The three-year About Families project, which came to an end last month, improved the practice of those working with families by making research more accessible and connected to the development of services. The project looked at four topics: parenting teenagers; relationships and relationships breakdown; parenting on a low income; and how and where parents seek support for parenting.

Project partners were helped to reflect on how they made use of research in their everyday practice, particularly looking at how they involved the families they were working with in deciding what services to develop and how.

The project has exposed gaps in both research and practice in addressing the needs of families affected by disability.

Many project partners had little experience of involving families in service planning but found it an untapped and highly useful source of evidence.

The project has not been without its challenges. Many organisations would have found it difficult to find time to develop staff capacity to learn and apply an evidence-to-action process without the proactive support that About Families was able to provide.

The project’s success has led to further funding to develop the About Families ‘knowledge to action’ model – see inside for more details.

Read the evaluation reports online:
www.aboutfamilies.org.uk

“We’ve taken knowledge and used it to improve practice – that’s what it was all about”
Richard Hamer
Director of external affairs, Capability Scotland

“[About Families made] organisations think about what the evidence is saying and looking at their services to see if there are gaps in their service provision.”
Voluntary organisation

“Not only did the work provide insight into the needs of [service users] it also demonstrated that it is possible to engage with typically ‘hard to reach’ groups.”
Voluntary organisation

“We have learned that there is less evidence out there than we originally thought – especially about disabled parents and their families.”
Project partner

“The service user interviews were very informative and challenged professional money advice workers’ beliefs”
Tracey Rogers, and Linda Bates, ASH Scotland

About Families was a partnership between CRFR, Capability Scotland and Parenting Across Scotland. It was funded by the National Lottery through the Big Lottery Fund.
Research methods: insights into real life

Jennifer Mason, co-director of the Morgan Centre for the Study of Relationships and Personal Life, University of Manchester, sets out an alternative research methodology for the social sciences.

Real life is complicated and gloriously messy. Much of social science research is about enquiring into small sections or compartments of the lived world in order understand complexity better, to add information to the stock of knowledge around a broad research question in order to make sense of the world and help direct our responses to it, whether that be by raising further research questions, or by shaping policy or practice.

But research methods have their limitations and we felt a need to explore a new way of thinking about the practice of research that enlivened and animated our enquiries into everyday life and relationships. A method that freed us from the reductionist impact of compartments and typologies, but one which retained methodological rigour.

We have been developing an approach that we feel is a new mode of practicing and thinking about social science research, and it’s one that we’d like to share and discuss more widely.

The methodology we have been developing involves envisioning research fields as constructed through combinations of facets as we might see in a cut gemstone.

Now imagine that the gemstone encapsulates the thing we want to understand and explore. In facet methodology, the facets in the gemstone are conceived as different methodological-substantive planes and surfaces, which are designed to be capable of casting and refracting light in a variety of ways that help to define the overall object of concern. They will involve different lines of enquiry, and different ways of seeing. What we see or come to know or to understand through the facets is thus always a combination of what we are looking at (the thing itself, the ontology), and how we are looking (how we use our methods to perceive it, the epistemology).

The aim of our facet methodology approach is to create a strategically illuminating set of facets in relation to specific research concerns and questions: not a random set, or an eclectic set, or a representative set, or a total set.

The rigour of the approach comes ultimately from researcher skill, inventiveness, insight and imagination – in deciding how best to carve the facets so that they catch the light in the best possible way.

We believe facet methodology can make a contribution to debates about the ‘politics of method’, especially in relation to its emphasis on the significance of flashes of insight rather than the production of ‘maximum data’ of a descriptive kind.

Facet methodology was developed collaboratively through the work of the Realities programme at the National Centre for Research Methods, at the Morgan Centre, University of Manchester.

Professor Jennifer Mason delivered a masterclass at CRFR’s international conference in June.

For more information visit http://www.manchester.ac.uk/morgancentre/research/facet/
The politics of neuroscience and early intervention

Rosalind Edwards, Val Gillies and Nicola Horsley presented their research at CRFR’s international conference

Significant amounts of public money are being invested in interventions that are in line with the idea that what happens to the way children’s brains grow and develop early in life determines their lifelong personality, behaviour and emotions, and shapes our whole society.

