



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

**Research Centre for Children and Families**

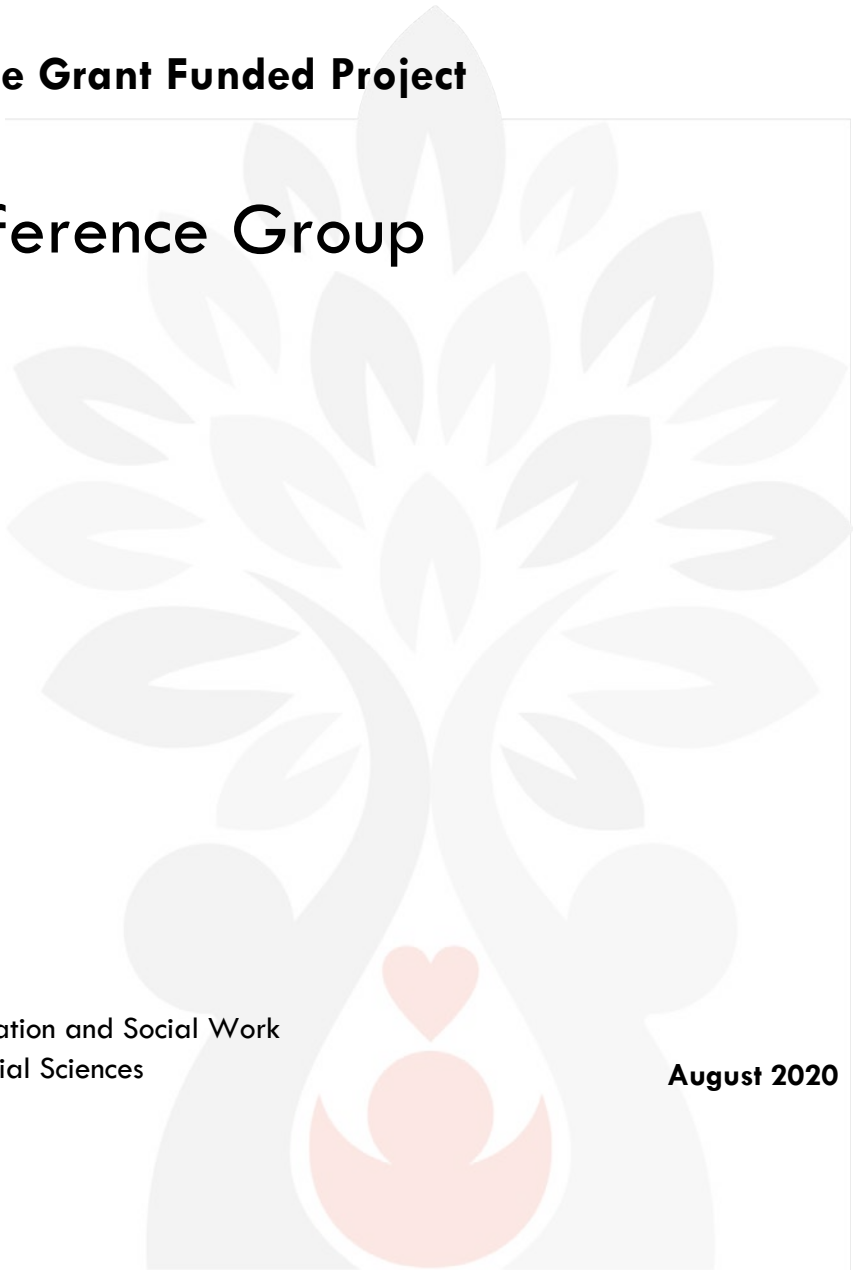
# **Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care**

**An ARC Linkage Grant Funded Project**

**Expert Reference Group**

Sydney School of Education and Social Work  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

**August 2020**



## BACKGROUND

The Research Centre for Children and Families, at the Sydney School of Education and Social Work, has commenced action research with the out-of-home care sector. The ARC Linkage-funded *Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care* study will develop evidence-informed practices that support positive interactions between children and their birth and carer families. The project is being conducted in partnership with the NSW Government and 7 non-government organisations across four NSW sites. Small teams of practitioners will trial and evaluate small practice changes to improve children's experiences of 'family time' (also known as contact).

