



A newsletter for participants in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)

Message from the Secretary

It's hard to believe it has been 14 years since the first Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study interviews took place. I see there is a call-out in this newsletter for the last interviews to take place in two years' time. What a journey it has been – and an international journey, with this study having informed other studies across the world.



Michael Tidball
Secretary, DCJ

I was so pleased to have launched the special issue on the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study in the International Journal of Child Abuse and Neglect this year www.sciencedirect.com/journal/child-abuse-and-neglect/vol/149/suppl/C. The articles were by researchers who have been with the study since its inception, as well as those who have joined more recently.

The researchers were so skilled at drawing meaningful insights to do what good research should – which is to challenge our thinking and assumptions. Each of the pieces looks at what you have told us and deepen understanding of your experiences and through this, deepen empathy and compassion.

The articles point to how improvements can be made. This includes from restoration, to infants with developmental needs, to disability, to facilitating contact with birth parents, to the impact of placements and better supporting carers.

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study was also recently utilised in a review into out-of-home care that was commissioned by the Minister for Families and Communities, Kate Washington. The authors of this report expressed how grateful they were to have access to the data and insights. This review will inform the significant reform we are

undertaking in child protection and out-of-home care at NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ).

I am so grateful to the children, young people, parents, carers, caseworkers and teachers who have taken part in this study. Thank you for so generously giving your time and for sharing your thoughts and feelings. Your voices and your insights are helping us in our work to improve the system and improve outcomes and experiences for children and families. I thank you for it.

What's on in 2025?

For the first time we will be interviewing 18-25 year olds in the Study to learn more about their experiences, wellbeing and support needs.

We will continue to analyse the data, publish reports and present at meetings and conferences to share the knowledge gained through this research.

We'd like to interview you one last time!

In about two years' time, we will invite you to join-in the last interview for this Study when those who were infants at the start of the Study will be 15-17 years old. We will also include 18-25 years olds. We hope that you continue to take part in this Study and look forward to interviewing you again.

Please let us know your new contact details by calling:

- researchers at DCJ **1800 997 960**
- Ipsos who conduct the interviews **1800 105 088**
- or email Pathways@dcj.nsw.gov.au

For a reminder on why we do this Study, please visit:

www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/facsiar/pathways-of-care-longitudinal-study.html



What is the POCLS?

The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS) is the first large-scale longitudinal study of children and young people who have experienced out-of-home care in Australia. The aim of the POCLS is to provide significant new knowledge that will inform policy to improve the outcomes and experiences of children, young people and their families. The POCLS is conducted by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) with expert advice from a consortium of Australian and international academic researchers and the POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel.

How is the Study tracking?



We hope you join in the last Interview (Interview 7) in about 2 years. With your help we can end the Study on a high note!

Organisations supporting the Study



The CREATE Foundation represents the voices of children and young people with an OOHC experience.

Phone **(02) 9267 1999**
Email create@create.org.au



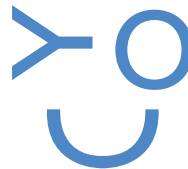
My Forever Family's goal is to see that all children in OOHC receive the care they deserve, and all carers receive the support and training they need.

Phone **1300 782 975**



AbSec is the peak organisations for Aboriginal children and families in NSW, particularly those impacted by the child protection system. AbSec also chair the Study's Aboriginal Governance Panel.

Phone **(02) 9559 5299**
Email admin@absec.org.au



DCJ's Youth Consult for Change is a group of young people who give feedback on projects and issues that affect children and young people in OOHC.

Email youthconsultforchange@dcj.nsw.gov.au

Message from the Chief Executive Officer, AbSec

As the Chairperson of the POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel, I would like to thank all Aboriginal children, young people, carers, and parents involved in the POCLS. Research is crucial for improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.



John Leha

I would also like to thank the Aboriginal experts influencing the methodology of this longitudinal study to answer our policy questions - each member of the Aboriginal Governance Panel and the academic experts in the Scientific Working Group. AbSec is proud to see the voices of Aboriginal practitioners, lived experience advocates, academics and Indigenous data sovereignty and governance in this Study.

