Centre for Family Research

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Professor Susan Golombok

**Deputy Director**
Professor Claire Hughes

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Dr Elian Fink
Dr Kitty Jones
Dr Laura Katus
Dr Sarah Foley
Dr Susan Imrie

**Research Assistants**
Capucine Poncet
Kate Shaw
Louise Gray
Niamh Chalmers
Poppy Hall

**PhD Students**
Caoimhe Dempsey
Helen Dolling
Jean Heng
Jo Lysons
Keya Elie
Samantha Friedman
Susie Bower-Brown

**MPhil Students**
Ellen Davenport-Pleasance
Iris Pattara-Angkoon

**Bath Placement Students**
Alba Galindo Gonzalez
Bethany Ketteringham
Izzy Erlewyn-Lajeunesse
Mina Gedikoglu

**Emeritus Professor**
Professor Martin Richards

**Centre Administrator and PA to the Director**
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ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21

After 16 years at the helm of the Centre for Family Research, this is my last annual report. And what a wonderful time it has been! When I took over from the Centre’s pioneering founder, Martin Richards, I had no idea what to expect, but I knew that I had much to live up to.

Martin established the Centre, then known as the Child Care and Development Group, in 1966, at a time when families were almost always composed of married, heterosexual couples and their biological children, and his research documented the rise in divorce and consequent increase in single-mother families. By the time I took over as the new director 40 years later, families had changed beyond recognition to include lesbian mother families, gay father families, families headed by single mothers by choice, and families created by assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF), egg donation, sperm donation, embryo donation, and surrogacy. Today, we have gay fathers with children born through surrogacy, single fathers by choice, transgender parents, co-parents meeting over the internet to raise children in the absence of a romantic relationship, and lesbian couples sharing biological motherhood by using one woman’s egg to create her partner’s pregnancy.

It has been widely assumed that the structure of families matters a great deal for children’s development and wellbeing: the greater the difference from the traditional family, the greater the perceived risk of psychological harm to the child. But is it really true? This is the question that my phenomenal team has set out to explore over the past 16 years. Our longitudinal studies have shown that children born through assisted reproduction experience positive relationships with their parents and high levels of psychological...
wellbeing. Our investigations of gay father families formed through adoption or surrogacy, families created by single mothers by choice, and families with transgender parents, have produced similar findings. Contrary to the expectation that they would experience problems, our research has shown that these families are just as likely to flourish as traditional families – and sometimes more so.

But new family forms produce additional issues for children. Children born through egg, sperm or embryo donation, or surrogacy, have a different pattern of genetic and gestational connections to people inside and outside their immediate family. We have found that children benefit from being told about their origins at an early age. Some children have little interest in these people, others are curious and want to find out more, and yet others have a strong desire to meet them.
A further issue faced by children with lesbian, gay, or transgender parents is stigmatisation. A study of the school experiences of children with same-sex parents that we conducted with Stonewall, found that classmates made negative comments about being gay that were distressing, some children were shunned because of their same-sex parents, and others reported that they never see families like their own in the books that they read or the films that they see. Schools and communities can go a long way to protect children against the negative effects of stigmatisation by being supportive of new family forms.
However, legislation that is conducive to the optimal functioning of diverse family structures is essential for lasting change. Since the very start, a key mission of the Centre has been to inform policy making through high-quality research. For me, a particular highlight of the past 16 years has been our impact on policy and legislation both nationally and internationally. Our research has been used as evidence in same-sex marriage legislation in several countries, including the landmark US Supreme Court ruling in 2015, and in legislation on assisted reproduction, such as the UK Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 that allowed same-sex parents to be joint legal parents of children born through assisted reproduction. Our research findings have also been considered by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Committee on Social Affairs, the Dutch State Commission on Family Law, the Swedish Government Inquiry on Surrogate Motherhood, the Colombian Government, the German Ethics Council, the Department of Child Protection in Switzerland, the UK Law Commission, the French National Assembly Parliamentary Committee on Bioethics, and the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law.
A further tradition of the Centre has been to speak to children directly in our research so that we can understand their perspectives. To complement our quantitative studies, we have used qualitative approaches to give insights into children’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences about growing up in new family forms. From what children tell us, it is not the make-up of their family, but other people’s reactions to it, that can be upsetting. That is why it is important to include children’s voices in research on new family forms, and essential that we listen, and respond, to what they tell us. For example, children want teachers to understand that having LGBTQ parents isn’t a problem – it’s other people’s responses that can be the problem. Also, children born through sperm donation, egg donation, and surrogacy wish for open communication about matters that affect them.

