (Prof Janet Boddy, Dr Ali Lacey, Dr May Nasrawy, and Prof Rachel Thomson) attended the Funore conference in Helsinki, Finland, on the theme of 'Contemplating Qualitative Longitudinal Research: Temporalities, Theories and Methods'. Prof Rachel Thomson was one of the two keynote speakers, with a talk titled 'A case of you? Working through individuals' biographies in qualitative longitudinal research'. CIRCY colleagues also presented on work from the ESRC Seldom Heard Families project and the National Evaluation of a Better Start (see highlights in this report), as well as contributing to other panels and workshop events.

Cultural assembly: from Eco-anxiety to Climate Action

CIRCY members Dr Perpetua Kirby and Dr Rebecca Webb (both from Education) took part in the first-ever South East Cultural Assembly on 22nd April at the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, which focused on From Eco-Anxiety to Action. The event involved partners: ONCA a Brighton-based arts charity that bridges social and environmental justice issues with creativity; the De la Warr Pavilion; and Culture Declares Emergency. The Cultural Assembly was launched on Earth Day and brought together arts groups to consider (and attempt to mitigate) the rise in eco-anxiety among young people.



Figure 6: EuSARF event, Brighton i360. September 2023.



Figure 7: Helsinki waterfront.

Prizes & Awards

CIRCY members recognised with Ethical Research Award

CIRCY members Dr Alison Lacey (Education) and Dr May Nasrawy (Social Work) were jointly conferred the 'Ethical Research Award' at the University of Sussex's Research Culture Awards, for their work on the ESRC project 'Listening to Families: Lessons for Research', led by Professor Janet Boddy. The award includes £1000 in funding for a follow-on project titled: 'From recruitment to the archive: innovations in ethical research practice with seldom-heard families'. The project will further develop new ethical practice in how the voices of non-English speaking participants are represented and archived, particularly focusing on the relational role of interpreters in research and the ethical challenges of only archiving transcriptions in English. The funding will enable the team to critically explore what this means for participants whose voice remain unheard in the archive, and the associated implications for data quality.

ACRC award winner

Professor of Applied Social Science, Lisa Holmes (Education), was the inaugural winner of the International Ambassador of Excellence in Child and Family Services and Supports award. The award was presented to Prof Holmes at The Association of Children's Residential & Community (ACRC) 68th Annual Conference in Phoenix, Arizona (6-9 May). The conference addressed what is working in regards to the urgent and often

unmet behavioural and mental health needs of children, and re-envision how children and families access care. At the conference, Prof Holmes presented on 'Right Care, Right Place, Right Time: Revolutionizing the Children's Continuum of Care'.



Figure 8: Lisa Holmes Award Poster.

Kay McDougall Prize by the British Journal of Social Work

Lecturer in Social Work, Dr Paul Shuttleworth, was awarded the 2023 Kay McDougall prize by the British Journal of Social Work (BJSW) for his article on 'Recognition of Family Life by Children Living in Kinship Care Arrangements in England'. The Kay McDougall Prize is awarded by the Journal's Editorial Board to the best 'Editor's Choice' article from the previous journal Volume (2023).

People

Return Visitor to CIRCY

Dr Hamide Elif Uzumcu (University of Padova, Italy) came for a return visit to CIRCY, after originally visiting us back in Spring 2019! Dr Uzumcu joined several CIRCY events and shared her current work on a cross-European study of humanist families. Dr Uzumcu also spent time working on a publication with Dr Liam Berriman, looking at the challenges of researching digital childhoods with families across Türkiye and England. Dr Uzumcu has recently been appointed to the ISA's Sociology of Childhood research committee.

Congratulations to former CIRCY PGRAs!

We're very pleased to share that two of CIRCY's former Postgraduate Research Assistants successfully completed their PhDs this year. In March, Dr Loreto Rodrigeuz (Social Work) defended her thesis 'Exploring the puzzle? Narrative understandings of the experience of psychotherapy following sexual abuse for young children in Chile'. And in May, Dr Brontë McDonald-Harper (Psychology) defended her thesis 'Intervention for School Anxiety and Absenteeism in Children (ISAAC): Co-designing and piloting an online parent-focused

programme for emotionally based school avoidance in primary school-aged children'. We wish them the very best in the next stages of their careers!

Goodbye to Emily and welcome to Kirsty

Those who have attended any of CIRCY's events this year will have become familiar with Emily Askew, who has been CIRCY's PGRA since October 2023. Emily was already working at Sussex in Widening Participation when she took on the role and had undertaken the MA in Early Years within ESW. In just a short time, Emily firmly embedded herself into the work of the Centre and played a key role in co-ordinating some of our biggest events of the year – particularly the CIRCY symposium. Sadly for us, Emily will be stepping down from the role at the end of this year. Emily is now working for the Institute of Early Years Education as a content writer and we hope she will continue to maintain a close connection with CIRCY in her new role!

Our new CIRCY PGRA will be Kirsty Fraser, who will be undertaking a PhD with us as part of the new CIRCY studentship funded by the Centre of Excellence scheme. We look forward to welcoming Kirsty in Autumn 2024.

Publication News

Parental substance use and child protection

Dr Simon Flacks, Deputy Director of CIRCY and a Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice in Sussex Law School, has published an article about his research into parental substance use. 'Parental Substance Use as a Child Protection Problem: A Poststructural Interview Analysis' featured in *Contemporary Drug Problems* and included data from interviews with social workers, lawyers and judges. It considered how concepts such as 'recovery', 'drugs' and 'addiction' were understood by participants and raised concerns about, for example, the gendered nature of 'risk' and 'harm'.

Innovate Project celebrates book launch

In May, Professor Michelle Lefevre (Social Work) and colleagues launched their new open access book published by the Policy Press: 'Innovations in Social Care: New Approaches for Young People Affected by Extra-Familiar Risks and Harms'. The book was launched with a webinar, which you can re-watch here: <https://vimeo.com/941697418?share=copy>. The book's co-authors include Dr Nathalie Huegler (Sussex), Dr Jenny Lloyd (Durham), Dr Rachael Owens (Durham), Dr Jeri Damman (Sussex), Prof Gillian Ruch (Sussex) and Prof Carlene Firmin (Durham). The book is available open access.

Strip Searching and Children's Rights

Dr Simon Flacks, Deputy Director of CIRCY and a Senior Lecturer in Criminal Justice in Sussex Law School, published a piece about Child Q and powers to search children in school. This commentary considered the response to the incident, focusing on the local authority's use of a children's rights framework to assess the actions of both police and schoolteachers. It compares the scrutiny of police powers to stop and search minors in public with the lack of focus on powers to search pupils in schools, noting the potential for disproportionality and the need for systematic data collection.

Beatrix Potter's Early Merchandise

Hannah Field (English) presented a paper at the 19th annual Child and the Book Conference, held at the University of Rouen in May. Her research examined the early merchandise produced or overseen by Beatrix Potter, including: toys, games, handkerchiefs, china, and wallpaper. These products challenge any view of product tie-ins as a parasitic intrusion in children's culture and instead suggest the world of bookish objects as a potentially vibrant aspect of children's relationships to books. Objects that Field discussed include a Peter Rabbit soft toy hand-sewn by Potter and patented in 1903. Lead bullets in his feet allow him to stand up!

Research Highlights

New project focused on children at risk of poor outcomes

We are delighted to be involved in a new ADR England Research Community Catalyst for Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes. The project is co-funded by ADR UK with Foundations: The National What Works Centre for Children and Families. The project will be co-led by Dr Lucy Griffiths of Swansea University and Professor Karen Broadhurst, of Lancaster University. Co-investigators include Dr Jenny Woodman and Professor Katie Harron (University College London), Professor Lisa Holmes (University of Sussex) and Dr Dougal Hargreaves (Imperial College London).

The data landscape for children who come into contact with early intervention services or children's social care is patchy. This limits its potential to drive research, practice and policy that improves children's lives. In recent years, there has been a lot of progress in making valuable national datasets available; however, researchers are still making insufficient use of them. Currently, knowledge is fragmented; there is no clear sense of research gaps or priorities, and where evidence exists, it often gathers dust on a shelf. Researchers in the field have varying levels of connectivity and support.

The ADR England Research Community Catalyst for Children at Risk of Poor Outcomes aims to address these issues by building a community of data users. This community will provide national strategic leadership for administrative data and research, focusing on children and young people supported by early

intervention services or children's social care.

New study with Trinity College Dublin on Care Leavers

Janet Boddy, Professor of Child and Youth Studies, is part of the 'Care Leavers - Ten Years On' research team, a groundbreaking study to transform our understanding of how adults fare after leaving the state care system. The study, led by researchers from Trinity College Dublin in partnership with the University of Sussex, will be the first conducted in Ireland to address the experience of adult care-leavers in terms of education, family, work, accommodation, health and wellbeing. Funded by the Department for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the study is part of a national project entitled 'Care Experiences: Journeys through the Irish Care System' examining the lives of children in care as well as adults who were in care as children.