It is the reciprocal nature in which each member continues to contribute to this research project that we hope to see a shift in practice and policy.

We have a winner!

The Study has just completed the 6th round of interviews with young people and their caregivers. At this interview, those who were infants when the Study began were starting high school - a significant milestone in a child's life and for the Study.

All those who participated were eligible to participate in a prize draw for a \$500 gift voucher. On the 28 August 2024 Ipsos, who conduct the interviews, drew out the lucky winner who was contacted and accepted the prize.

Again, thank you to all those who have participated in this important Study.



Capturing the voices of 18-25 years old after leaving care

Aftercare interviews in 2025

- In 2025, we will be reaching out to 18-25 year olds who have previously completed an interview for this Study to invite them to join in the first survey about their experiences since leaving care.
- This will provide valuable information that will be used to improve the supports and services provided to young people after leaving care.
- The questionnaire was co-designed by the research team, members of DCJ's Youth Consult for Change, the CREATE Foundation and the Aboriginal Governance Panel.
- More information about this interview with 18-25 year olds is on the Study webpage: www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/facsiar/pathways-of-care-longitudinal-study/information-for-participants/for-young-adults.html



How will we invite 18-25 year olds to an interview?

- DCJ researchers will first contact the young person via a mobile phone SMS message.
- Being part of this Study is voluntary and it is totally up to the young person if they want to join in.
- Young people who complete an interview will receive a \$100 gift voucher to thank them for their time
- If the young person chooses to opt-out they will not be contacted again. Otherwise, a POCLS researcher will contact the young person again to provide more information about the Study and ask for permission to pass their contact details to Ipsos who are conducting the interviews.
- All information, including any personal details, are held confidentially and securely.
- If you have any questions or would like to make sure we have your current contact information, please call the researchers on 1800 997 960, or email pathways@dcj.nsw.gov.au

Support for young people after leaving care?

Information and assistance

- **DCJ Care Leavers Line** - phone: **1800 994 686** or email: careleavers@dcj.nsw.gov.au
- **NSW Government Youth Hub** is a great place to find information - www.nsw.gov.au/living-in-nsw/young-people/leaving-care
- **Planning for your future and support after care** on the DCJ website has information and resources - www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/out-of-home-care/children-in-out-of-home-care/planning-for-your-future-and-support-after-care.html

Allowances up to 21 years old

- **Staying on Allowance** www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/children-and-young-people/staying-on-allowance.html - young people staying with their carer are now eligible for the Staying on Allowance. This fortnightly payment supports carers to continue providing a safe and stable home for young people after they turn 18, if the young person wishes to stay on.
- **Independent Living Allowance** www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/children-and-young-people/independent-living-allowance.html - young people leaving out-of-home care may be eligible to receive \$269 per fortnight until they reach 21 years of age. This payment will help with accommodation and other essential living expenses.
- **Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)** www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/children-and-families/oohc/transition-to-independent-living-allowance.pdf - the Australian Government also provides the TILA which young people can apply for with the support of their caseworker.

Specialist Aftercare Program

- DCJ's Specialist Aftercare Program has recently expanded and is for eligible young people aged 17-24 years who need additional support and extra assistance in areas like: access to financial support, care planning, referrals to programs and services like housing, education, employment, health, budgeting, connection to family/community, legal matters or accessing your care files. Call the DCJ Care Leavers Line.