The Centre’s reputation for world-leading research on new family forms would not have been what it is today without the hugely impressive team of psychologists and social scientists who have worked with me over the past 16 years: John Appleby, Nadia Ayed,
Shirlene Badger, Lucy Blake, Susie Bower-Brown, Polly Casey, Niamh Chalmers, Sarah Evans, Tabitha Freeman, Sarah Foley, Susanna Graham, Jess Grimmel, Zeynep Gurtin, Poppy Hall, Elena Ilioi, Susan Imrie, Humera Iqbal, Vasanti Jadva, Sarah Jennings, Pamela Jimenez Etcheverria, Georgie Jones, Kitty Jones, Nishtha Lamba, Joanna Lysons, Anja McConnachie, Laura Mellish, Sherina Persaud, Elizabeth Raffanello, Jennifer Readings, Gabriela Roman, Kate Shaw, Jenna Slutsky, Tatiana Visbol, and Sophie Zadeh. I have learned so much from them and appreciate their commitment and creativity from the bottom of my heart. Through their insights and different perspectives, they have taken the research to new heights that I would never have reached on my own.

In parallel with my own team, it has been a huge pleasure to work with Claire Hughes and her team, who are at the forefront of research on children’s social, emotional, and cognitive development. The two teams have complemented each other beautifully. Put simply, one has focused on family structure and the other on family processes. I have valued the cross-fertilisation between them, as well as the cross-team friendship, and believe that each has benefitted greatly from involvement with the other. Claire has made an enormous contribution to the work of the Centre for more than 20 years, raising its profile in academic circles and well beyond.

It has been a complete delight working with Abby Scott, the Centre’s Administrator, for the past 14½ years. Abby is the linchpin of the Centre, in charge of everything administrative from complex financial and HR issues, through grant applications and health and safety, to organising the Centre’s social life and providing much good advice and solutions to problems large and small. In 2017, Hannah Tigg joined us as an Administrative Assistant and PA to Claire Hughes. Thanks to her background as a qualified accountant,
Hannah has provided expertise in financial processes in addition to exceptional all-round support. I cannot thank Abby and Hannah enough for their commitment to the Centre, their goodwill, and the myriad of kindnesses that they have shown to us all.

I am also extremely appreciative of the Centre’s Management Committee, especially those from outside the Centre who have been so generous with their time and expertise – Jude Browne, Claire Hughes, Mark Johnson, Mavis Maclean, Paul Ramchandani, Abby Scott and Anastasia de Waal. Roger Mosey, the Chair, has been a huge support, and a responsive sounding-board, over the past 8 years. I shall always remember our meetings in the Master’s Lodge at Selwyn with his wonderfully affectionate Basset Hound, Yo-Yo, firmly installed on my lap, and the lovely lunches that he hosted for the committee each summer.

My enduring memories of the Centre will be of close friendships and fun. We have had wonderful Christmas parties, summer parties, leaving parties, and parties for no particular reason. Friday coffee, when everyone stops at 11am for tea and cake, is a CFR institution, and one that no doubt will be reinstituted post-pandemic. I have also had memorable trips abroad to conferences and meetings with members of my team; the highlight was the trip that 12 of us made to Chile in 2012 to take part in a conference on assisted reproduction at Diego Portales University in Santiago.
I am delighted to hand over the reins to Pasco Fearon, who will be the new Professor of Family Research and Director of the Centre from February 2022. I am sure that he and Claire will take the Centre from strength to strength, and in exciting new directions. I shall look forward to seeing what the Centre for Family Research does next.

