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Centre for Child & Family Justice Research

Welcome to the April 2025 CfJ Newsletter This edition brings you essential updates on upcoming events, the latest evidence-based research, and key professional developments tailored for those in the judiciary, local authorities, social work, and the child and family justice sectors. Stay informed and ahead in your field with our curated insights and resources.

What's Been Happening

International Roma Day: Celebrating Culture, Advancing Rights

Earlier this month, Dr Joanna Kostka represented CfJ at two key events marking International Roma Day on 1 April—a powerful day of reflection and advocacy for Europe's largest ethnic minority. Established in 1971 during the First World Romani Congress in London, the day celebrates Romani culture and history, while spotlighting the injustices and systemic inequalities Roma communities continue to face.

Dr Kostka took part in the <u>International Roma Day Reception</u> at Europe House, organised by the <u>Delegation of the European Union to the United Kingdom</u>, which brought together voices committed to promoting social justice for Roma communities. She also attended the *Roma Rights Forum Annual Event*, hosted by the Roma Support Group. The event showcased the <u>Mishto Campaign</u>, a timely call for fair and dignified access to public services for Roma people in the UK—a cause that aligns closely with CfJ's commitment to justice, equity, and inclusive policy development.

On **15 April**, Dr Joanna Kostka, together with colleagues from a collaborative research team including <u>AdviceNow</u>, and Anglia Ruskin University, presented their findings to the <u>Association</u> of <u>Child Protection Professionals' Special Interest Group on Gypsy</u>, <u>Roma and Traveller</u> <u>Communities</u>. Their study, <u>Come to Us in a Peaceful Way</u>, investigates Roma families' experiences with children's services in England, highlighting systemic discrimination, data gaps, and engagement barriers. The research offers culturally competent, community-rooted recommendations to improve practice and policy.

The study was previously showcased by CfJ at a dedicated event in **February**. If you missed it, the full recording is available to watch on our <u>YouTube channel</u>, offering further insights into the findings and their implications for social work and policy.



In Conversation: Justice, Care and Collaboration

Thank you to everyone who joined us on **28 April** for *In Conversation: Justice, Care and Collaboration*. It was a thought-provoking afternoon with Kirsty Kitchen from <u>Birth</u> <u>Companions</u>, who shared powerful insights into the organisation's work with women affected by the criminal justice system, immigration, housing precarity, and health inequalities. In conversation with Professor Karen Broadhurst, Kirsty explored the challenges and possibilities in the current policy landscape, as well as ways researchers can contribute to meaningful change.

We look forward to continuing the conversation and exploring opportunities for future collaboration with Birth Companions.

Upcoming Events – Key Dates for Your Diary

Launch of the Escape to Safety Exhibition

📰 Wednesday 7 May 2025 (on display until May 15)

🕥 10:30–11:30 AM

P Library Exhibitions and Event Space

Join us for the launch of *Escape to Safety*, an interactive exhibition exploring the experiences of refugees seeking asylum in Britain. Through personal stories and immersive multimedia, the exhibition challenges stereotypes and promotes understanding of displacement, belonging, and protection — key concerns for those working in children and family justice.

Register here Free event with refreshments – registration required.

Rural Inequalities Research Symposium

📰 Thursday, 22 May 2025

- 🕐 9:30 AM approx. 4:00 PM
- P Lancaster University, Fylde, Lecture Theatre 2
- Includes tea, coffee, and lunch

Join us for a day of talks, discussion, and networking focused on rural inequalities. The event will feature a public lecture by Professor Sally Shortall (Newcastle University), titled "How to research inequality? Interrogating a micro/meso/macro approach to gender inequality in agriculture."

The day will also include talks from leading researchers on rural health, smart farming, transport deprivation, soil restoration, and farming communities, alongside networking opportunities and discussions on future collaborations. Organised by CfJ member Dr Steffi Doebler.

Register here: <u>Eventbrite Registration</u>



Ole Flamenco! Photo Exhibition

Thursday, 8 May 2025
1:00 -2:30 PM

Lancaster University Library, Library Avenue, Bailrigg, LA1 4YH
On display until 13 June 2025

CfJ is pleased to highlight *Ole Flamenco!* a vibrant photography exhibition by <u>Rina Srabonian</u>, celebrating the emotion, identity, and cultural heritage of flamenco.

The opening event will feature a roundtable discussion with the artist and scholars from various disciplines. Dr Joanna Kostka (CfJ) will offer reflections from the perspective of justice, empowerment, and the politics of survival—exploring how flamenco, as a cultural practice rooted in resistance, can speak to the lived realities of marginalised families and communities navigating structural injustice.

While flamenco may appear distant from child and family justice, the exhibition invites us to consider how cultural expression can be a powerful site of resilience, identity, and collective memory—values that are central to CfJ's research and advocacy.

If you're visiting Lancaster or on campus this spring, don't miss it—a powerful journey through the lens of community and art.