The Fostering Lifelong Connections study is underpinned by three principles:

1. Trauma-informed practice
2. Cultural respect and safety
3. Reflective practice.

The Fostering Lifelong Connections study will develop, test, embed, and disseminate practices to develop and sustain positive family connections for children in permanent care by:

- Identifying relationship-building practices and co-designing resources
- Conducting action research to trial, implement and evaluate practice changes
- Implementing new relationship-building practices at four NSW sites and within the 8 partner organisations
- Disseminating the outcomes, including practice resources and training, to the out-of-home care sector.

### Expert Reference Group

An Expert Reference Group has been formed to provide guidance over the course of the three-year project. The group will provide advice on the development and evaluation of relationship building practices being trialled by the research project.

The Expert Reference Group provides a forum to review the progress of the project and discuss the challenges that arise in the course of trialling new practices to improve family time. As findings emerge about successful practices, the group will be involved in creating resources to support practice improvement across the sector.

### Experts by Profession

An international, multi-disciplinary group of academic and practitioner professionals will provide insights into key approaches for applying cultural safety and trauma awareness to decision-making around family time in out-of-home care. These experts will offer advice on evidence and research-to-practice gaps, based on knowledge of the Australian and international context.

### Experts by Experience

A group of people with personal experience of the out-of-home care system will be employed as Experts-by-Experience. The group will include young people who have been in care, parents of a child in care and foster or kinship carers. They will offer invaluable insights into the impact of family time practices on children and families and contribute to assessing the acceptability and utility of proposed practices to be trialled.

## EXPERT REFERENCE GROUP MEMBERS

### Research Team



**Associate Professor Amy Conley Wright - Lead Chief Investigator**

**Director, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney**

Amy's work has focused on building the evidence base for family support and child advocacy, in partnership with children's services organisations. Amy will provide strategic oversight to achieve project milestones, ensure regular communication for the research team and Partner Organisations, oversee operational budget, lead development of project outputs and co-supervise the Research Associate and PhD student.



**Professor Judith Cashmore AO, Chief-Investigator**

**Professor of Socio-Legal Research and Policy, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney**

Judy brings an extensive background in out-of-home care research and is an international expert on children and the law. She is a lead investigator on the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study, conducted in partnership with the NSW Government. She has expertise in research to elicit children's perspectives and will provide guidance on measures to evaluate the impact of practice change on children. She will contribute to data analysis and write up of results.



**Dr Lynette Riley, Chief Investigator**

**Senior Lecturer in Aboriginal Education & Studies, Race, Racism & Indigenous Australia, School of Education and Social Work, University of Sydney**

Lynette, a Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi woman from Dubbo and Moree, has a distinguished background in Aboriginal education. She has collaborated with Aboriginal communities to embed cultural knowledge of Kinship into university curricula and was awarded the 2015 Vice-Chancellors' Award for Support of the Student Experience at University of Sydney. Lynette will provide specialist guidance on cultural issues and practices related to Kinship care and will supervise aspects of the project focused on Aboriginal children and families, including PhD supervision.



**Dr Susan Collings, Chief-Investigator**

**Research Fellow, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney.**

Susan brings extensive skills in using participatory action to understand complex social issues and knowledge translation to generate lasting practice transformations. She has skills in inclusive and visual methodologies to elicit the perspectives of children and marginalised groups in research. Susan will support data collection by Partner Organisations and contribute to data analysis and write up. She will co-supervise a PhD student and Research Associate.



**Sarah Ciftci, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney**

Sarah has a background in out-of-home care sector research and program evaluation, including with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Sarah will lead field work support to the four action research teams, coordinate data collection by Partner Organisations, and contribute to data analysis and write-up.



**Dr Betty Luu, Research Associate, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney**

Betty has a background in developmental psychology and a research interest in child identity and permanency outcomes. She has expertise in quantitative research design and the collation and management of incoming data, data analysis and report-writing. Betty will provide technical knowledge and support for the data collections and coding.



**Suzanne Pope, Program Manager, Research Centre for Children and Families, University of Sydney**

Suzanne has extensive experience managing service and research programs spanning the Government and non-government sectors. Suzanne will provide the overall project governance, management and budgeting.

## International Partner Investigators



**Professor Elsbeth Neil, Professor of Social Work, University of East Anglia, UK.**

Elsbeth (Beth) has conducted an influential longitudinal study on direct contact after adoption in England and has developed and disseminated a suite of accessible and practical resources to support professionals and families with contact planning. Beth will support the development of practice resources and contribute to data analysis and write up.