Professor Susan Golombok

4th December 2021.
This year has seen the end of data collection for all of our studies, and a move to data coding and analysis. In our longest-running investigation, Kitty Jones and Poppy Hall heroically powered through interviews with more than 250 mothers, fathers, and children in the final phase of our longitudinal study of families created through egg donation, sperm donation, surrogacy, and unassisted conception. The families were first assessed in 2000, when the children were aged 1, and followed up when they were 2, 3, 7, 10 and 14. In this final phase, they were 21 years old, and venturing into the world as young adults. The mothers and fathers took part in separate in-depth interviews about their relationships with their adult children, and reflected on their thoughts and feelings about having a child through third-party assisted reproduction. The young adults were administered the Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) to assess their representations of their attachment relationships with their parents, as well as an interview about their current life in further education or work, and their feelings regarding the circumstances of their birth and towards those involved in their conception, gestation, and upbringing. Vasanti Jadva, Susan Imrie and Kitty Jones have undergone training in the coding of the AAI, which will enable them to examine the impact of the absence of a genetic and/or gestational relationship between children and their parents on the security of their attachment relationships at age 21. Due to its longitudinal design, this study will not only inform us about the long-term outcomes of assisted conception involving a gamete donor or surrogate, but also the factors in childhood that are associated with positive parent-child relationships and psychological wellbeing in adulthood.
Another study completed this year is our investigation of shared biological motherhood in lesbian couples. Kate Shaw and Anja McConnachie have done a wonderful job of recruiting and interviewing mothers in 39 such families, as well as a comparison group of 40 lesbian mother families with children born through sperm donation where only one mother is biologically connected to the child. In addition to questionnaire measures of mothers’ psychological wellbeing, this study used the Parent Development Interview to assess the nature of the emotional bond between each mother and the child to shed light on the relative importance of genetic, gestational, and psychological motherhood on the quality of parent-child relationships. The coding of the Parent Development Interview is a lengthy and skilled procedure, and we are very grateful to Niamh Chalmers and Poppy Hall for their tireless work on this and their dedication to carrying out the coding to the highest possible standard.

The coding and data analysis of our follow up study of families created using identifiable egg donors also finished this year. Thanks to a huge effort by Jo Lysons, with help from Vasanti Jadva, Susan Imrie, Kitty Jones and Sarah Foley, all the data has been coded and analysed, with a view to having two papers ready for submission early in 2022, one by Susan Imrie and the other by Jo Lysons. This study is of interest as it is the first to examine the impact on family relationships of the change in the UK law allowing donor-conceived children to request the identity of their donor on reaching age 18. Jo’s PhD is based on this research. Congratulations to Sooz Imrie for winning the American Society of Reproductive Medicine Mental Health Prize for her presentation on this study.

Susie Bower-Brown also obtained her PhD this year. Her innovative research investigated the school experiences of transgender, non-binary, and gender questioning
young people, as well as the thoughts and feelings of transgender and non-binary parents who had children following their gender transition.

Ellen Davenport-Pleasance, an MPhil student supervised by Susan Imrie, conducted a fascinating study of bisexual mothers with a particular focus on how mothers tell children about their bisexual identity. Other ongoing studies include an investigation of surrogate mothers by Vasanti Jadva, with the help of Poppy Hall, and a collaboration with Dorit Segal-Engelchin from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, and Galia Shomron, one of our former students, on a study of hetero-gay families where single heterosexual women have had children with gay men.

Capucine Poncet, a research assistant in art history, has remained in Paris this year due to the pandemic. Although we have missed seeing her in person, we have kept in touch through zoom and the occasional face-to-face meeting. Capucine is involved in the exhibition on the family that will be held at the Fitzwilliam Museum in autumn 2023. Together with Coralie Mallisard from the Courtauld Gallery, she has produced a huge array
of contemporary and historical artworks representing the family, and the next stage will be to select those that we hope will make it into the exhibition.

Susan took part in several online conferences this year including the Annual Conference of the American Society of Reproductive Medicine. Her new book, *We Are Family: What Really Matters for Parents and Children*, aimed at a general audience, was published in October. She was invited to speak about the book to diverse audiences and participated in several podcasts and media interviews. She also took part in public engagement events, including ‘in conversations’ with Professor Jens Sherpe from the Law Department for Cambridge in America; with Alex Graham, the creator of the television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* for the Cambridge Festival; and with Dr Marcin Smietana from the Sociology Department for the Cambridge Reproduction Strategic Research Initiative. In addition, the report of the International Commission on the Clinical Use of Human Germline Genome Editing, of which she was a member, was published this year.

Although the pandemic has meant much less contact with each other than usual, we were pleased to begin to return to the CFR in a staggered way. To keep in touch during lockdown, we held online events, including an Indian cookery class and a cocktail-making evening. We also acquired cheery striped deckchairs so that we could meet in the courtyard outside.