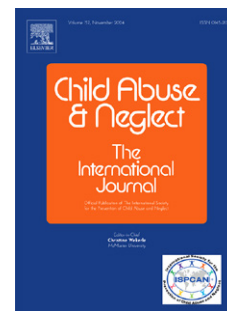
Opportunities

- Accommodation options such as referral to programs like Youth Initiative www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/housing-reforms/youth-initiatives-in-housing-and-homelessness/housing-and-homelessness-programs-for-young-people/youth-initiative or Foyer Central www.uniting.org/foyercentral.
- Help with obtaining a driver's licence and free access to the Safer Drivers course www.nsw.gov.au/driving-boating-and-transport/driver-and-rider-licences/driver-licences/learner-driver-licence/safer-drivers-course.
- Fee-free Smart & Skilled courses www.education.nsw.gov.au/skills-nsw/students-and-job-seekers/low-cost-and-free-training-options/smart-and-skilled-training.
- DCJ care leaver university scholarships with Charles Sturt University www.csu.edu.au/scholarships/scholarships-grants/find-scholarship/foundation/1st-year/nsw-department-of-community-and-justice-scholarship and Western Sydney University www.westernsydney.edu.au/opportunities/scholarships/all_uws_scholarships/DEPFAMPAT.
- Resources like Your Next Step www.nsw.gov.au/young-people/leaving-care/aftercare-support/information-for-young-people-leaving-care#:~:text=to%20learn%20more,-Download,-download and Ask Izzy www.askizzy.org.au/.
- Leading the way www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/documents/service-providers/out-of-home-care-and-permanency-support-program/leaving-and-after-care/leading_the_way_a_guide_for_carers...pdf for carers.

The Special Issue on the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study was launched at the ACWA 2024 Conference

Alice Xiao, who grew up in care, chaired the launch at the ACWA 2024 Conference. The panel launching the Special Issue on the Study in the International Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect included the DCJ Secretary Michael Tidball, CEO of AbSec John Leha, DCJ executives Simone Czech and Dr Jessica Stewart, Professor Judy Cashmore and Dr BJ Newton. The session attracted a large audience demonstrating significant stakeholder interest in the POCLS. The issue is available on ScienceDirect via the following link:

www.sciencedirect.com/journal/child-abuse-and-neglect/vol/149/suppl/C



Alice Xiao UC Change Youth Consultant and Simone Czech Deputy Secretary DCJ launching the Special Issue on the POCLS

A lot of evidence is produced retrospectively but this is the first prospective evidence-based policy making. While a lot of the findings for children in OOHC tend to be negative, many of the POCLS findings have also been positive. That is important to point out.

Researcher [University researcher]

How the study has informed policy and practice

Ten research papers have been published in the International Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect co-edited by University of Sydney's Professor Judy Cashmore and Associate Professor Jennifer Fraser. The Special Issue on the POCLS provides strong evidence to inform policy and practice to improve the outcomes of children who experience OOHC including:

The importance of early developmental assessments, access to services/support and ongoing monitoring

for all children on entry to OOHC (especially for those who enter care as infants) is highlighted, emphasising the need for nurturing care environments and health, psychological and educational services to promote positive development among children who have experienced maltreatment and OOHC. All developmental assessments and services provided to children and families need to include cultural consideration.



Understanding how early risk and protective factors impact longer-term wellbeing

may help to better target placement and support for cohorts of children with different presentations on entry to OOHC. The POCLS found relative/kinship placements are a protective factor in relation to children's socio-emotional development.



Effective and tailored support for carers is essential

to ensure that children in OOHC can be placed with capable, resilient, and responsive carers. Additional support is needed as children reach school age to assist carers with the transition to school. Routinely measuring carer satisfaction with their caring role, and monitoring carer psychological wellbeing, would help to identify support needs to prevent unplanned placement changes.



Providing clear information to Aboriginal parents

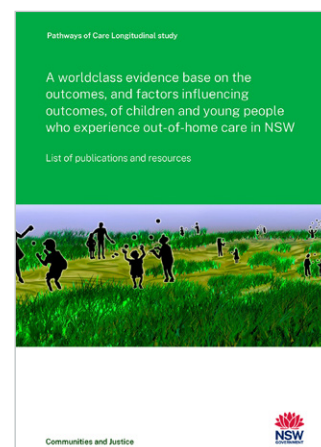
that removal is imminent if they do not address the safety concerns of DCJ, and they need to receive timely and appropriate intensive family casework to address the concerns. Parents of Aboriginal children need more support during and post restoration to help children achieve their full potential after returning home.



POCLS publications, dashboards and webinars

Since 2010, the POCLS has created a world class evidence base from nearly 6,000 interviews conducted over a 14-year period. The POCLS has worked with academics, researchers and practitioners to produce over 40 research reports and journal articles, plus evidence-to-action notes, interactive dashboards and webinars to inform policy, practice and professional development, and improve decision making to support children and families.