**Professor Peter Pecora, Professor, School of Social Work, University of Washington and Managing Director of Research Services, Casey Family Programs, USA.**

Peter is an international child welfare research expert whose work has led to improvements in child protection risk assessment, foster care programs and intensive family support in many countries. Peter pioneered the use of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative research methodology within child welfare and has applied it to a variety of organisational, geographical and funding contexts. He will provide methodological expertise, particularly during project establishment.

## Partner Investigators



### **Matthew Jones, Director Strategy, Child and Family Directorate, New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice**

Matthew represents the NSW Department of Communities and Justice on the project. He brings extensive policy and service development background to the project.



### **Dr Robert Urquhart, Head, Knowledge, Outcomes and Research, Barnardos Australia**

Robert represents Barnardos Australia, a large non-government family support and out-of-home care agency. He will provide insight into the system and practice implementation issues arising from the project. He brings extensive experience in improving outcomes for children and their families, by translating research evidence, and strategic and operational information into practice. Robert has been a consultant to the OECD on long term trends in inequality and poverty and was previously Joint Director/Principal Researcher at the NSW Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA). He is an Honorary Research Fellow, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, The University of Sydney.

## Experts by Profession



### **Emeritus Professor, Judith Atkinson AM, We-Ai-li Foundation**

Judy is a Jiman (central west Queensland) and Bundjalung (northern New South Wales) woman, with Anglo-Celtic and German heritage. Her academic contributions to the understanding of trauma related issues stemming from the violence of colonisation and the healing/recovery of Indigenous peoples from such trauma has won her the Carrick Neville Bonner Award in 2006 for her curriculum development and innovative teaching practice. Her book *'Trauma Trails – Recreating Songlines: The transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia'*, provides context to the life stories of people who have been moved from their country in a process that has created trauma trails, and the changes that can occur in the lives of people as they make connection with each other and share their stories of healing. In 2011 she was awarded the Fritz Redlick Memorial Award for Human Rights and Mental Health from the Harvard University program for refugee trauma.





**Ms Maria Elena Albu, Children's Registrar, NSW Children's Court**

Mariaelena has an extensive background working with families involved in the out-of-home care system through her work in the Local and the Children's Courts since 1986. Mariaelena is a trained mediator and lawyer. She currently works in the Children's Court with a focus on families and children who are involved in the Court's care and protection jurisdiction.



**Ms Sue Buratti, Program Manager – Therapeutic Services, Australian Childhood Foundation**

Sue is currently overseeing the implementation of a state-wide trauma treatment service which supports children in OOHHC. Sue has previously held several positions in leadership providing clinical oversight and support to teams implementing trauma informed practice. For many years she has provided Supervision, Training and Consultancy to a range of NGO and Govt agencies, predominantly in childhood trauma and its impact across the lifespan. She is an advocate for children's rights and holds the view that all behaviour is language and that children should not be labelled by it. Sue has presented Nationally and Internationally on the aforementioned.



**Dr Sue Foley, Director, NSW Children's Court Clinic (part of the Sydney Children's Hospital Network)**

For all children, lifelong connections promote or undermine the health and wellbeing of children. Many of them have parents whose own stories are complex and unhealthy. The CCC seeks to advocate for children's safety wellbeing and welfare and seeks to ensure cultural safety is enhanced and maintained. Issues around relationships between children and their carers and their families are core to the assessments undertaken in the Clinic. For Aboriginal children and families these issues are particularly complex because of the historical separations that families have experienced. Sue has worked for YACA, YACS, DoCS and FaCS (now DCJ) as well as a number of agencies, and health services. Sue has been a member of the ISPCAN Council and has ongoing engagement with international child protection agencies who are interested in psychological and relational wellbeing of children in care.



**Ms Ananda Hall, Solicitor**

Ananda has extensive experience as a legal practitioner in the field of child and family law in Australia and the United Kingdom. She holds a BA/LLB (Hons) and MA (Child Studies) and is an Accredited Specialist in Family Law. She is currently a Principal Solicitor with the Crown Solicitor's Office, specialising in child protection and adoption, and is also a Teaching Fellow with the Law Faculty of the University of New South Wales.