Susie, Anja and Remi enjoying the sunshine
Several members of the New Families team moved elsewhere this year due to Susan’s retirement in September. We were sad to say farewell to them all, but we are delighted that they have moved on to bigger and better things. Vasanti Jadva, who came to the Centre for Family Research from London with Susan in 2006, has taken up a Lectureship at the Institute for Women’s Health at UCL. Vasanti has played a leading role in all the research of the New Families team, and she will continue to work for one day per week on our Wellcome Collaborative Award, on which she is a Co-Investigator, until the end of 2022. Susan (Sooz) Imrie took up a Lectureship at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) at UCL, and joins two other former members of our team, Humera Iqbal and Sophie Zadeh. Sooz will continue to collaborate with us until the completion of the Wellcome grant. Kitty Jones also moved to the TCRU as a half-time Research Fellow, and will spend the other half of the week at the CFR working on our study of single fathers by choice. We are delighted to continue to work closely with Sarah Foley, who is now a Lecturer at Edinburgh University, and we are very thankful for her expertise in sophisticated statistical modelling techniques. We are also grateful to Poppy Hall, who has moved to a clinical placement, for continuing to help us with coding. As Vasanti and Zeynep Gurtin (a former member of our team) at the Institute for Women’s Health are 5 minutes’ walk from Sooz, Humera, Sophie, Kitty and Charlotte Faircloth (who has worked closely with us in the past) at the Thomas Coram Research Unit, it’s very pleasing to have a New Families satellite at UCL in London. Rather than losing colleagues, it feels more like spreading our wings.
Looking back to my entry in last year’s annual report brings a real sense of déjà vu. Once again, we face the challenges of teaching in a pandemic – but this time with hybrid lecture delivery rather than pre-recordings. And once more, plans have been thwarted as we attempt to maintain research with children and schools despite multiple stresses and barriers. Heroic efforts have therefore been needed to minimise battle fatigue and keep the wheels on the wagon. I’d therefore like to start by thanking Hannah Tigg for her ever-reliable ‘Keep Calm and Carry On’ Blitz spirit and her behind-the-scenes work to enable everyone to adapt and keep the show on the road. Whilst supporting her daughters through online school and isolation periods Hannah has taken on a multitude of new challenges and innovations to ensure data-access / data-security and we are all in her debt! Following her wise philosophy of accentuating the positives, this section of the CFR annual report will focus on the pockets of good news that 2020-2021 has brought to my team.

What could be better news than a baby’s safe arrival? On 17th December 2020, Dr Laura Katus gave birth to baby Mika. As we know, lockdown has been hard for many new parents, but Laura and her husband Toby have managed to thrive and share caregiving responsibilities. Laura worked very hard on several writing projects before Mika’s arrival – such that one substantial achievement of the year is the draft of a new book – a three-author primer on the development of executive functions (Katus, Cragg and Hughes) that
will be the inaugural volume in the Developmental Psychology stream of the new Oxford Psychology Primer Series.

Early 2021 also brought good news for three early career researchers at the CFR, with lectureship appointments for:

1. **Dr Sarah Foley** at the University of Edinburgh School of Education and Sport;

2. **Dr Elian Fink** at Sussex University’s School of Psychology;

3. **Dr Hana D’Souza** at Cardiff University’s School of Psychology.

Proud as I am of this hat-trick, it leaves real gaps that will be hard to replace. In particular, Sarah Foley has been affiliated to the CFR for a full decade and I have known her since the 2nd year of her undergraduate degree. Looking back, it is wonderful to see how Sarah has remained true to herself while gaining in confidence and skill as an academic researcher. The transition from postdoctoral researcher to lecturer is notoriously difficult –
and yet Sarah sailed through her very first job interview since her PhD. Remarkable as this sounds, I’m not at all surprised that the University of Edinburgh wanted to snap her up – Sarah manages to combine a very human connection with her participants with a real flair for rigorous statistical methods, topping this expansive skillset with the most wonderful capacity for looking on the bright side of life. Sarah, we will miss you! As an editor for the Oxford Psychology Primer series, I know that Sarah is working with Sooz Imrie (another great CFR researcher to fledge the nest) and Rachel Latham from London to write an accessible volume on family relationships. I look forward to keeping in touch with Sarah and Sooz through this work, and through other shared projects, both ongoing and in the pipeline.