In Conversation: Emergency Interventions in Child Protection, Lessons from Finland

- Friday, 16 May 2025
- 2:00 PM -3:30 PM
- P Lancaster University, Charles Carter A02 and TEAMS Join the meeting HERE

We are delighted to welcome Juulia Hietamäki, visiting PhD researcher from the University of Eastern Finland (Kuopio) to *CfJ in Conversation* — our ongoing series of events exploring key issues in justice, social policy, and practice.

Juulia Hietamäki's research focuses on child protection system and how various factors influence it at the municipality level. She is a co-author of the important recent study: "The Quality of Child Protection Buffers the Need for Emergency Child Removals" (Journal of Social Service Research, 2023) @ Read the article

Drawing on system-level data from Finland, the research highlights how strengthening the quality of child protection services can reduce the need for emergency child removals, particularly in areas facing economic insecurity. This event offers a valuable opportunity to learn from approaches in different settings where positive change is happening — and to reflect on how these lessons might inform policy and practice in the UK and beyond.



Research and Transformative Practice

Navigating Conflicting Roles in Roma Activism: Advocacy, Solidarity, and Child Welfare

Dr. Joanna Kostka will present at the upcoming conference *Romani Racialization Beyond Majority-Minority Narratives: Transnationalism, Activism, and Solidarity*, taking place from 21–23 May 2025 at Vila Lanna, Prague. Her presentation explores the complex realities of Roma activists who navigate dual roles of systemic advocacy and direct family support within child welfare systems. Drawing on in-depth interviews, she examines how activists balance immediate family support with long-term goals of transformative change, often within institutional frameworks that perpetuate systemic anti-Roma racism.

Onference details

CfJ at the AFINet Conference: International Knowledge Exchange

We're pleased to share that Professor Judith Harwin, CfJ Co-Director, will be presenting at the <u>6th Annual Addiction and the Family International Network (AFINet) Conference</u>, taking place at Laval University, Quebec City, Canada, from 21–23 May 2025.

Judith will present two papers at the conference:

- The impact of Family Drug and Alcohol Courts on sustainable reunification and parental offending: a longitudinal comparison study in England
 This paper draws on an ongoing ESRC-funded study investigating the impact of FDACs on family and offending outcomes. It is presented on behalf of Dr Bachar Alrouh and Dr Claire Hargreaves (Lancaster University), and Dr Les Humphreys (UCLAN).

 Ward Market Content
- Supporting families affected by substance misuse, domestic abuse and child maltreatment across family and criminal justice systems in England and the US: a policy and legal analysis

Co-presented with Caroline Cooper (U.S. Criminal and Civil Justice System Consultant), the paper explores comparative approaches to supporting vulnerable families across justice systems.

These papers reflect CfJ's ongoing commitment to international dialogue and policy-relevant research at the intersection of justice, care, and family support.



Launching the First HOPE Room

Friday, 9 May 2025

P East Lancashire Health Trust, Maternity Unit

We are proud to share that the first HOPE Room will be launched at East Lancashire Health Trust on 9 May. Developed by specialist midwife Natalie Woodruff in collaboration with HOPE mother Pauline, the room builds directly on the Born into Care: Developing Best Practice Guidelines research and the Giving HOPE project.

These initiatives, led by CfJ researcher Claire Mason, have been instrumental in highlighting the urgent need for more compassionate, trauma-informed practices for parents facing separation from their babies at birth.

The HOPE Room is a private, respectful space on the maternity unit, offering parents time with their baby and a setting for sensitive meetings with professionals—away from the public and often distressing environment of the general ward. Equipped with a computer, it also provides the option to attend first court hearings remotely in a private and supportive space.

This launch marks a vital step in reshaping maternity and family justice practices around dignity, empathy, and care.

To receive more information about the First Hope Room contact us at cfi@lancaster.ac.uk

Listening, Learning, and Leading: Stakeholder Priorities for Children's Social Care

CfJ member Kat Tranter, alongside Prof Karen Broadhurst, has co-led a major qualitative stakeholder consultation as part of the ADR UK Community Catalyst project on <u>Children at</u> <u>Risk of Poor Outcomes</u>. This UK-wide consultation brought together insights from leaders across practice, policy, and academia to identify urgent priorities for children's social care research.

The stakeholder report explores pressing issues such as poverty, mental health, SEND, and school disengagement, alongside the challenges and opportunities of using administrative data to improve children's lives. It has been published alongside a scoping review and a new research agenda—the latter forming the cornerstone of this 2-year initiative to build a more informed, data-savvy research community in the field.

Read the report

This project is a collaborative effort between Lancaster, Swansea, UCL, Imperial, and Sussex universities, supported by ADR UK Community Catalyst.



🔁 Recommended Read:

The Quality of Child Protection Buffers the Need for Emergency Child Removals

Hietamäki, J., Seppälä, P., Häkkilä, L., & Toikko, T. (2023). *Journal of Social Service Research*, 49(5), 582–594.