As part of our ‘Brain Science and Early Intervention’ study, funded by the Faraday Institute under its ‘Uses and Abuses of Biology’ programme, we’ve been interrogating policy and practice materials. We want to find out how accounts of the impact of early experiences on brain development are shaping policy and practice.

While early intervention is often couched in the gender neutral terminology of ‘parenting’, it is almost exclusively directed at mothers in poor communities as the core influence on their children’s development.

Mother-child relationships in the early years are claimed to be reflected in the anatomical structure of the child’s neural circuits, with sensitive mothers producing ‘more richly networked brains’.

This biological emphasis promotes mothers as being ‘naturally’ better attuned to their infant’s needs. The foundations for secure attachment and optimal brain development are traced back to pregnancy, with the prenatal period identified as physiologically and psychologically crucial – both in terms of neural growth of the fetus and the establishment of a healthy attachment bond between mother and child.

At the heart of early intervention is the assumption that poverty and disadvantage are personal failings associated with poor parenting. Disadvantaged families are automatically conceptualised in terms of risk, with little consideration given to wider structural and economic factors.

Brain science and early intervention are seen as overcoming outdated ideas about social class shaping life chances. As one of the politicians who advocates it told us, neuroscientific ideas ‘break the class spell’, and avoid social determinism.

So, policymakers no longer have to bother with ideas about redistribution; they can put that aside and focus down on how mothers bring up their children. How convenient.

Rosalind Edwards is professor of sociology at the University of Southampton. Val Gillies is professor of social research and Nicola Horsley is a research fellow at London South Bank University.

Read the CRFR blog.
CRFR is providing support for building evaluative processes into project planning to local authorities and voluntary sector organisations.

Sarah Morton and Linda McKie have been using contribution analysis in project planning to reduce young people’s risk of homelessness in Tayside. With project partners, Shelter Scotland and Relationships Scotland Family Mediation Tayside and Fife, they have been asking how stakeholders envisage success; working back to consider how to achieve a shared goal and unpicking assumptions to minimise risk and clarify the factors the project has direct influence over.

The research team: Amy Chandler, Steve Platt and Caroline King, The University of Edinburgh and Chris Burton, University of Aberdeen.

Contact Amy Chandler amy.chandler@ed.ac.uk
http://sashresearchproject.wordpress.com/

Evaluation methods:
contribution analysis

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CRFR has been using a similar approach to support West Lothian Council’s early intervention programme, and to support the work of Starcatchers, a theatre project for very young children.

If you’d like to discuss how CRFR might support your evaluations and project planning contact Sarah Morton s.morton@ed.ac.uk
www.crfr.ac.uk/using-research/how-do-we-monitor-and-measure-impact/

Marriages present: a study of legally-binding separation agreements

The use of legally binding separation agreements has doubled in the last 20 years, as has their use by unmarried couples, research has found.

Separation agreements set out couples’ agreed division of their property and any ongoing financial support for each other, or for their children, without having to go to court.

While separating parties can register an agreement independently, findings show that most seek independent legal advice and that this is essential to ensuring key assets (especially pensions) are not overlooked. Nonetheless, the study found, women often prioritise retaining the family home for their children and for themselves and may sacrifice a share of their husbands pension, leaving them vulnerable to poverty in later life.

A full report and CRFR briefing paper are online http://www.crfr.ac.uk/publications/research-briefings/
Email: jane.mair@glasgow.ac.uk

Talking to young people and GPs about self-harm

Self-harm is a new field of research and there remain significant gaps in knowledge and understanding. CRFR has two new research projects that aim to address some of these gaps.

While it is widely acknowledged that self-harm is common among young people most research on self-harm involves adults over the age of 18. The SASH Research Project is investigating Social Aspects of Self-Harm, including drug and alcohol use, among young people aged 14-16.

Advice available online suggests that people who self-harm should consult their GPs. However, GPs do not receive any routine training on self-harm, and research has so far focused upon the role of GPs in preventing suicide, rather than in responding to self-harm in the broadest sense. A research project looking at GPs’ understanding and management of patients who self-harm will explore their accounts of treating patients and examine the feasibility of developing GP training.