Dr Sarah Foley

**Dr Elian Fink** has been associated with the CFR for less time than Sarah (she joined in November 2018) when she and I were successful in gaining a Wellcome Trust Seed for Science award). I’ve also known Elian for a very long time (since her PhD days in Australia). Fortunately, another recent grant means that Elian and I continue to meet regularly to discuss ongoing research involving LENA devices (a talk pedometer system that
provides automated analyses of children’s linguistic environments at home), as well as wider issues related to the Ready or Not project, which I will describe later. Elian is another researcher with a fantastic talent for bringing sophisticated statistical methods to exploring very human questions surrounding children’s early peer relationships and understanding of emotion. As these are two topics that are close to my own heart, I will use every trick in the book to ensure that I don’t lose touch with Elian either. One such trick is to co-author a book – together with Caoimhe Dempsey – entitled 'Starting School: Psychological Insights', which we hope will provide a valuable accompaniment to the Ready or Not study.

Dr Hana D’Souza is officially a Junior Research Fellow at Newnham College but joined the CFR family as a co-Investigator on the Ready or Not grant, with special responsibility for extending the work with LENA talk pedometers to the LonDOWNS study sample of primary school aged children with Down Syndrome. Hana has been a truly valuable colleague in so many ways – sharing in teaching and admissions interviews as well as research – to which she brings an exceptional level of rigour and innovation. Having been successful in gaining two other grants to conduct EEG studies of young children with developmental disabilities, Hana’s research plans were badly hit by the pandemic – but her
‘can do’ approach has enabled her to weather the storm, devising creative ways of gathering data via zoom. It would have been wonderful to keep Hana in Cambridge – our loss is Cardiff’s gain!

From farewells to words of welcome to three new (and not so new) PhD students who joined my team in October 2020: Jean Heng, Helen Dolling and Caoimhe Dempsey – and a new research assistant for the Ready or Not study, Louise Gray. Jean Heng arrived from Michigan (having grown up in Malaysia) and promptly had to revise her research plans to meet the constraints on research in the time of COVID. Fortunately, the new ESRC-funded study of wellbeing in children and families around the transition to school (dubbed ‘Ready or Not’) provided an obvious platform for Jean to plan a new PhD. This has taken some time but, overall, Jean has made very good use of her year – getting involved in several writing projects as well as becoming a key member of this new Ready or Not research team. Jean’s PhD brings together two different measures of parent-child interaction: (i) automated analyses of extended periods of children’s linguistic environments, gathered via the talk pedometer system LENA; and (ii) video-based coding of parent-child interaction during a virtual Etch-A-Sketch task, administered at the end of zoom
visits to children taking part in the Ready or Not study. Together, these approaches offer complementary strengths and so enable Jean to tease apart effects of quantity and quality of parent-child communication as a source of support for children’s developing self-regulatory skills. Watch this space for more news!

Helen Dolling grew up in Estonia but has lived in Cambridge for many years and is launching a very special PhD project that builds on six years of work on the Next Generation Children Study at Addenbrookes Hospital. The NGC study is the first in the country (and, I believe, the largest study of its type in the world) to deliver rapid genetic testing for babies and infants with suspected rare genetic conditions. Historically, families embarked on diagnostic odysseys that could take five or more years to deliver answers to questions about the nature, etiology and prognosis for children with rare genetic conditions. Technological advances in genetic testing mean that this information is now available to families in a matter of days. While this massive acceleration in the pace at which information can be shared with families is potentially extremely valuable, it may also bring other problems, as parents have very little time to process news that is likely to have a significant impact on families’ lives. Helen therefore plans a mixed-methods study involving 90 families in the NGC study, to explore parental experiences of rapid genetic testing and examine how variation in these experiences relates to caregiver burden and individual and contextual markers of resilience – and, if possible, to explore moderating effects of severity of children’s condition and time elapsed since diagnosis. I have no doubt that Helen’s work - part funded by the NGC - will be both fascinating and valuable in guiding future practice in the NHS.
Caoimhe Dempsey grew up speaking Gaelic (her name is a clue!) and came to Cambridge in 2019 to complete an MPhil. Caoimhe is an exceptionally talented rower and so, as we noted in last year’s report, it was heart-breaking for her when the 2020 Varsity Boat Race was cancelled because of the pandemic. It was therefore a double delight when, in 2020 Caoimhe gained a funded PhD place that enabled her to return to her to her original topic of interest (derailed by Lockdown 1) – namely how the interplay between families and schools contributes to children’s success in the transition to school – and allowed her to compete in the 2021 Varsity Boat Race. It was a thrilling race to watch – especially as the Light Blues were victorious in both the Men’s and Women’s races. They say that hard work pays off – and I know that training for this race was very intense – so all the more credit to Caoimhe for also being able to inspire others in the Ready or Not team to get on board with zoom visits, as well as engage our four students from Bath (more on them later) in developing a new coding scheme to allow a quantitative analysis of parents’ thoughts and feelings on how their own lives had been affected by their child’s transition to school. Caoimhe has worked hard over the year in making sense of this complex bank of interview codes and is soon going to submit her first ‘first author’ paper – Chapeau! (as they say in France).
Spring of 2021 saw the official launch of the Ready or Not study and the appointment of two research assistants - Louise Grey in the CFR and Mikeda Jess in Birmingham, working with former CFR member, Dr Rory Devine. When Louise was interviewed for her RA post in November 2020, we did not know that we would have to rip up the school-based study protocol and devise a zoom-based alternative that hinges on remote visits with children out of school hours. Like Hannah, Louise is also a single parent - we are therefore extra grateful for her flexibility and good humour in meeting the many challenges that face staff joining a new team in lockdown. I’m sure that Louise is in turn grateful to Caoimhe and Jean for their pivotal work in the early months of Ready or Not that enabled Louise to join a team that was already on the move.