New Girlhood in Migration Research Network

In May 2024, Dr Rachel Larkin, Lecturer in Social Work, co-founded a new research network with Tatiana Avignone, from the University of Loyola in Spain. Girls and young women have been called an 'invisible' group in forced migration. The network has members from Finland, Spain and Sweden who are researching girlhood in the context of migration. The aim is to develop collaborative and inter-disciplinary

work, initially in Europe and then more globally.

New project funded by GambleAware

Dr Liam Berriman (Social Work) is part of a research team, led by not-for-profit consultancy organisation Social Finance, that have been awarded funds by Gamble Aware to explore how social media influencers shape children and young people's perceptions of gambling and gambling-like activities. The research will involve research with young people, exploring their experiences of influencer content that encourages or promotes gambling activities. The study will also undertake co-design work with young people to shape educational resources. The study runs from March 2024 to February 2025.

Educating for Empathy: The Reading Factor

In the School of Psychology at the University of Sussex, Jane Oakhill, Robin Banerjee and Alan Garnham are running an ESRC-funded project: "Reading Feelings: Does Reading Fiction Improve Children's Empathy and Pro-social skills?" The children are primary school children, aged 8 to 10 years old, and the study involves a synergetic collaboration with the not-for-profit community interest company, EmpathyLab (empathylab.uk), who work closely with children's authors, publishers, schools, and libraries to "raise an empathy-educated generation, inspired to build a better world for everyone" (EmpathyLab mission statement). In December 2023 we co-organised a dissemination event, "Educating for

Empathy: The Reading Factor", to explore the accumulating science behind the use of children's books and stories as a vehicle to promote empathy and prosocial behaviour alongside increasing reading for pleasure. The day was co-designed with EmpathyLab and another of their partners, St Matthews Research School, Birmingham. The day was an eclectic mix of keynotes (from Robin Banerjee, Sonia Thompson, head of St Matthews, and Teresa Cremin from the Open University), a presentation of our own research, accounts of other school-based projects involving EmpathyLab, input from children's authors, and interactive workshops. A wide variety of delegates attended this online event, including academics, head teachers, a variety of other teachers and school staff, librarians, and children's authors. The meeting was well received all round. A larger scale dissemination event with EmpathyLab is planned at the end of the grant.

CIRCY researchers involved in new environmental projects

Dr Perpetua Kirby and Dr Rebecca Webb (both from Education) are working with Prof Alice Eldridge (Principal Investigator) to support primary school children to attend to, and record, the sounds of the outdoors, as part of a Brighton Festival initiative entitled 'Bird Bath'. The project aims to transform beautiful buildings into restorative spaces by inviting the public to stop, rest and soak in the sound of local birdsong. The team are interested in the possibilities of attending to sounds for opening-up pro-conservation sensibilities and action. The research is funded by an Arts and Humanities Research Council Impact Acceleration Award.

The pair are also part of a new project: 'Rooted Phase 1: Connecting with Local

Food Systems'. The project is the first phase of a proposed larger piece of research to develop an analogue farming game. This is a transdisciplinary project aiming to unlock the power of games, play and storytelling to engage stakeholders across the agri-food sector and to foster understanding, empathy, and collaboration. The project partners include:

Wiston Estate Farm in West Sussex; Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP); WebbPaton; and Plumpton Agricultural College. This initial phase is funded by the Sussex Humanities Lab Digital Fund, and is being conducted together with Jim Jackson; Dr Michael Jonik; Dr Chris Sandom; Dr John Thompson; and Dr Jo Walton.

CIRCY's involvement in teaching and learning

CIRCY continues in its mission to provide a supportive and creative 'space to think with' for the academic community – building methodological capacity, opening up new interdisciplinary possibilities, and supporting the work of colleagues at all career stages. We have an active social media presence, with an X (Twitter) feed and blog. Postgraduate researchers continue to register for our Childhood and Youth PhD and you will see spotlight contributions from doctoral researchers later in this report. Our taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses continue to flourish, and we are delighted to see our graduates thriving across a range of academic and professional roles with children, young people and families:

BA in Childhood and Youth Studies

As mentioned above, we are delighted that this year our undergraduate degree in Childhood and Youth Studies retains its position as one of the top two undergraduate courses for childhood and youth in the UK. We have some news on our students. **Amber Holland** was this year's winner of the BA Childhood & Youth

dissertation award for outstanding research. Two BACY students, **Yanna Erikson** and **Ellie Flynn**, successfully completed projects as part of the University's Junior Research Associate (JRA) Scheme. Ellie's research allowed her to explore teachers' understanding and experiences of the intersection between behaviour and potential. Yanna undertook research to explore young people with autism's views on practices of 'sharenting' (social media sharing of children's lives by parents/carers) and rights to consent. Both projects were featured in the JRA poster exhibition at the start of the Autumn term, and Yanna's poster was one of those shortlisted by the judging panel.

We spotlight below the dissertation findings of Amber Holland who won the BACY dissertation prize for her outstanding research project. We also feature the reflections of three of our year 2 BACY students – **Vianney Rubit**, **Leona Cremnitz** and **Alysia Goacher** – who collaboratively organised the CIRCY symposium this year on the theme of creative methods.

Amber Holland

BACY Dissertation Prize Winner

This study aimed to highlight the different areas of transitions within the early years, focusing on practitioners' perspectives. Honing in on ideas of micro-transitions during a child's early life that I felt was often overlooked due to the focus on school transitional periods. My motivations for this research came from my experiences in early years settings as both a student and practitioner. Through this, I observed and carried out many transitions, whilst witnessing my fellow practitioners' different methods. This inspired me to further explore the concept by focusing on personal practice as well as what is expected from policy/legislation. Much focus is brought to the transitions from nursery to school, and I felt there was less around the everyday transitions that children are expected to follow.

My wider studies on BA Childhood and Youth developed my knowledge of theories of attachment and pedagogic practices which held much influence over my research. Within my literature review, I explored these concepts in how practitioners carry out transitions linked to the attachment between them, the child, and the parents. Throughout my study the different pedagogic practices taught continuously throughout the degree were at the forefront of my mind, including viewing professionals and children as equals, and that activities and processes within education should benefit everyone involved.

Throughout the process of my dissertation, I have learnt invaluable skills in writing and analysing, time management and organisation, interviewing, and thinking critically. I believe many of these skills will benefit me throughout my academic and professional life. Additionally, the knowledge I have learnt in my degree, as well as through my research has benefited my practice and changed my perspective on education. Through this, I hoped to show the importance of everyday transitions in the early years to explore methods and policies to support the well-being and learning of children and practitioners.

Exploring Children's Imagination, Creativity And Self-Expression Through The Works Of Professor John Potter, Ms. Ellen Yates And Judith Szenasi

Vianney Rubit, Leona Cremnitz and Alysia Goacher

(Year 2, BA Childhood and Youth: Theory and Practice)

When the idea of organising a CIRCY seminar was presented to us, we started reading a wide range of articles and exploring a range of possible themes. We were drawn to the idea of creativity, which we believe is an essential part of childhood, for it emphasises the role of imagination and self-expression in children's development. The research conducted by Professor John Potter, and that of Drs Ellen Yates and Judith Szenasi, complimented each other with their perspectives on children's creativity and expression, and the ways in which this is encouraged or facilitated in their lives. The combination of the two research studies provided an insight into the topic that we were eager to explore further. The primary objective for the symposium was to share the professionals' research and discuss their practical applications in the field.

The seminar took place on Thursday 7th March 2024. Professor John Potter presented his team's research on children's play in the pandemic: 'National Observatory of Children's Play Experiences in COVID-19'. This project features children's creative depictions of play through various mediums, prompting reflections on the importance of providing children with opportunities to play and create. This insight into children's creativity and resilience was complemented by Dr Ellen Yates and Dr Judith Szenasi's exploration of clay and illustrations help to nurture and sustain children's creative identities. They shared their research project in which children were provided with opportunities for meaning making using bone china clay, a medium with strong cultural and historical links to the local city (Derby), and the children's artwork was valued and displayed. Following their presentations, a Q&A session sparked a discussion on creativity's role in children's education and daily lives at school.

The traditional seminar is something that relies on engagement through listening and discussion, but the emphasis of our speakers spoke volumes for interactions and learning through play. We wanted to reflect these sentiments through the learning environment of the symposium to demonstrate just how powerful creativity in education can be, for all ages. In doing so, we chose to provide reflective opportunities through mediums that encouraged and facilitated verbal discussion but also had the potential to replace it and express thoughts in a different, interpretative, and subjective way. Incorporating Lego and salt dough enabled the attendees to express themselves creatively, reinforcing the theme of creativity, imagination and self-expression. We thoroughly enjoyed seeing the ideas people conveyed using the resources provided, and appreciated the engaging discussions inspired by the presentations.