This timely and insightful article analyses how the quality of child protection services can significantly reduce the need for emergency child removals, particularly in municipalities facing high levels of economic insecurity. Using system-level data from Finland, the authors show that when needs assessments are carried out effectively and on time, families are less likely to reach crisis point—offering clear implications for policy and practice.

The study calls for a shift in focus from individual risk factors to structural quality in services, emphasising the role of early, consistent support in preventing family breakdowns.

Read the article

Media & Podcasts

Behind the Red Tractor: Who Are Our Farming Families?

CfJ member Dr. Claire Hargreaves (Lancaster University) brings a unique dual perspective as both a data scientist and farmer in her latest blog for ADR UK. Drawing on the AD|ARC dataset, she explores the lives, challenges, and contributions of farming households across England and Wales—highlighting the need for policy that reflects the real people behind our food systems.

Read the blog here

Celebrating Successes

Congratulations to CfJ Member Dr Linda Cusworth!

We are thrilled to announce that <u>Permanently Progressing? Building secure futures for</u> <u>children in Scotland</u>, a major longitudinal, mixed-methods research project led by the University of Stirling in partnership with Lancaster University and AFKA, has been nominated for '**Project of the Year**' by *The Herald* newspaper.

CfJ member Dr Linda Cusworth has been a key part of this important, which focuses on improving outcomes for children in care in Scotland, since Phase 1 started in 2014. The project's nomination is a fantastic recognition of its impact on both policy and practice.

The awards ceremony will be held on 29 May 2025 in Glasgow — congratulations Linda, and we hope you enjoy the celebrations!



Rew CfJ Leadership Team Members

We're delighted to welcome two new members to the CfJ leadership team:

- **Dr Michael Lambert** (Research Fellow, Lancaster Medical School) joins as *Health Collaboration Lead*
- **Evgenia Apostolou** (PhD researcher in Criminology) joins as *Postgraduate Research* (*PGR*) *Lead*

We're excited to have them on board as we continue to strengthen CfJ's collaborative and inclusive research community.

Key Sector Highlights

Identifying and Supporting Parents with Learning Disabilities

Research commissioned by the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory has found that one-third of recent infant care cases involved parents with learning disabilities or difficulties. However, these conditions were often identified only at the court stage, highlighting the need for earlier detection and tailored support to ensure fair proceedings and outcomes.

Read more

Tightening Regulation of Experts in Family Courts

A study by University College London has highlighted serious concerns about unregulated experts influencing decisions in family courts, sometimes leading to harmful outcomes such as inappropriate separation of children from mothers or placements with fathers accused of abuse. In response to wider concerns, the Family Procedure Rule Committee has proposed amendments to require that all experts instructed in family law children proceedings be regulated by a UK statutory body or appear on an accredited register. A public consultation on the proposed changes is open until 6 June 2025.

Read the UCL research

View the consultation on proposed rule changes

Neglect of Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage Children

A report published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel on 11 March 2025 reveals that local safeguarding reviews have often failed to address the specific needs of Black, Asian, and Mixed Heritage children. The report examines cases of 53 children from these backgrounds who died or were seriously harmed between January 2022 and March 2024, calling for improved cultural competence and anti-racist practices in child protection services.





Latest from Perspectives

Perspectives is a regular feature in our newsletter that brings together insightful writing from our students and members. This space explores the intersection of theory, practice, and policy within child and family justice.

Contributors offer reflective commentary, grounded analysis, and real-world insights that connect academic research with frontline experience. These pieces aim to spark conversation, challenge assumptions, and highlight the diverse voices within our community.

We hope *Perspectives* continues to be a source of inspiration and critical reflection for all those committed to justice and well-being for children and families.

In this powerful Perspectives piece, Dr Joanna Kostka, Lecturer in Sociology and Social Work at Lancaster University and Director of Engagement at the CfJ, draws on her own research alongside national safeguarding reviews and child welfare studies to examine the overlooked realities facing Roma families within the child protection system. Dr Kostka challenges assumptions that parental neglect is the primary cause of intervention, highlighting instead how poverty, systemic marginalisation, and racialised blind spots drive disproportionate outcomes. This critical reflection calls for urgent, poverty-aware, and anti-discriminatory reforms to better protect all children.

Read the full blog post <u>here</u>

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It only takes a minute, and your input will allow us to share news, events, and opportunities that matter most to you.

Fill out the form <u>here</u> and help us make our newsletter more valuable for you!

Thank you for engaging with **CfJ's research and policy community**. We look forward to your participation in upcoming events.

Contact us: cfj@lancaster.ac.uk

Website: <u>About | Child & Family Justice Research</u>

• Linked In: follow CfJ here

For those interested in joining our network, collaborating on research, or organizing/disseminating an event, please contact:

- → Director of Engagement, Dr Joanna Kostka (j.kostka@lancaster.ac.uk)
- → Director of Communications, Dr Linda Cusworth (<u>I.cusworth@lancaster.ac.uk</u>).

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