We turn now to the two graduate students for whom 2020-2021 was the 2nd year of their PhD (Sam Friedman and Keya Elie). Both hail from the USA but spent the year on opposite sides of the duck-pond. This is because Sam’s status as a qualified Forest School teacher meant that she was able to continue with data collection, by slotting this alongside helping as a Forest School teacher at two local schools (one for children with autism and a mainstream primary school). In addition, during lockdown Sam was able to conduct zoom- and phone-based interviews with parents. Sam has also had a productive year for analysis and write up, leading to the publication of her first first-author paper: a mixed methods
analysis of parents’ views on how the pandemic affected children’s connection to nature, using data gathered in the online COVID study that we ran in Lockdown 1. This paper garnered quite a lot of media attention, enabling Sam to hone her (already impressive) public engagement skills – many congratulations Sam!

Thanks to the remote file share system set up by Hannah Tigg, Keya was able to spend her year productively too, completing video-based coding for an impressive number of parent-child dyads, taking part in two different studies (NewFAMS and EPICC). This involved developing an extension to an existing Cognitive Sensitivity Scale to capture warmth and autonomy support as well as communicative clarity and mentalising. Keya has recently launched the final part of her study, interviews with teachers, parents, and home-visitors to identify barriers children face when learning to read. This has involved collaborating with stake-holder groups, giving Keya valuable experiences in how to implement research evidence to assist families in need and organizations serving families with young children. Another graduate student who had to re-think her research plans to comply with social distancing is MPhil plans is Iris Pattara-Angkoon who, like Keya, spent much of her year coding NewFAMS parent-child videos. Complementing previous coding of autonomy support, Iris coded the affective quality of caregivers’ talk to toddlers – to demonstrate that parents’ positive affect facilitates toddler compliance.

At a team level, the main achievement of the year has been the successful launch of the ESRC-funded Ready or Not study. The opening line from Charles Dicken’s novel ‘A tale of two cities’ ‘It was the best of times, it was the worst of times’ comes to mind: there can never have been a harder time to conduct a study of school readiness – but our focus on children’s wellbeing across the transition to school also meant that there’s never been a
more important time for such a study. Somehow, we have managed to exploit the switch to
zoom to expand the scope of the study to include previously unplanned parental measures –
and our expert advisory group have been genuinely impressed by what we’ve achieved.

We’d learned from last year’s attempt at zoom-based testing of NewFAMS children
in Lockdown 1 just how hard it was likely to be to recruit families during the pandemic – and
our initial plans to recruit via schools also quickly hit the buffers. We therefore applied both
imagination and a willingness to go the extra mile to find ways of making remote
participation as easy and enjoyable for families as possible – with a big shout-out to
everyone in the Ready or Not team who all pitched in and contributed in so many ways to
the success of our first wave of data-collection (zoom-based testing with more than 250
children from across the country!). A few words on our adapted protocol might be of
interest

1. Recruiting via social media. As schools were under such pressure, we decided to
adopt a digital grass-roots approach using a paid Facebook ad and a bespoke study
website that made it easy for families to register their interest.

2. ‘Warm-up’ zoom visits. To ensure that parents can ask questions about the study
before enrolling their child and to check that there is good connectivity, families who
register interest are invited to take part in a short zoom call in which the study
protocol is explained and their questions answered. This zoom call is also used to
gather 5-minute speech samples (a bonus feature of working directly with families) –
and the information gleaned from parents in this way is used to customise the zoom
visit if needed (e.g., dividing the session into bite-size pieces if the child is described
has having a short attention span). We decided to send the family a XX if their
connectivity was poor, but this has not been the case for the families seen so far.