This experience of delving into the works of these researchers, developed our reflections of our learning both on our course and in our current roles working with children. In addition, the process of creating this seminar, interacting with inspiring professionals in the field, and devising creative ways to bring this research together has been an experience we will take with us into our future work, and one we would love to do again.

MA in Childhood and Youth Studies

We are incredibly proud of the research produced by our MA Childhood and Youth Studies students as part of their dissertations. Recent projects have included a study of the academic journeys of young middle-class women in Pakistan, and gender performance in the UK's army cadet force.

In what follows, we provide a flavour of some of our students' research, by shining a spotlight on the most recent prize-winning dissertations.

Our prize winning Masters dissertations, including previous years, can be read in full in the [CIRCY journal on our blog](#).

The Barrie Thorne Prize for Best Overall Academic Achievement

Katie Hildreth: 'Exploring Reanimating Data as a Queer Research Method in the Retrospective Accounts of Childhood and Weight'

Starting out on the MA Childhood and Youth Studies course, I didn't know what to expect. Returning to education 10 years after I'd completed my undergraduate degree, I was not sure if I would be able to manage the demands of the part time course alongside my work. I had wanted to study at Masters level ever since I finished my undergraduate degree, but work schedules and finances had played a part in it never feeling the 'right' time. Finally, in 2021, things seemed to align for me, and I was accepted onto the MACYS course.

In the first semester of my first year, I remember one of my lecturers talking about how academia has historically been a space for cis, white, middle-class men. They said that times were changing and there was more room for diversity at the table, and more space for anxieties to coexist with academics and researchers. Coming from a working-class background, and as someone who has experienced anxiety for as long as I can remember, I was both inspired and reassured by their words. I began to feel that perhaps there was a space for me in the world of academia.

On reflection, it was this lecturers' words in that first term which sparked the flame that led me to write my dissertation through a Queer Theory and Fat Studies lens. Queer theory stood out to me as it aims to deconstruct norms and commonsense assumptions. As I furthered my own understanding of Queer Theory, I began to understand the link with Fat Studies, how children who grow up fat can be understood as queer in the way their bodies may be considered different to the norm, or a problem which needs solving.

(cont.)

My interest in childhood and weight comes from both my own experiences of living in a larger body and working with children who have struggled with body image and eating disorders. As I explored the academic field of Fat Studies, a discipline I had not been aware of prior to the MACYS course, it became evident that childhood and weight is a significantly under-researched area (except for in medical research which focuses on childhood 'obesity'). This is despite the increasing number of government publications and anti-obesity policies in the United Kingdom which focus on reducing the body size of 'overweight' children.

I had a wonderful dissertation supervisor who encouraged me to undertake innovative primary research using a method that she had co-devised; Reanimating Data. Reanimating data brings archived research data to a contemporary context using creative workshops. As reanimating data had not been used to study childhood and weight before I used adult participants as this was the most ethical choice. My research was conducted as a pilot study to understand the benefits and limitations of Reanimating Data in the study of childhood and weight, with the hope of working with children and young people in future research.

Within the workshop, using creative methods such as collaging and poetry, and re-asking questions from archived interviews allowed for the participants to connect with the original data in a playful way, and was instrumental in allowing the participants to feel comfortable. As the original data used included interviews with children about their experiences of being weighed and measured at school, it was fascinating to see how the participants responded and discussed the topic both from their experiences as adults and as children.

The MACYS course was thought provoking and challenging and helped me feel more confident in my role as Director of Studies. The level of support we were given from our academic advisors and dissertation supervisors was excellent, and there was a sense of comradery amongst course mates who became good friends throughout the years. Thanks to the MACYS course I am now seriously considering a PhD, something I never would have felt able to do before!

The Cathy Urwin Prize Winner for Work with the Greatest Impact on Practice

Mitchelle D'Souza: 'Redefining Masculinities: Engaging Boys and Young Men for Gender Equality in India'

When I embarked on my journey to explore gender dynamics in India, I didn't anticipate how transformative it would be for my academic pursuits and my outlook on gender equality. My dissertation, "Redefining Masculinities: Engaging Boys and Young Men for Gender Equality in India," has profoundly shaped my understanding of the importance of engaging boys and young men in gender equality efforts.

Growing up in an urban middle-class Indian family, I witnessed first-hand the pervasive influence of patriarchy. The restrictive norms around education, career, and marriage choices for women were evident in the lives of my family members, friends and colleagues. This personal context, coupled with my professional experiences in empowerment programs for low-income girls and boys, sparked my curiosity about gender dynamics. However, it wasn't until I delved deeper into academic research that I realised the critical gap in addressing boys' roles in achieving gender equality.

Most initiatives in India focus on empowering girls, which is undeniably crucial. But what about the boys? This question led me to explore targeted interventions for boys and young men, aiming to transform harmful masculine norms and promote gender-equitable attitudes. My dissertation set out to investigate whether engaging boys in patriarchal societies like India can foster a more inclusive and equitable society.

My research centred on three interventions in India: Parivartan ("Change") in urban Mumbai; Mardon Wali Baat ("A Conversation Among Men") in urban Uttar Pradesh; and Do Kadam Barabari Ki Ore ("Two Steps Towards Equality") in rural Bihar. These programs provided a comparative lens to analyse how different strategies and contexts impact gender norms among boys and young men. Through these programs, I explored how intersectional factors like caste, class, and region influence the outcomes of gender interventions for boys. The socioecological and intersectional frameworks used in my dissertation helped dissect the complex web of gender dynamics in India's multifaceted society.

One of the most significant insights from my research was the realization that transforming harmful masculinities is not just about changing boys' attitudes but also about dismantling the patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequalities. This requires coordinated efforts engaging women, communities, and institutions. The interventions studied showed promise in shifting gender norms, but sustainable transformation necessitates a holistic approach that centres on feminist visions of gender equality. Additionally, decolonizing these interventions is crucial to ensure they are culturally relevant and effective.

(cont.)

My positionality as a female academic from a minority background added complexity to my research. While my insider status provided a deeper understanding of the cultural contexts, it also required rigorous reflexivity to account for potential biases. This journey emphasized the importance of maintaining objectivity and ethical standards in representing and analysing gender dynamics. Embracing a decolonized approach in my research also meant being mindful of how my background and perspectives influenced my interpretation of data.

My dissertation journey has been an eye-opening experience, highlighting the critical role boys and young men play in achieving gender equality. By rethinking masculinities and engaging boys in transformative ways, we can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable future for everyone in India.



Figure 9: (Left to right) Alysia Goacher, Leona Cremnitz and Vianney Rubit, CIRCY Annual Symposium.

Imagining Resistance

The following section of this year's report contains an exhibition of images from the AHRC funded project 'Imagining Resistance Through Participatory Photography: Exploring Resistance in Young People Victimised by Interpersonal and Sexual Violence'. The project was led by Professor Kristine Langhoff (Social Work and Social Care), working with Camille Warrington (University of Bedfordshire) and the visual artist Becky Warnock.

To find out more about the study, you can visit the project website:

<https://www.imaginingresistance.com/>



'I have a right to be the person I want to be...and I have a right to a full life as the next person...Your start doesn't determine what your future is...like, I resist the fact that you are who you are, you can always change your life at any point. Do you get it?'

This declaration was made by Lizzie, when asked to share an example of how she 'resists', on the last morning of the first workshop series ran as part of the 3-year Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project 'Imagining Resistance'. The project, led by Prof. Kristi Langhoff (University of Sussex) along with Dr. Camille Warrington (University of Bedfordshire) and Becky Warnock (University of the Arts London), explored how resistance, a concept with deep roots in historical, political, and sociological literature, might come to life in new ways amongst young people (n=20) affected sexual violence and exploitation who are often described as 'resistant' to help, to direction, and to the conventional wisdom of helping professionals tasked with keeping them safe.



Imagining Resistance sought to explore new connections between how we understand the power and importance of resistance movements throughout history and the lived experiences of young people who simultaneously resist violent victimisation and the interventions that helping professionals design to keep them safe.

Each project workshop was delivered with three charity partners (London-based Abianda and Safer London, along with Imara in Nottingham) and plans for designing the workshops changed dramatically along the way, as young people rejected many of the original plans for the research.

Their resistance taught us to embrace fluidity over structure. We had to abandon the original plans (i.e. to primarily utilise a photo elicitation method) and instead drew upon a range of artist practices, attuning to a reflexive learning process that resulted in something more participatory and equitable than we might have originally planned. Together, researchers, young people and practitioners made a series of zines, a protest quilt, and a film.



Through the use of multi-modal visual and creative methods, the research team worked with young people to surface how accessing the 'felt sense' of resistance enabled them to reframe some of their own 'resistant' behaviours as evidence of their self-care, freedom, power, agency and 'weightlessness'. In the words of one participant, learning about resistance made her feel 'lighter and more free'.