The research team: Amy Chandler, Steve Platt and Caroline King, The University of Edinburgh and Chris Burton, University of Aberdeen.

Contact Amy Chandler amy.chandler@ed.ac.uk
http://sashresearchproject.wordpress.com/

Childcare patchwork

CRFR associate researchers Alison Koslowski and Ingela Naumann are investigating childcare as part of a major European research project: Families and societies – changing families and sustainable societies: policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations.

They will be examining childcare options in Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Sweden and the UK to explain why different groups of parents use different sources of childcare, and considers the parental labour market outcomes associated with differing access to multiple sources of childcare. The research will be asking key stakeholder organisations how parents interact with and negotiate the childcare options available to them.

An objective of the research is to arrive at a more complete conceptualisation of the multiple sources of childcare that parents may draw upon and to evaluate the potential policy mismatch on the basis of these care realities.

www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/humanities-soc-sci/news-events/news/archive/january-february-2013/eu-research
The Young Digital website went live in 2013 offering anyone with an interest in using digital media for research, consultation or participation activities with children and young people information and advice about:

- technical aspects of using digital media in research with children
- methods that are available
- ethical issues
- analysis and dissemination with digital media
- how to involve young people as co-producers

www.youngdigital.net is part of CRFR’s programme of developing research and consultation methods with children and young people. Funding came from the ESRC’s digital social research demonstrator programme. Please get in touch using Twitter or via the website – and if you’re looking for training in this area visit http://www.youngdigital.net/training (ESRC), ES/J009814/1

Research methods: digital media @young_digital

Working with nine nurses, service managers and social workers CRFR, and project partner IRISS, increased the evidence base for those who design and deliver services for older people. The project has been supporting practitioner-led inquiry through research training, mentorship and knowledge exchange. Small-scale research projects have used qualitative and mixed-method approaches to explore questions relevant to practice-settings, such as an evaluation of early stage support for people with a diagnosis of dementia, reablement training, the use of music therapy in dementia services, and different models of carers’ assessments.

The comparison of different approaches to making a carer’s assessment at two health settings found that a focus on having a conversation as opposed to using an assessment tool was found to be more valuable for carers. The conversation itself was found to achieve outcomes.

An evaluation will be available in July 2013 on the website: http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/prop

Catherine-Rose Stocks-Rankin has been the project officer at CRFR.
**Responding to Government**

**Child poverty**

CRFR’s response to the Westminster Government’s ‘Measuring child poverty: A consultation on better measures of child poverty’ highlighted the Government’s lack of attention to the existing evidence based on poverty research. Most importantly evidence shows that income is the dimension of poverty that has the most significant, adverse impact on children’s outcomes; and that the impact of living in poverty in childhood itself may result in their feeling ashamed, excluded and stigmatised. Many of the dimensions suggested in the government’s consultation document are consequences or causes, but not measures of poverty.

Read the full response online [www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/CRFR_response_to_the_child_poverty_consultation_final.pdf](http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/CRFR_response_to_the_child_poverty_consultation_final.pdf)

**New food body**

CRFR has urged the Scottish Government to use research on people’s everyday food experiences to inform efforts to change the nation’s eating habits.

Issuing nutrition information to consumers is not enough to bring about changes to Scotland’s poor diet.

CRFR’s response to the Scottish Government’s “consultation on creating a new food body” stressed the importance of research into families’ experiences, to understand better the impact of low income on diet, for example. Growing up in Scotland data shows that a poor diet is associated with a lower income, and improved diets with higher levels of education. Inequalities are experienced early in life.

Research into food practices with looked after children highlights the way food has symbolic meaning in expressing care and affection, but is also a focus for issues of power and control and resistance to authority.