3. **Personal touches by post.** Knowing from our work in the New Fathers and Mothers
Study how important personal touches are in retaining families, we have posted
each participating family a bumper pack to open just before the main zoom
session. This pack includes reward stickers for the child, a laminated card with fun
facts about puffins and space (see the study logo) and some materials that allow
children to spend some of the session completing traditional pen-and-paper tasks
rather than staring at the screen continuously. The pack also includes a wrapped
thank you gift of pens and a wooden blank jigsaw to decorate. For examples of the
children’s beautifully illustrated jigsaws, see [https://readyornotstudy.squarespace.com](https://readyornotstudy.squarespace.com).
4. **Tag teams & recordings to ensure reliability.** Testing children on zoom is not easy – and so we have engaged student helpers to assist the graduate research team during the zoom visits – enabling the main researcher to focus on engaging and maintaining the child’s full attention during the session. As the sessions are recorded, we are also able to check the reliability of coding – which would not have been possible in our originally planned school visits – so this is another bonus.

5. **Remote observations of parent-child dyads.** While we have had to abandon our planned child-peer observations, we film caregivers and children completing a virtual Etch-A-Sketch task at the end the main zoom session, using a paradigm developed by Bonny Oliver, an old friend from my Institute of Psychiatry days. Our hope is that this will enable us to create detailed and objective codes of children’s social competencies and task engagement/ persistence as well as of caregivers’ parenting style and scaffolding support. This virtual paradigm is being used by several research groups across the world, and so may lead to interesting cross-cultural work.

6. **Continued Professional Development Events.** Linked to the Ready or Not study we have hosted bi-monthly workshops with a wonderful array of speakers on topics of interest to primary school teachers – recordings of these events are kept on the CFR website, so that others can also benefit. We had hoped that these events would facilitate recruitment – this has only been true to a limited extent, though the events are clearly valued by the attendees and so are in themselves useful.
Another blessing on the year was the wonderful ‘Bath Quartet’ of research placement students who joined the CFR during the pandemic (Alba Galindo Gonzalez, Mina Gedikoglu, Beth Ketteringham, and Izzy Lajeunesse) and made a really positive contribution to my team and to the CFR more widely. Without fail, the Bath girls were full of smiles, quick to spot when help might be needed and to volunteer their skills, supportive of each other and completely professional in their approach to work.

Together, these many qualities enabled them to have very successful placements – the icing on the cake is that the CFR was awarded a prize from the University of Bath as ‘research placement of the year 2020-21’, delivered in a virtual Oscars-style evening of acceptance speeches etc!

Finally, Spring-Summer 2021 brought some unforeseen good news, in the form of a sizeable philanthropic donation from Adrian Cheng, a Hong Kong businessman who has a chain of kindergartens in Hong Kong and China and who is interested in evidence-based initiatives to promote positive mental health in young children. This interest dovetails very
nicely with our emphasis on wellbeing in the ESRC-funded “Ready or Not” study. Thus, by setting up a parallel study in Hong Kong we will be able to explore the cultural universality / specificity of factors that predict wellbeing and success in the early school years. Demonstrating that success builds success, the prospect of this new study enabled former CFR PhD student Dr Chengyi Xu (now at Tsinghua University, currently considered to be China’s premier university) to gain post-doctoral funding from the Chinese Ministry of Education in order to include a mainland China site in what we are calling the ‘East meets West’ study. It’s lovely to be able to support Chengyi’s career in this way and I’ve no doubt that she will be a real asset to the team. The East Meets West team also includes Claudia Chu (a PhD student in Michelle Ellefson’s lab who will shortly defend her thesis) and another HK national, Siyu Ching Wong, who is a graduate student I first met through work on the Evidence for Better Lives Study and Catherine Wang, who will join the team in February 2022. As the start date of the East Meets West grant was delayed till October 2021, I shall leave an account of it to the next annual report, but would like to end as I began by thanking Hannah who, with Abby Scott, has successfully navigated the administrative odyssey required to set up overseas employment contracts and so set the stage for the CFR to enter a new period of working ‘beyond-borders’!
PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Susie Bower-Brown

Publications


Ellen Davenport-Pleasance

Presentations


Helen Dolling

Publications


Presentations

The Community Child Health care of children with genetic diagnoses/Poster Presentation. A Burman, EJ Radford, H Dolling, DH Rowitch, FL Raymond, HV Firth, A Sansome. October 2021. BACCH Meeting. UK

Elian Fink

Publications


Book chapters


Presentations

Elian Fink & Jenny Gibson (March, 2021) It’s time to pay attention to the complexities of social pretend play. Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting. USA via zoom.