Weightlessness, in particular, surfaced as the necessary antidote to the heavy expectations placed upon young people who shoulder both normative stressors of modern teenage life alongside the trauma of sexual violence and the addition of sometimes multiple professionals who -brought in to support their safety- also bring along new sets of expectations for their time, behaviour, and relationships.



Imagining Resistance helped reframe resistance as both a vehicle for self-acceptance and as part of a healthy response to feelings of oppression and control. However, it would not have been possible to engage young people in such new, complex and challenge ways of thinking and/or representing their lives without the use of visual and creative arts methods.

Arts methods created space for the bravery required to experiment with new ways of thinking, communicating, creating, and being in community with others.

When the projects ended, it became evident that the original plans for organising an exhibition with young people's photographs would not authentically represent the experience or feeling of being involved in Imagining Resistance. Instead, we made a film that represents our work together as creative polymaths. The film, just 8 minutes long, combines 'documented moments from the workshops, interviews, and creative writings by both young people and artists, staged narrative scenes, the stitching of a protest banner, and abstract movement elements' (Warnock, Langhoff, & Warrington, 2023: 179).



Research findings from the Imagining Resistance project can perhaps be succinctly summarised as this: Resistance isn't something we can ignore, sidestep, or attempt to dismantle. The words of two participants make this clear:

"I feel like I resist everything...everything they give me, every task, I'll say 'why do I need to do this, and for what reason'? (Jannay)

When I say no to people, like I feel like I'm resisting, and it gives me a sense of power. I'm trying to be my own person...they don't let you be your own person, they don't let you express yourself. The expectations are unreasonable...yeah, that's resistance' (Feyi)

When we understand it better, it is a sign of something hopeful and generative. Resistance in young people can be celebrated, elevated, and transformed.

Image credit: Ali Mohammed

With thanks to all participants: Ellz, Chan, Feyi, Laila, Asmara, Ceebee2real, Kristi, Willow, Camille, Laura Chase, Iggy, Gemma, and Becky

CIRCY Research Spotlights

Playgrounds, the experimental years.

Ben Highmore (Cultural Studies)

This last year I've been putting the finishing touches to a project on the history of experimental playgrounds – those playgrounds that departed from the orthodoxy of fixed devices (slides, swings and jungle gyms) plonked like little islands on a sea of spongy rubber ground. One of the delights of the project has been meeting playworkers and going to playworker conferences. As someone very much used to going to dry academic conferences, I've got to admit that playworkers do things differently. This academic year I've been to two: one in Glasgow, the other in Eastbourne. Glasgow was the triennial conference of the International Play Association (its 22nd). I knew right away that things were going to be different when I was chaperoned into the main hall of Glasgow Caledonian's Annie Lennox conference suite (they also have a Sir Alex Ferguson library) by a 9-year-old wearing a t-shirt that declared that the wearer was a 'play expert'. In the opening ceremony the 500-plus delegates were encouraged to shout, talk to their neighbour, and do all the sort of convivial things that in academic conferences need at least a drink or three. The keynote was given by Philip D. Jaffé, Director of the Centre for Children's Rights Studies of the University of Geneva. But instead of a 'paper' he was interviewed by primary school children from Glasgow and Lagos.

Given that playwork is a viciously underpaid profession and that supervised adventure playgrounds are in a constant state of jeopardy, I'm still non-plussed by

the levels of enthusiasm, energy, and – dare I say it – joy that playworkers seem to muster. I've met quite a lot of young playworkers (many of whom grew up on adventure playgrounds) but it is the elder playworkers I'm most fascinated by. Many are unselfconsciously eccentric (the convenor of the Eastbourne conference unaffectedly wears a monocle and a yellow bowler had with googly eyes stuck on it) and they have all managed to hold on to a sort of anarchic utopianism that is refreshingly bold and just the right sort of medicine for the ills that afflict us today.



I spent most of the year putting together the finishing touches to my book Playground, the Experimental Years, which is due out from Reaktion Books in September 2024. It charts some of the most ambitious experimental playgrounds

that emerged in the years after 1945. You can get a good idea of my research from an Open Access journal article that has just been published by the History Workshop Journal. The article is called 'Adventures in Lollard Street: An Experimental London Playground, 1955–60' and can be found here: <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbae001>. As usual the researcher's best friend is serendipity. When this article was published online, I sent it to a couple of playworkers who I knew were interested in the history of junk and adventure

playgrounds. One of them sent it to a civil servant who lived on Lollard Street and was also a trustee of the playground (which had relocated after the original playground closed). She then emailed me. But what was so serendipitous was that she was just finishing compiling a report based on the evidence that she and others had gathered for a House of Commons inquiry on Children, Young People and the Built Environment. We met online and she was able to include some of my thoughts into her report.

Understanding how financial precarity links with children's social care

Liam Berriman (Childhood & Youth)

At the time of writing, the UK is preparing for a general election, with the major political parties setting out their stall for policies that will shape the government's agenda for the next five years. However, notably absent are policies relating to child poverty. The Children's Charities Coalition has issued a letter to the main parties highlighting the lack of policies focused on children, and particularly addressing child poverty. The letter calls for the major political parties to, "show national leadership by committing to a Bill to end child poverty". Likewise, the former Labour Prime Minister Gordon Brown, writing in May 2024 just ahead of the election, called for a cross-government workforce to develop a national "plan for childhood", particularly focused on what he calls 'austerity's children'.

These interventions coincide with fieldwork currently being undertaken as part of a recently funded project (by the Nuffield Foundation) on financial precarity and child welfare that I am a contributor to.

The study is being led by Kingston University, along with partners from the University of Sussex, the National Children's Bureau, Research in Practice, and Policy in Practice. The study's primary aim is to develop new forms of data linkage (between benefits and social care data) that will capture how financial precarity overlaps with families' engagement with children's social care services.

The strand of work that I am leading on the project involves bringing the voices of young people, parents and carers, and social care practitioners and managers into the study. This summer, we will be holding the first of two focus group discussions that will provide a space for each of these groups to share how they feel financial precarity impacts on family lives, and in particular the welfare of children and young people.

With young people and parents/carers, we will particularly be exploring how financial precarity shapes their experiences of

children's social care services, and the extent to which they feel their financial circumstances are recognised in the service's they receive. We will also be asking them about the extent to which they would feel comfortable with practitioners having more information about their financial circumstances, and whether they feel it is appropriate for benefits data to be linked with their social care data, and under what circumstances.

Next year, we will be returning to each of these group to carry out a second set of focus groups that will share findings from the quantitative data linkage work being led by Kingston and Policy in Practice. Our aim in these sessions will be to reflect with the participants on these findings and the extent to which they align with their experiences. We'll be particularly

interested to see what they feel might be added to a quantitative picture of financial precarity and child welfare, and whether there are parts of their experiences that can only be understood qualitatively.

Looking beyond the upcoming election, we hope that this work will be a contributor to future discussions on how financial precarity impacts on families' experiences with children's services and can help support wider efforts to recognise the impacts of child and family poverty.

To find out more about this study you can visit the Policy in Practice blog: <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/new-study-launched-to-investigate-links-between-poverty-and-child-welfare/> or contact Dr Liam Berriman (l.j.berriman@sussex.ac.uk)

Tapestries of care and connection: Evaluating complexity in family support

Alison Lacey, Janet Boddy, and Gillian Hampden-Thompson (Childhood & Youth)

In last year's CIRCY annual report, we described our qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) with families as part of the national evaluation of A Better Start (ABS). ABS is a ten-year (2015-2025) £215 million programme set up by The National Lottery Community Fund, the largest community funder in the UK. Five ABS partnerships based in Blackpool, Bradford, Lambeth, Nottingham, and Southend-on-Sea are supporting families to give their babies and very young children the best possible start in life. Services are commissioned flexibly, depending on local priorities and shaped in partnership with families, but share a focus across areas on diet and nutrition, communication and language, social and emotional development, and local systems change.

The national evaluation is being conducted by a multi-disciplinary team, led by NatGen Social Research, in partnership with the University of Sussex, RSM Consulting, Research in Practice, and the National Children's Bureau. The overall aim is to engage with the complexity of ABS across the five partnership areas, through a multi-method design that builds a 'mosaic of evidence' over time. The Sussex CIRCY team leads qualitative longitudinal interviews with 25 families from diverse backgrounds, five in each ABS area.

Our recently published second annual report of the national evaluation includes analysis of the first two years of interviews with families. We drew on Sarah Marie Hall's (2019, p70) metaphor of a 'tapestry

of care' to conceptualise new ways of thinking about how formal and informal support networks intersect in family lives over time. Hall's metaphor highlights how relational qualities of care and support shape everyday social infrastructures, including care that is often viewed as incidental – for example, when provided by friends and neighbours. We have adapted this metaphor to highlight how complex systems of support built from multiple 'threads' combine to create meaningful systems of support. Across all five ABS areas, the longitudinal analysis documents the importance of flexible access to non-judgemental support – responding to families' changing circumstances and priorities and avoiding deficit-focused constructions of need, enabling meaningful engagement with ABS and non-ABS infrastructures and services. These developing tapestries of care and connection are characterised by embedded, networked and responsive local systems that acknowledge that one size does not fit all, and recognise that access to support may depend on multiple and non-linear pathways.

