

Fostering a sense of belonging for higher education staff and students with caring responsibilities: what works?

Executive summary

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1. Overview

Fostering a Sense of Belonging is an original research and art-based collaboration between Marie-Pierre Moreau, Professor of Education at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge, UK, and Sally Campbell Galman, an independent artist and a Professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, US. This project was supported by Advance HE, as part of the Good Practice Grants programme.

2. The project aims

The main aims of this project were to raise awareness of carers, including in relation to the diversity and intersectionalities of their experiences, and to encourage the development of practices and policies which encourage the inclusion of carers and foster their sense of belonging. This was facilitated by the accessibility of the chosen medium as well as by the dissemination strategy detailed above.

To achieve these aims, we used the arts as a way of stimulating interests and reaching out to a broad range of policy-makers, practitioners and individuals which may or not, in other circumstances, have engaged with this issue. Using the arts as a mode of dissemination does more than enhance accessibility and engage diverse publics with research topics and stories, the arts in general, and comics specifically, enable readers to simultaneously consider the parts and the whole. The contiguous images and words that characterise comic art allow readers to be challenged by individual carers' stories while also considering the larger sociocultural context.

3. The project outputs

The project has led to the production of a series of 23 illustrated vignettes and their companion booklet, which articulate in a written and visual way how carers in academia experience their dual status, while also considering how we can challenge the status quo. As a result, the work generates social change through the identification of research-informed good practices and through the production of the main output as a piece of art and research which provokes audiences and encourages them to rethink the way they think of carers in academic contexts.

4. Dissemination and impact

The work has been shared with Advance HE and a broad range of audiences, including on the authors' personal websites and on social media. The team has also been invited to present the work at a number of events attended by professional and academic audiences, including Anglia Ruskin University, the University of Lincoln, Managers in Partnership, the University of Bedfordshire and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. We will continue to share our work at events. The exhibitions of the work due to take place at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and at Anglia Ruskin University have been postponed due to the current Covid pandemic. However, we are hoping to run these exhibitions in 2021-2022 once it is safe to do so.

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