Elian Fink Social play: Different measures, different viewpoints (different outcomes?) April 2021. Playtrack: Aarhus University Play Symposium. Denmark via zoom.
**Sarah Foley**

**Publications**


**Book Chapters**

Reports


Presentations

Invited talk: Foley, S., (2021, June) Keeping baby in mind: links between parents’ thoughts about their infant and interaction quality. The Interdisciplinary Perinatal Mental Health Group, Swansea University.


Samantha Friedman

Publications


Susan Golombok

Publications


**Book**


**Book chapters/reports**


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**Presentations**


“We Are Family.” *In conversation event with Marcin Smietana for Strategic Research Initiative in Reproduction*. October 2020.


“Psychosocial follow-up of families formed by lesbian and single heterosexual mothers”. *Invited presentation to Webinar on Different Forms of Families and Access to Assisted Reproduction, University Diego Portales, Chile*. May 2021.


Claire Hughes

Publications


Hughes, C., Ronchi, L., Heng, J.*, Basile, C., Del Sette, P., & Lecce, S. Negative feelings about social distancing rules mediates the impact of the pandemic on young children’s prosocial behaviour. Under review (ECAP)


Books


White, N., & Hughes, C. Why Siblings Matter – Polish translation

Susan Imrie

Publications


**Presentations**


**Other**


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**Dr Vasanti Jadva**

**Publications**


**Book chapters**


**Presentations**


**Kitty Jones**

**Publications**


Laura Katus

Publications


Presentations


Neural markers and developmental outcomes in infants in rural Africa. 23rd July 2021. *Developmental Neuroscience Seminar Series, University College London*. UK.

Anja McConnachie

Publications


Active CFR Grants 2020-2021

XJAG/099
Grant holder: Professor Claire Hughes
Investigator: Professor Claire Hughes
Title: Socio-Cognitive Skills, Social Relationships and Wellbeing in Hong Kong Children in the Early School Years.
Sponsor: Donation – Hong Kong Wemp Education Foundation Ltd
Period: 1st August 2021 – 31st July 2023
Amount: £604,750

XJAG/098
Grant holder: Professor Claire Hughes
Investigator: Professor Claire Hughes
Title: Identifying risk and protective factors to help support student mental health.
Sponsor: University of Edinburgh (FB ESRC)
Period: 30th June 2021 – 30th April 2022
Amount: £2,564

XJAG/097
Grant holder: Professor Claire Hughes
Investigator: Professor Claire Hughes
Title: Strengthening innovative child development research in African settings: new methods and improved capacity.
Sponsor: The Academy of Medical Sciences
Period: 30th December 2020 –30th December 2021
Amount: £25,000

XJAG/096
Grant holder: Dr Sarah Foley
Investigator: Dr Sarah Foley
Title: A parenting team? (3-months additional funding)
Sponsor: ESRC
Period: 1st Oct 2019 – 30th Sep 2020
Amount: £38,736

XJAG/095
Grant holder: Professor Claire Hughes
Investigator: Professor Claire Hughes
Title: School readiness: Connecting viewpoints on child and family wellbeing, and identifying commonalities across diverse groups
Sponsor: ESRC
Period: 1st March 2021 – 28th February 2023
Amount: £329,500 (total grant value £566,300)
**XJAG/094**
Grant holder: Dr Sarah Foley
Investigator: Dr Sarah Foley
Title: A parenting team?
Sponsor: ESRC
Period: 1st Oct 2019 – 30th Sep 2020
Amount: £118,593

**XJAG/091**
Grant holder: Professor Susan Golombok
Investigator: Professor Susan Golombok
Title: Shared Biological Motherhood
Sponsor: ESRC
Period: 1st Apr 2019 – 31st March 2022
Amount: £468,684

**XJAG/083**
Grant holder: Professor Susan Golombok
Investigator: Professor Susan Golombok
Sponsor: Wellcome Trust
Period: 1st January 2018 – 31st December 2022
Amount: £1,552,401