This is illustrated in a map of local connections drawn by a sibling group to represent what has changed for their family since our first visit. At their first interview, this family (who came to the UK as refugees) described significant intersecting barriers to engagement with local services. By Wave 2, drawing initially on information shared on WhatsApp by an ABS outreach worker, the family were accessing a range of local provision and activities (ABS and non-ABS). The change in their lives grew through multiple points of connection, combining to create a local tapestry of engagement and support.

Children's map of change for their family in the last year:

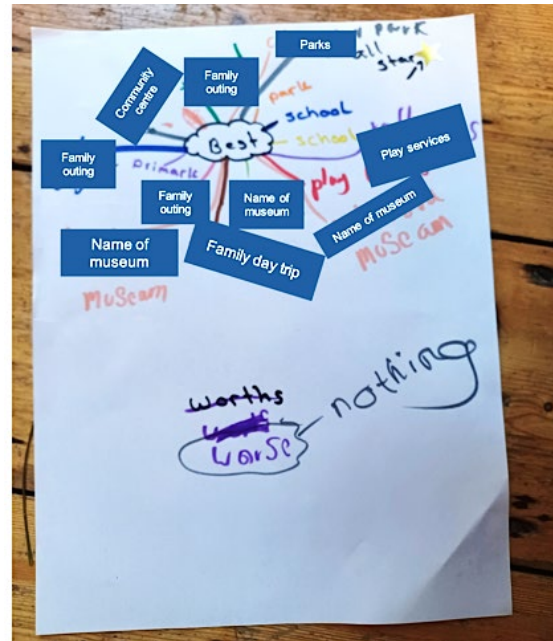


Figure 10

Mother: I started to go to find something [...] Yes, I did, I did want to know what I have to do to make the life of my children better instead of sitting at home and wait for something which is not. So I went, and I managed to go to these two [places].

Researcher: And what was the first thing that you ... when you decided to go out and find something, what was the first thing that you went to?

Mother: Yes, actually, I went to the [baby group recommended by ABS].
(see McAskill et al. 2024, pp58-59)

Figure 11

In methodological terms, these insights are afforded by the family-centred qualitative longitudinal methodology – shining light on aspects of experience that resist easy measurement in order to 'move closer to reality itself, the reality that precedes our definitions and categories, the reality that can't be gotten around, the reality that, in its surplus, insists on our

recognition of, and reverence for, its irreducible otherness' (Freeman, 2024, p45). ABS as an approach is rooted in recognition that one size does not fit all, with place-based systems built in partnership with parents. Evaluating these local 'tapestries' entails attention to complex and dynamic diversity, with qualitative longitudinal methods opening up new possibilities for understanding of what works – and what matters to families over time.

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Re-imagining the Birth Cohorts: Listening to Seldom Heard Families

Janet Boddy, Rachel Thomson, Alison Lacey, May Nasrawy, Linda Morrice

(Education and Social Work)

The birth cohorts have been seen as the jewel in the crown of UK social science, a series of large scale surveys following distinct 'generations' from birth to death and in doing so providing evidence that helps us unpick the knotty problems of the lifecourse and providing evidence that shapes social policies. But despite their powerful potential the birth cohorts suffer from two fundamental challenges. Designed to provide a 'big picture', they rely on quantitative survey; the small

amounts of open qualitative data collected are rarely analysed, limiting the capacity of cohort studies to get inside the 'black box' of complex causality over time. Representativeness is also a persistent – and growing – challenge. Cohort studies struggle to recruit – or to retain the involvement of – families from disadvantaged and marginalised communities. As a consequence, the 'norms' created by their data are misleading and potentially stigmatising.

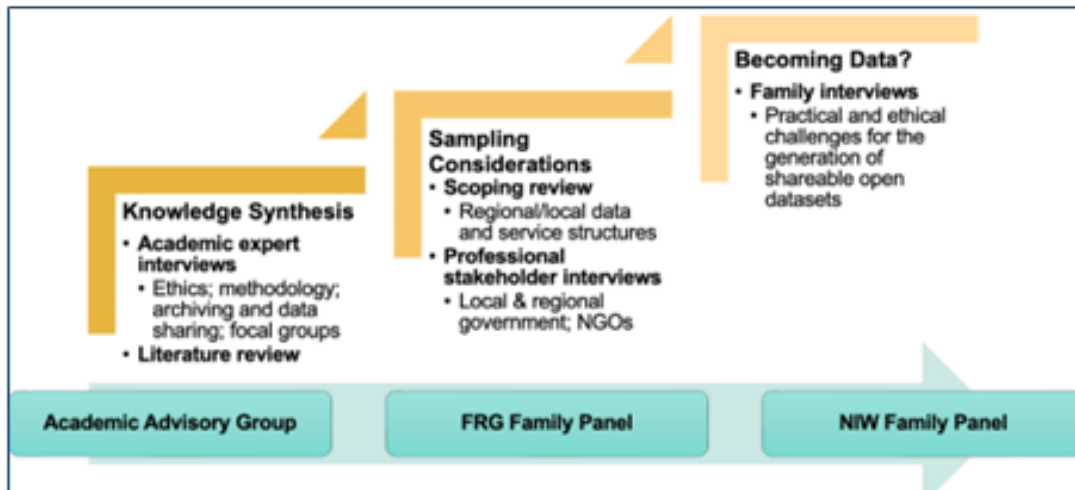


Figure 12: Seldom Heard Work Packages

Recognising these concerns, the ESRC put out a call last year, inviting researchers to explore the feasibility of a qualitative longitudinal study that would complement a new birth cohort (the first in over 20 years), focused on the experiences of seldom heard groups. Ideally suited to CIRCY expertise, we jumped at the chance, and secured one of two commissions for a 12 month project. Our Sussex team – led by Janet Boddy and Rachel Thomson, with Linda Morrice, Ali Lacey and May Nasrawy, and supported by Eve Wilcox – worked in partnership with Family Rights Group (FRG, a national NGO); the Network of International Women for Brighton and Hove (NIW, a local NGO); and Research in Practice (RiP, a national NGO). We focused on two groups, broadly defined to acknowledge the fluidity of ‘seldom heard’ categories and the dangers of essentialising complex and diverse experience: families with statutory child welfare or targeted non-statutory involvement; and families with refugee, asylum seeking or in/secure migration status.

Each group affords distinctive insights, but they also share experiences with a wide range of seldom heard groups: of living with professional scrutiny, and with

poverty, precarity, stigma and marginalisation. We set out to learn what might make families want to get involved – what would make such a study attractive, realistic and meaningful? Would they like to have their experience documented as part of the public record, and what would need to be in place to make this a safe and positive experience? Our scoping study involved three work packages and was advised by three expert panels: an academic advisory group chaired by CIRCY Visiting Professor Julia Brannen, and parent/carer advisory panels from NIW and FRG.

Seldom Heard Families: Work Packages

Our research shows clearly that a qualitative longitudinal birth cohort study involving seldom heard families is possible, but depends on an inclusive approach to the definition of ‘seldom heard’ families and ongoing ethical engagement across the research process. This entails flexibility to accommodate families’ diverse needs and circumstances, and must embed a respectful, relational approach that centres on trust: addressing sensitivities in research with families who may be isolated, suspicious of professional

involvement or risk of stigma, and living with poverty, uncertainty, and/or significant unmet support needs or safeguarding risks. Learning from community archiving and data stewardship traditions, the study would break new ground in establishing an open and shareable data set, but this also depends on ethical care and a capacity for researchers to work in partnership with communities and participants, 'working at the speed of trust'.

A mother's picture of her children playing



Figure 13

Families were happy to have their material archived – including visual data such as this photo – providing they are involved and have control over what is archived and how it is re-used. Risk of stigma – and ensuring that researchers learn from their experiences in order to help others – were seen as key, described by one panel member as 'the rope of hope' that would motivate their involvement in a QLR cohort

Figure 14

The team has recommended design options to the ESRC that would enable a national project of significant scale, incorporating a collaborative and consultative approach; place- and space-based work with families and communities; respecting the rhythms of precarious family lives; and a resilient and responsive research team that brings together best practice at the intersection of research ethics, integrity, and researcher career development.

Our knowledge synthesis report is published open access:

Thomson, R., Lacey, A. J., Nasrawy, M., Boddy, J., Morrice, L., & Brannen, J. (2024). Scoping Longitudinal Qualitative Studies with Seldom-Heard Families (Version 1). University of Sussex. <https://hdl.handle.net/10779/uos.2557477.8.v1>

Spotlighting the Innovate Project

Michelle Lefevre (Social Work)

Many CIRCY members and friends will have followed the progress over the past four years of the [Innovate Project](#), funded by the Economic and Social Research Council to explore how innovation in social care services and settings may be mobilized and helped to flourish. The project was led by former CIRCY Director Michelle Lefevre, working with other Social Work and Social Care colleagues (Kristine Langhoff, Gillian Ruch, Reima Ana Maglajlic, Jeri Damman, Nathalie Huegler and Roni Eyal-Lubling) in partnership with Durham University, the charity Research in Practice, and the social enterprise Innovation Unit. In particular, we examined new approaches to supporting young people affected by extra-familial risks and harms, such as child exploitation and peer-to-peer abuse.