**Mr Steve Kinmond, CEO Australian Association of Child Welfare Agencies**

Steve commenced as the CEO of ACWA in February 2019. As the former NSW Deputy Ombudsman and Community and Disability Services Commissioner, Steve has an impressive track record of advocating for vulnerable children and families and extensive experience in the community services sector. ACWA is the NSW non-government peak body representing community organisations working with vulnerable children, young people and their families.



**Ms Rowena Medland, Care & Protection and Family Law Solicitor, Legal Aid NSW**

Rowena works as a lawyer in the Family Law Division of Legal Aid New South Wales on the Central Coast. She oversees the care and protection legal practice and consistently strives to provide a high standard of legal representation, ensuring that clients also have access to holistic case management support. She represents parents, extended family members, children and young people involved in legal proceedings before various Courts and Tribunals. She has a particular interest and passion working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, having lived and worked for many years in Cape York and the Torres Strait.



**Associate Professor Loyola McLean, Brain and Mind Institute, University of Sydney**

Loyola is an Associate Professor with the Brain and Mind Centre, University of Sydney, and a Senior Staff Specialist with the Westmead Psychotherapy Program for Complex Traumatic Disorders, WSLHD. She co-coordinates the Masters of Trauma-Informed Psychotherapy for the University of Sydney and WSLHD. She is a certified Adult Attachment Interview (AAI) Coder and Trainer. She applies an interdisciplinary biopsychosocial model to her research and clinical work, informed by attachment, neuroscience and the modern conceptions of the Self and Trauma in the Conversational Model. She is exploring how attachment can be integrated with other models to open up opportunities for better collaborative research, formulation and multimodal treatments.



**Ms Bernadette Wood, Director Practice Support, Office of the Senior Practitioner, NSW Department of Communities and Justice**

Bernadette is a social worker with over 30 years' experience supporting children and families. Her roles in NSW Health included child & family counsellor, Manager Community Health Services, and Director Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). Since joining the Department of Communities & Justice she has spent 10 years as Director Child and Family Services and is currently Director Practice Support in the Office of the Senior Practitioner.

## Experts by Experience



**Mx Billy Black**

Billy Black is an ex-child in care who has been advocating for children in the care system since age 15, working closely with children in care, families, carers and departmental employees and decision makers. Billy currently provides training to foster care applicants, works as a youth worker facilitating family visits for foster children, and volunteers as an independent carer authorisation panel member. This year, Billy has been extra busy with a Masters of Research and raising a new baby, complementing their enthusiastic passion for quality in research and quality in care of children.



**Ms Jacqueline Kaelle**

Jacqui is a psychiatrist and foster carer. She is in the process of adopting her son who has been in her care since he was one year old. Jacqui's concerns about the lack of trauma-informed practice in out-of-home-care and advocacy on behalf of her son have led to a passion for systemic change. She has commenced a Bachelor of Law and is committed to improving understanding of trauma and ensuring this is translated into legislation and practice.



**Ms Bobby Hendry**

Bobby was in foster care as a child and had many moves before she 'aged out' seven years ago. She has a passion to use her own story to ignite change. She is a wedding photographer and recently did a photo series to document the multiple houses she lived in as a child. This led to a visual installation on what moving is like and how to make this easier on children which was presented at a Conference run by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice.





### **Ms Miimi Morris**

Miimi is a proud Gomeroi and Dungutti woman from the mid coast of NSW and a mother of five children. She has long-standing experience of the child protection system as both a child and a parent. Miimi has spent six years fighting the legal orders for her four children in out-of-home-care and is a passionate advocate for system change to stop the removal and cultural dislocation of Aboriginal children. Miimi is a social worker and counsellor who has worked in remote and regional Aboriginal communities, and in drug and alcohol and victim counselling services.



### **Mr Malcolm Sky**

Malcolm is a Darkinjung man from the lower Hawksbury, who is now living in Northern NSW. He is a primary school teacher with a passion for teaching Aboriginal culture and language in schools. He and his wife have been fostering Aboriginal children for 13 years and have been caring for two children for around 10 years, since they were very young. He is committed to supporting their connections to family and culture.



### **Ms Tegan Whittaker**

Tegan is a mother whose children have been in care. One is in long-term care and two left care and now live with their dad, and Tegan has shares parenting. Her youngest child has never been in care. She is passionate about making change to the care system so that it does not damage the bonds between parents and children. She is completing a Diploma of Community Services and she wants to run mental health gyms and work on male behaviour change related to domestic violence.