Read the full response online [www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/CRFR_new_food_body_consultation_response.pdf](http://www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/CRFR_new_food_body_consultation_response.pdf)

**Scottish health visitors: “Eroded, demoralised, and not using our skills”**

These are the views of some of the health visitors interviewed by Caroline King during the course of her research into the impact of public health policy ‘Health for All Children’ (HALL 4). The reflections are recorded in a new film by Caroline King and artist Rosie Gibson, based on the findings of Caroline’s PhD study. The views of health visitor and mothers are narrated over a film of a baby feeding and being observed and drawn by artist Rosie Gibson. The film developed out of Rosie Gibson’s Leverhulme Artist Residency at CRFR.

View the film at [https://vimeo.com/62327287](https://vimeo.com/62327287) and read Caroline’s CRFR Blog – crfrblogspot.co.uk

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**Marriages past: A history of working-class marriage in Scotland, 1855-1976**

Eleanor Gordon is leading a team of historians to look at the nature of the relationship between husbands and wives and establishing the pattern, causes and consequences of marriage breakdown.

We hear a good deal in popular and official discourses about the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ family. The dominant narrative is that the family, was a stable unit organised around a nuclear or extended unit from the middle of the 19th century until after the Second World War. Multiple family forms are seen as a recent development caused by increases in divorce, remarriage, co-habitation and single parenthood since the late 1970s.

Only six months into the project, our research shows widespread single parenthood, separations, desertions and ‘blended’ families in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The large number of single-parent families was partly related to the low average life span, particularly amongst men. However, desertions and separations – often regarded as the ‘poor man’s divorce’ – also account for the high number of single parents. Poor Law records are crammed with the claims of deserted women.

Although cohabitation may have been frowned upon, the breakup of marriages and the prohibitive cost of divorce, meant that many couples chose to live together. Until 1939 irregular marriage, in other words marriage based solely on simple exchange of consent with no ceremony, meant that many couples lived together in a way that would be classed as cohabitation in our society. The average percentage of marriages registered as irregular between the wars was 12 per cent. However, during the Second World War the figure rose to around 40 per cent in some areas and in St Giles, the busiest district of Edinburgh, the number of irregular marriages outstripped regular marriages.

[http://workingclassmarriage.gla.ac.uk/](http://workingclassmarriage.gla.ac.uk/) and follow the project on Twitter @WCMScotland

As well as contributing to academic debate, the project will work with practitioners including Scottish Women’s Aid and Education Scotland to contribute to the public debate on marriage and marriage breakdown and to inform educational practice.

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Student profiles

We spotlight students or project staff who are part of the vibrant CRFR research community. For a full list of projects see www.crfr.ac.uk

Emma Davidson
The University of Edinburgh

Emma Davidson’s completed PhD explored young people’s experience of antisocial behaviour.

For young people growing up in a ‘disadvantaged’ place, ‘antisocial behaviour’ can be daily, routine and unexceptional. Normalised within their surroundings, ‘the antisocial’ becomes an established (and often necessary) part of everyday life.

This research studied young people growing up within a ‘disadvantaged’ neighbourhood in the suburbs of a Scottish city. Its aim was to explore the social processes through which ‘antisocial behaviour’ is constructed in young people’s everyday lives and, in turn, challenge the absence of young voices in existing research.

While young people in the study recognised the term ‘antisocial’ as a familiar negative stereotype, they understood ‘the antisocial’ as a reflection of the economic inequality, poverty and material disadvantage around them.

The study makes recommendations for a fresh approach to tackling ‘the antisocial’. The issue is not, and should not, be about normalising ‘problem people’ and ‘problem’ places. Instead, interventions need to bring to the fore the social and economic conditions that impact on young people’s everyday lives and attend to the widening inequality and social injustices experienced by those growing up in ‘disadvantaged’ neighbourhoods.

Contact Emma: e.c.davidson@ed.ac.uk.

Emma’s PhD was funded by an ESRC (CASE) studentship and undertaken collaboratively with Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People (SCCYP). More detailed research findings will be published in two forthcoming briefings by CRFR and SCCYP.

Julie Watson
The University of Edinburgh

Julie Watson’s PhD looks at relationships between people with advanced dementia and care home staff.

In the UK, one third of people with dementia live and eventually die in care homes.

The quality of the relationships between care staff and residents in care homes is known to be important for their quality of care and quality of life.