Having now moved through the usual flurry of activity and reporting involved in closing down a large project, it's been a timely moment to step back and celebrate

what has been achieved, as well as consider next steps to ensuring our findings can make a positive impact in service delivery to young people and their families.

Did we do what we set out to do? Mainly, although not always in the ways we quite expected! Our in-person ethnography was derailed by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns, but technological advances meant we were able to rapidly pivot to online observations of strategic and operational meetings. Although we certainly missed out on the everyday interactions and informal decision-making processes that can only be gained from an embodied immersion in an organisation, reviewing and planning forums have remained within 'virtual environments' so, in fact, our ethnography was of the 'new normal'. In addition to our recent [open access book](#) on the ethnographic findings, we have also, this year, [published a paper](#) on how the crisis conditions of the



Figure 15: The Innovate Project Team. Credit: Michelle Lefevre.

pandemic meant practitioners were able to gain permission for radical changes to the usual pattern of service delivery in order to be more responsive to young people. How, we ask, might such innovation be facilitated outside of crisis conditions?

We were able to learn much from meeting observations, interviews, and case file analysis about how professionals perceive and work with young people at risk of extra-familial harm. [One of our recent papers](#) describes the importance of professionals being trauma-informed and building relational trust with young people in order to properly understand their views, their concerns, the lives they lead, and the risks they face. [Another clarifies the importance of reflective spaces for professionals](#) if they are to feel emotionally and intellectually supported in this complex and demanding area of practice.

More trenchant challenges were experienced, however, in relation to our plans for longitudinal, relational, and participatory engagements with young people to learn about their experiences of involvement with safeguarding services, as these were continually stymied by public health restrictions and the impact of these on services. Finally, by the latter stages of fieldwork, this creative work could finally begin. It has resulted [in two exciting sets of resources](#) – tested by young people – that a) support professionals in ensuring that their practice is youth-centred, and b) guide professionals in running their own consultation processes with young people.

Over the past year we have focused not only on writing books and articles, but on producing a range of practice-friendly resources and discussing our research in a range of forums, [including webinars](#). A key highlight was [our conference in London](#) in November 2023, to which we invited policymakers, sector leaders, and key representatives from our research sites and wider 'learning and development' network of local authorities and social care organisations which have met regularly with us through the project to adopt emergent findings and feedback on their usefulness. The cartoonist, Harry Venning, created a number of entertaining and pithy images in the moment to capture key findings and themes discussed.

Most recently, we were fortunate to have been awarded some additional money from the University's Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fellowship fund which has enabled us to continue the work with two of our sites to trial some [new innovation system review tools](#), to see whether and how they may be further improved. There is much potential for ongoing work, so watch this space!

Access to all our materials can be found on the ['latest resources'](#) page of our website. Some further publications are being finalized as we write, so please do email [Michelle Lefevre \(M.Lefevre@sussex.ac.uk\)](mailto:Michelle.Lefevre@sussex.ac.uk) if you would like to go on our mailing list for further updates.

understand my experiences further, I found a significant gap. While an emerging body of literature is available, there is a real absence of parent and student voices.

Finally, the app was seen as a tool of punishment that worked in a way that allowed controlling techniques of discipline rather than an educational approach.

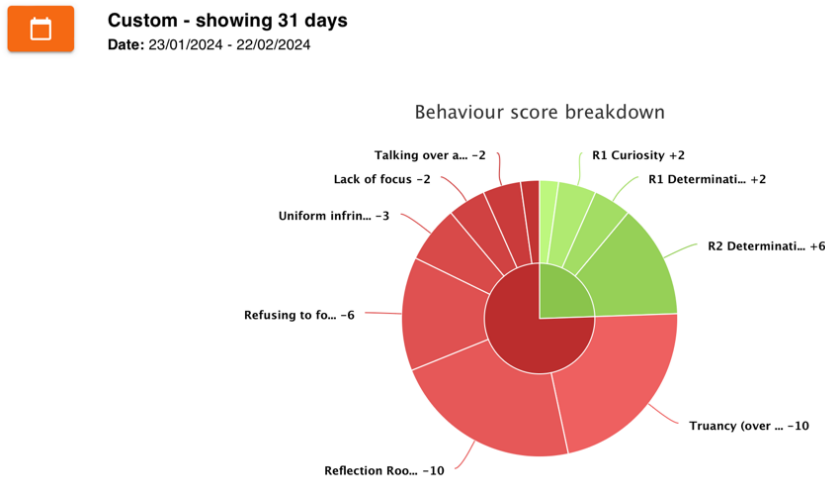


Figure 17: ClassCharts breakdown. Credit: Natalia James.

Despite the small sample of four parents, significant themes emerged from all parents' experiences. Firstly, it was found that parents felt that many negative points were given to their children for behaviours stemming from their SEN diagnosis or unmet needs. Parents discussed a wide range of instances conveying this, such as one parent detailing that their child with vocal ticks was awarded negative points for 'making stupid noises'.

Secondly, parents regularly check the app. Some checked the app multiple times a day, causing substantial stress and worry whilst at work when seeing their child had received negative points. Further, some parents have sought to stop using the app but found no way to escape it despite its detrimental impact on their lives. When parents attempted to ignore the app, they were compelled to look through email prompts.

Parents discussed constant negative points that never disappear as they are constantly reminded of past behaviour. Parents found that receiving points had little impact on changing their child's behaviours but significantly impacted their child's well-being, extending into the family home as parents were constantly updated on their child's behaviour.

Altogether, this research highlighted the need for further, rigorous research into behaviour-tracking apps, particularly research that centres students' voices and focuses on students from marginalised communities. As digital tracking of behaviour in the education system is likely to grow, it is vital that all stakeholders are aware of any changes they may introduce and that apps are used with an informed and careful approach. To that end, I am delighted to say that I have been awarded funding through the ESRC to continue this research for my PhD.

Killing Children in British Fiction: Thatcherism to Brexit

Dominic Dean (English)

Killing Children in British Fiction: Thatcherism to Brexit (due for publication in October 2024) stems from a disturbing observation: contemporary British fiction is full of children killing or being killed. Considering novels and films alongside actual murder cases and moral panics, I develop this insight into a complex account of British cultural history from the Thatcher to Brexit eras, where the child provides a figure for negotiating, and hence for understanding, conflicts over the British future. The book explores such children in work from major twentieth and twenty-first century authors including Kazuo Ishiguro, Ian McEwan, Doris Lessing, Sarah Waters, Alan Hollinghurst, Blake Morrison, Jim Crace and Peter Ackroyd; emerging writers such as David Szalay and Melissa Harrison; and filmmakers including Stanley Kubrick, Nicholas Roeg, Robin Hardy, Derek Jarman, and Remi Weekes. Bridging and often challenging existing scholarship in childhood studies, literary studies, and critical and queer theory (including from Lee Edelman, Kathryn Bond Stockton, Rebekah Sheldon, Jacqueline Rose, Adam Phillips, and others), I show how the child, at once materially present and representative of an unsecured future, provokes relentless fantasies, fears, and violence from adults.

In my introduction, I observe that fiction responding to Britain's recent history by imagining the child who must kill or be killed "explores both a strain of anxiety within this history, the severity of which other kinds of text cannot as fully describe; and an epistemological dimension of historical crisis that only the child can

properly embody". This often emerges, I argue, through attempts to read children as affirming or denying an essentialist, organicist view both of the British position in the world (something both Thatcherism and Brexit attempted to fundamentally reconfigure) and of reality in general. I explore how this impulse is betrayed in the real or imagined killings of children, and in the attempts to redirect the risks they present into authorized channels - as Thatcherism did in celebrating a version of the ambitious male youth. Confidence in such attempts has narrowed over time, however, with Brexit-era retreat from some narratives of neoliberal aspiration.

Perhaps more provocatively, I argue that this attempt to mitigate the risky alterity presented by the child-as-future is not confined to conservatives, but rather appears in ostensibly progressive incarnations - from Ian McEwan's narratives of disappearing children replaced by consolation for adults disoriented by Thatcherism, to Derek Jarman's radical queer re-writing of the boy-king in Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. Authors, filmmakers and theorists are not immune from the urge to replace the child's alterity and material risk with a recognisable and assimilable figure; yet I find other characters and narratives that refuse to compromise that alterity, underlining the child's need for political and material accommodation without the conditions for adult reassurance.