As dementia progresses and verbal language and memory diminish, forming and maintaining relationships can become more difficult for people with dementia and their carers. The person themselves is often viewed by others as ‘lost’ or ‘gone’. Despite this, care staff and residents with dementia in care homes often relate in reciprocally caring ways.

I’m exploring how this happens and what could make it happen more often by observing interactions between care staff and residents, including attending to the ways that people with dementia express themselves in interactions using their bodies and body language.

Initial findings suggest that relationships can be maintained into the end stages of dementia when care staff ‘try to talk the language’ of people with dementia who ‘feel your feelings’ and when subtle forms of communication through the body are recognised as meaningful and reciprocal.

Contact: Julie Watson, J.E.Watson-1@sms.ed.ac.uk

Poverty

UK poverty figures underestimate the number of families living in poverty by as much as 40% – reported the Scotland on Sunday in April. The article was based on research by CRFR’s Morag Treanor: “Deprived or not deprived? Comparing the measured extent of material deprivation using the UK government’s and the Poverty and Social Exclusion surveys’ method of calculating material deprivation”. View the publications on the back page.

Parents’ court disputes

Kirsteen Mackay’s article in the Herald on how children’s views are or, more often, are not heard, in court disputes between parents generated debate in January. She argued that the assumption that contact with both parents is the best thing for a child’s welfare is becoming increasingly untenable in the light of what is now known about the nature of so many of the cases that come before the courts. Calling for professional advocates to support children’s views being heard she said: “There is a clear need to ensure those taking the views of a child for a court report are trained in speaking with children”.

Eating habits

The Growing up in Scotland research published by Valeria Skafida on children’s eating habits hit the headlines in April and May. The finding that young children who eat the same meals as their parents are more likely to have healthier diets than those who eat different foods also challenged the idea of family mealtimes. Articles in national UK newspapers, the Scottish press, online and radio interviews generated debate and comment about children’s diets that spread internationally. Valeria’s research paper is online, and listed on the back page.
Welcome

New CRFR Associate Director

Natasha Mauthner is a Reader in the Business School at Aberdeen University where she teaches courses on gender, work and organisation, as well as research methods.

She has long-standing philosophical and methodological interests in the knowledge-making practices of qualitative researchers, and has written about interpretive, collaborative, data sharing and feminist practices.

http://www.abdn.ac.uk/business/profiles/n.mauthner

Paula Grieve, CRFR’s new administrator, Paula.Grieve@ed.ac.uk

Sarah Burton, knowledge exchange and communications coordinator during Kirsten’s maternity leave, sj.burton@ed.ac.uk

Caroline King joins the research team working on self-harm.

Christina Rzepi is a knowledge exchange fellow based at CRFR and working in partnership with the Parenting and Pregnancy Centre in Edinburgh, until September 2012.

Karen Mountney will start in August on the ESRC funded research evidence bank project.

Congratulations

Caroline King, Emma Davison and Stephen Hinchcliffe for gaining their Phds, and to Kirsten Thomlinson on the birth of her second child, Connell.

Events

Book online - places limited

Seminar
Children, child contact and domestic abuse
Glasgow Caledonian University
Tuesday June 18, 2013 • 9.30 - 1.30

The University of Edinburgh
Wednesday June 19, 2013 • 9.30 - 1.30

Seminar
The More Candles, the bigger the wish: ageing with a learning (intellectual) disability
CRFR meeting room, 23 Buccleuch Place, Edinburgh
Tuesday 16 July 2013 • 12.00 - 2.00

Conference
So what? Measuring impact in services for children and families
John McIntyre Conference Centre, Edinburgh
Tuesday 22 October 2013

Seminar
Moral Panics and the State
Cardiff University • Friday 22 November 2013

For further information about our events or to make a booking visit our website www.crfr.ac.uk

Publications

A selection of the many publications by CRFR directors, researchers, staff and students.

Knowledge Exchange


Parenting


Gender based violence


Dementia


Watson J. What is Dementia? Implications for care at the end of life (2013) End of Life Journal 3(1).

Child contact

CRFR Briefing 65: Hearing children in court disputes between parents, Kirsteen McKay.


Children’s learning


Young people’s health and wellbeing