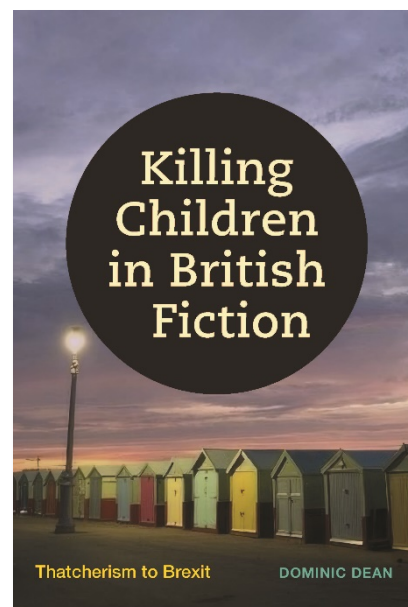
Killing Children in British Fiction had multiple inspirations. Having noted differences of emphasis between North American and British scholarship on

children in literature and culture, I wanted to explore how this reflects the UK's more compromised experience of neoliberalism – which means, for example, that some of the assumptions made by Edelman in his field-defining 2004 book, *No Future*, do not translate across the Atlantic without qualification. This compromised relationship between neoliberalism and nationalism is powerfully evident in recent British history, where conflicts over migration, intersecting with intergenerational conflicts – an intersection Brexit made much more prominent – are central to it. I also wanted to explore how the hegemonic reproductive futurism identified by Edelman is queried by changing times also; the political function of the child's image has changed by the third decade of the twenty-first century, its claims to universalism undermined by a collapse of neoliberal certainties, growth in multipolar conflict producing migration crises, 'culture wars', and the constant threat of climate breakdown.

Killing Children also responds, of course, to fiction itself. Amongst major British authors who first gained prominence in the 1980s, at least three – Ishiguro, McEwan and Ackroyd – all produced early narratives centered on killed, killing or disappearing children (which dominate Ishiguro's first novel, both Ackroyd's first two novels, and McEwan's third). This is also the decade of Lessing's *The Fifth Child*, a gothic satire on social change and Thatcherite family values. I noticed how these authors play on tropes taken from the horror movie genre, which has been foregrounding dangerous children since the 1960s - children so deadly or evil that they justify a fantasy of adult violence against the child that few other genres openly indulge. Authors like Ishiguro, Ackroyd, McEwan and Lessing took these tropes as material to build their own, often

more subtle, explorations of the same impulses. More recently, Remi Weekes has done the same with his horror movie about the British asylum system and the migrant child, *His House* (2020); I have explored this within a series of 2010s texts that present dangerous and endangered children between migration-driven and intergenerational conflict, and which echo themes established in Thatcher-era writing like Ishiguro's first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*. Happily, this has also allowed me to write about recent novels and films that have not previously received substantial scholarly attention, primarily those from Weekes, David Szalay, and Melissa Harrison.

I hope that *Killing Children in British Fiction* will be of broad interest for scholars of childhood, literature, film, cultural history, and psychoanalytic and queer theory.



Killing Children in British Fiction: Thatcherism for Brexit will be published in October 2024 and is available for pre-order.

Parenting

Charlie Rumsby and Sevasti-Melissa Nolas (Childhood & Youth



Figure 18: Illustration by Netherlands-based artist Marika Marini. Offering a creative take on family “fridge drawings” Marini depicts the “many bodies” feeling that comes with providing care while balancing countless tasks as a parent.

Earlier this year, Dr Charlie Rumsby and Dr Melissa Nolas guest edited a themed issue on [Parenting for the June 2024 edition of the Sociological Review Magazine](#). Charlie and Melissa wanted to dive into the murky waters of parenting, with the aim of humanising it. The Sociological Review Magazine offered a platform to do something stylistically different from an academic journal, and that resulted in authors playing with genres of representation, such as autobiography and sociologically imaginative reflections on their own parenting experiences. Contributions included letter writing, a parents’ dictionary, photography and writing that captures a powerful range of emotions.

This themed issue asks: what does it feel like to parent, understood as a verb? How do we parent in the everyday realities we inhabit? What guides us and where do we find inspiration as we grow and learn together with our children and each other?

The answers contained in the articles are sometimes surprising, always moving and often funny. There is something gentle about using a joke when trying not to declare your real emotions, says [Jenny Lee](#). Her Parents’ Dictionary defines the unsayable, one letter at time.

By courageously offering up their personal parenting accounts, the themed issue’s contributors help us see how parenting plays out in all its different realms: the physical, the relational, the demographic, the societal, the institutional, the political and the geopolitical. For, if nothing else, this issue reveals that parenting is leaky and sticky, harbouring a vital force of its own. Any attempt to contain it, to tame it, to make it more palatable and more polished – that is, any attempt to put order in this habitat of mess – is nothing but the cunning strategies of capitalism and what [Yvonne Su](#) calls “benevolent sexism” at work. We witness how becoming a parent can be a hope fulfilled as well as

dashed. It is not always a choice, or perhaps the timing of it is not, and as [Lisa Ballesteros](#) poignantly notes, we don't always get to choose the co-parent, which might end up being the state itself. For women, the choice to become a parent can become more complex with age, societal judgement whispering its verdict on the "right reproductive age". [Tracy Jenson](#) explores the concepts of having a "last chance baby" and being of "advanced maternal age" in a parenting landscape that still prizes and privileges youth, health and "natural" fertility. She reflects on how her sociological imagination enabled her to reframe the negative messaging about being an older mother. Carrying another baby is a gamble, but Jenson has wisdom on her side in her parenting journey.

Parents (mostly mothers in this themed issue) experience the daily challenge of being judged "good" or "bad" against societal standards. [Francielli Dalpra](#) discusses the self-surveillance born of the societal pressures placed on mothers within her research. This was a reality she later experienced firsthand after having her first child. Mothers are criticised, sometimes passively so, when they diverge from heteronormative and patriarchal expectations of what a parent should be. In this context, we have at our fingertips an array of books, manuals and guidance on how to parent. The "ergonomics of motherhood", as [Clare Qualmann](#)'s piece beautifully illustrates, drawing on Lisa Barraitser's *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption*, are anything but graceful.

Technology is not always cast as a friend in parental narratives. Companies market technologies of intimate surveillance and, more recently, AI-based technologies are promoted as the must-have solutions for parenting. However, as [Giovanna Mascheroni and Andra Siibak](#) observe, they can create further challenges,

causing bewilderment to parents and children alike and sometimes creating tensions within families. At the same time, and viewed otherwise, technology makes diasporic parenting possible. Technology can act as a conduit between activities at home here and at home over there – wherever "over there" might be. Mobile phones, VOIPs and social media are the everyday platforms of transnational family life. They are a means of connection, a way to share the joys and sorrows of family goings-on, offering a way to keep ancestral cultures alive and interesting to children. But what happens when those cultures and identities come under attack? How do we explain to a child who is just discovering their heritage that here they are safe, even if the children over there are not? That the shelling over there cannot reach them here even if the fear and uncertainty might? This point is poignantly explored by [Ala Sirriyeh](#), as she reflects on passing on her Palestinian heritage at a time of crisis.

Sociological theory – in various guises – was the surprising doula in several pieces in this issue. While not your typical parents' little helper, sociological thought and related disciplines enabled many of our authors to process, analyse and make sense of life with infants and children. [Cecilia Serrano](#) offers us wisdom – to not do away with ambivalence. When wisdom speaks, it often does so in a whisper. Our learning does not always make sense in the moment, but at another time it may provide the alchemical antidote to our worries and stresses. It offers us a platform from which to speak to ourselves, to our children and, for those of us who teach, to our students.

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Spotlighting the Children's Information Project

**Lisa Holmes (author) with Elaine Sharland, Liam Berriman,
Perpetua Kirby and Caitlin Shaughnessy (Education & Social Work)**

The [Children's Information Project](#) is funded by the [Nuffield Foundation](#) and is a collaboration involving four Councils (North Yorkshire, Hampshire, Oldham and Rochdale), along with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority), five universities and [Research in Practice](#). The researchers and local authorities work closely together, enabling collaboration and co-production between children, young people, parents and carers, practitioners, managers, data analysts, service leaders and policymakers to understand and shape how information can be used ethically and effectively. The focus in Hampshire is on children and families needing additional support from Early Help and in North Yorkshire for young people leaving care. In Oldham and Rochdale the work is about targeted and universal early years services.

Led by [Leon Feinstein](#) at the University of Oxford, the project senior leadership team includes CIRCY members, [Lisa Holmes](#)

(Education) and [Elaine Sharland](#) (Social Work and Social Care), along with Polly Vizard at CASE, London School of Economics and Dez Holmes (Research in Practice). The wider research team also includes members of the CIRCY leadership team: Liam Berriman and Perpetua Kirby along with CIRCY Research Fellows Caitlin Shaughnessy and Ruth Goodman.

The five-year project started in late 2022 and this is the first time we have included the project as an extended piece in the CIRCY annual report. Within this section we spotlight three elements of the project: Further information about other project elements is available on our project website (linked above) and you can join the project mailing list: childrens.information@education.ox.ac.uk.

We look forward to providing updates, and further information about the project in 2025!

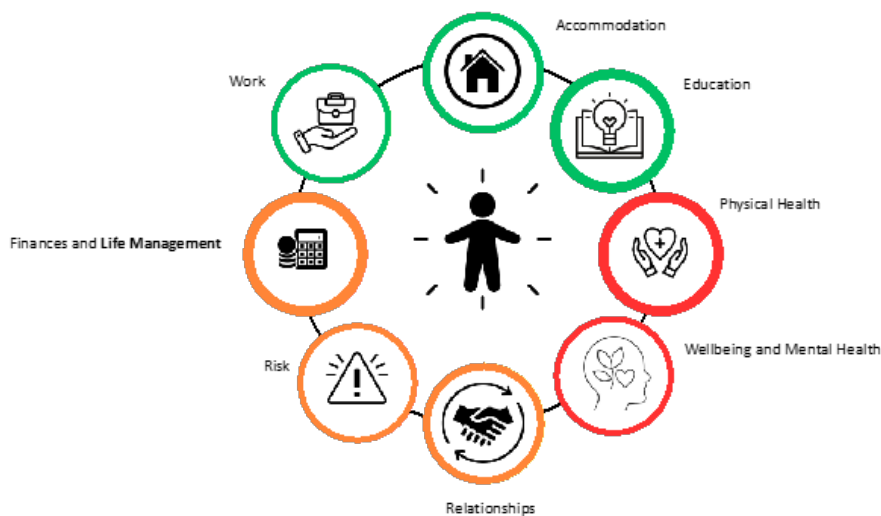


Figure 19: Credit Lisa Holmes.

Conceptualising children's voice and data

'Voice' and 'data' have been at the heart of the Children's Information project from the start. Our challenge is to do the right thing by, with and for children, young people and families, by ensuring their voices, and the voices of those who work with them – appear within the data and information that are gathered about them, in ways that can improve agencies' use of that information, to improve their lives. Core to this commitment is identifying how 'voice' and 'data' are meaningfully related.

We use 'voice' metaphorically to mean, in the broadest sense, views, wishes, feelings and expressions of lived experience. A serious commitment to voice demands deep listening to a wide range of perspectives, communications and concerns, and being open to what is challenging and difficult to hear. As an interdisciplinary team, coming from different research, policy and practice backgrounds, we had to begin by listening to each other. We have discovered that we had different understandings of data and voice, and we sometimes used the same language in different ways. We have also listened to our stakeholders and partners and the varying ways that they understand and use these terms amongst themselves. Some, for example, see data as the numbers and statistics that they use to populate their dashboards, to inform service planning and complete statutory returns. Others see data as anything that is collected and documented, such as case notes, WhatsApp messages, even emojis. All can count as information, that becomes processed and used.

What is clear from our conversations so far is that many practitioners see voice as part of their everyday practice, not something that can, or should, be gathered or measured as an extra. For them, deep listening is part of an ethic of respect: it is core to their commitment to understanding and building relationships with children, young people and families. So, voice and data are not separate but already intertwined: voice is integral to what informs practitioners, including what they note, understand, decide and do.

As a core thread that runs throughout the Children's Information project, we have already produced a range of outputs to explore some of the issues briefly outline above. These include blogs, roundtable discussions, podcasts and presentations. All resources are available on our project webpages.

Defining and measuring children's needs

This element of the project is led by Polly Vizard at CASE and provides a unique opportunity to explore whether the conceptual and measurement frameworks that they have developed can contribute to innovation in local policy and practice. CASE research has been exploring how the capability approach developed by Nobel Prize winner Professor Amartya Sen can be operationalised as a framework for conceptualising and measuring multidimensional social outcomes. The research puts central emphasis on the links between the capability approach and human rights, and over the years CASE have been commissioned to develop several multidimensional outcomes frameworks that have been used by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to discharge its statutory duties in relation to national equality and human rights monitoring.

As part of the Children's Information project, the team will be drawing on CASE knowledge and expertise in this field as part of a broader workstream on frameworks for identifying and measuring children's needs. This workstream will also draw on previous work on children's frameworks undertaken by project partners and advisors. This includes work by Lisa Holmes on the Children's Social Care Framework; work by Leon Feinstein on the Child Vulnerability Framework developed by the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England; and work by senior advisor to the project, Julie Selwyn, on subjective wellbeing and the Bright Spots programme.

Further information about this workstream, and a blog written by Polly Vizard are available on the project webpages.

Partnership working with local authority sites

As set out in the overview text about the Children's Information project our collaboration with North Yorkshire Council aims to enhance the long-term quality of life for young people with care experience. North Yorkshire puts relationships at the core of its work with young people, not least through listening to them. Information needs to reflect young people's needs and wishes, so that they feel listened to and valued, and so that the most appropriate decisions are made. Those decisions also need to be informed by the expertise and knowledge of those who work with the young people every day. This project has a core commitment to strengthen their voices in and about collected information, as well as how that information is used.

Our fieldwork in North Yorkshire to date has focused on what data and information are readily available about care leavers, and whether these are the most meaningful. Throughout 2023 the site project team and research team collaboratively designed a series of research activities to understand more about care leaver data in North Yorkshire, and the integration of voice within data. Data collection activities included observations of interactions between personal advisors and care leavers, exploration of case records and a series of interviews and focus groups with representatives of data teams and the care leaving services. The fieldwork culminated in a wreath making workshop and focus group with care leavers in December 2023.

In the infographic, we outline the eight outcome domains that have been identified to date. We have ascertained that four are already reasonably well defined, recorded and analysed in the existing dashboards. Although they could be refined. The remaining four (physical health; wellbeing; 'safe' risk-taking; financial preparedness) are largely absent from existing dashboards, so throughout 2024 we are focusing on these and considering ways in which they can be incorporated in the future.

The CIRCY PGR community

The CIRCY postgraduate researcher (PGR) network has continued to meet and share knowledge and support throughout the year. We encourage all doctoral researchers with an interest in research that has children, childhood and youth at the centre to join our network. Meetings were co-facilitated by Liam Berriman, Perpetua Kirby and Simon Flacks (CIRCY Directors), with input from Dr Rebecca Webb and Fliss Bull.

Five of our PGRs completed their doctorate this last year. Congratulations to Anna Hutchings, Amy Lunch, Brontë McDonald-Harper, Evelyn Polacek Kery, and Loreto Rodriguez!

Anna Hutchings successfully defended her PhD thesis on 'Exploring Gendered Terrains: Female Social Workers' Perspectives on Working with Boys and Young Men Who Have Displayed Harmful Sexual Behaviours' in June. Anna's study explores how female social workers understand and navigate gender in relation to both themselves and to the boys and young men they encounter in their practice who have sexually harmed others. It also investigates the ways in which gender stereotypes, victim-blaming attitudes, and narratives around sexual assault are addressed in this specific context. External examiner: Prof. Simon Hackett (Durham University); internal examiner: Dr Tam Cane; viva chair: Prof. Gillian Ruch; Anna's supervisors: Prof. Michelle Lefevre and Prof. Kristi Langhoff.

Amy Lynch successfully defended her thesis 'Creating constellations of empathy: a relational exploration of social worker-parent empathy in the English child protection system' in March. External examiner: Dr Matthew Gibson (University

of Birmingham); internal examiner: Dr Jeri Damman; Amy's supervisors: Prof. Gillian Ruch and Prof. Michelle Lefevre.

Brontë McDonald-Harper, who was CIRCY's PGRA until October 2024, successfully defended her thesis 'Intervention for School Anxiety and Absenteeism in Children (ISAAC): co-designing and piloting an online parent-focused programme for emotionally based school avoidance in primary school-aged children'. The study investigated primary school absenteeism during, and in the aftermath, of the Covid-19 pandemic. Brontë's supervisors: Dr Kathryn Lester and Dr Daniel Michelson.

Evelyn Polacek Kery successfully defended her thesis, 'Exploring Children and Young People's Critical Thinking: The Case of YouTube' in May. The study explored how children and parents think critically about YouTube content – particularly that of influencers. External examiner: Dr Harry Dyer (University of Essex); internal examiner: Dr Keith Perera; Evelyn's supervisors: Dr Liam Berriman and Prof Rachel Thomson.

Another former CIRCY PGRA was also awarded their PhD in March. **Loreto Rodriguez** successfully defended her thesis 'Therapy with young children in Chile following sexual abuse: a child-centred relational perspective?' The examiners – Dr Suzanne Mooney (Queens University Belfast) and Prof Kristi Langhoff (internal) – particularly highlighted the richness of her qualitative study and her original theoretical framework, linking psychotherapeutic literature with childhood studies. Loreto's supervisors: Prof. Janet Boddy and Prof. Michelle Lefevre.

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