- **A list of publications and resources** is available to download from the webpage www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/facsiar/pathways-of-care-longitudinal-study/pocls-publications.html
- **A Snapshot** has been produced to summarise and reflect on the Study's findings to date and the implications for out-of-home care policy and practice.
- **Dashboards** are freely available on the POCLS webpage, and allow users to explore key POCLS de-identified data to gain insights on the experiences and trajectories of children and young people in out-of-home care www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/facsiar/pathways-of-care-longitudinal-study/interactive-dashboards.html
- **Information on past and future research webinars** hosted by DCJ is available on the webpage www.dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/facsiar/facsiar-research-seminars.html



This document lists all POCLS publications

Where to from here

Ongoing engagement between researchers and policy makers is critical.

DCJ continues to work closely with non-government and peak organisations to strengthen out-of-home care and early intervention supports so that there are fewer children entering care, children are restored when safe to do so, and children have a better experience while in care.

Evidence from the POCLS answers priority policy and practice questions and will inform the Child Safety and Wellbeing Strategy, Close the Gap targets and out-of-home care reform.

Ten grants were awarded to Aboriginal-led or partnered research projects to address priority policy questions focused on improving the lives of Aboriginal children and young people. The findings will be published in 2025.

The POCLS has received international interest from Japan (University of Tokyo), Sweden (University of Gothenburg), Singapore (Ministry of Social and Family Development) and South Korea, and has informed the University of Chicago's Centre for State Child Welfare's work with Tanzania, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Romania, Cambodia, Italy and Germany.

“ The POCLS operates through a collaborative approach to governance with academics, child protection practitioners and Aboriginal experts to ensure our policy and practice mandates, the must dos of our practice, are shaped by the best evidence. The POCLS is some of the best and most practical evidence we have

Policy Colleague [DCJ]



Ethics approvals for the Study

- University of NSW (HC210985)
- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW (766/10)
- State Education Research Application Process (SERAP) NSW Department of Education (2012250)
- NSW Population and Health Services Research Ethics Committee (HREC/14/CIPHS/74 Cancer Institute NSW: 2014/12/570)
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (EO2019-1-406).

Message from the Director of Ipsos

Thankyou

We are very grateful to the 543 caregivers and the 470 young people who gave their time to be interviewed at the last round of interviews in 2023. Almost all the interviews were able to be conducted face-to-face.

Ipsos project team

After 14 years of involvement, I am personally moving into retirement, and handing over responsibility for the data collection to the brilliant project management team of Lexi Kong, Jo Thompson, Tak Ota, field supervisor Nicole Lambkin, and the interviewers pictured below.

As I leave the Study...

I have been reflecting on what a great team effort has enabled this important program of research to take place. From the researchers at DCJ with the vision to imagine and create the study, the policy-makers with the need for the guidance the study will provide who

have then funded it, the wide range of academic experts who have provided their national and international expertise to help refine the information that is needed and to analyse and report on it, the interviewers who have conducted the 5,881 interviews to date, and all the children, young people and caregivers, who have provided the enormous collective effort of answering all the questions. A huge number of reports have already been produced from the survey, and I look forward to seeing the future outcomes of the research as more data is collected, reports produced, and findings used to inform best practice to make lives better for the families of New South Wales. Thank you for taking part!

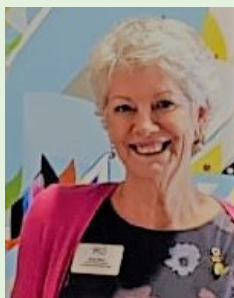


Andy Cubie, Ipsos Director

Ipsos 2023-2024 interviewers



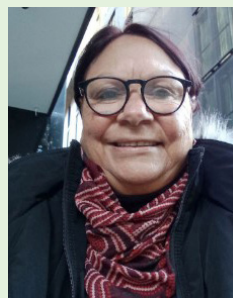
Alla Brynza



Donna Munro



Alicia Cruwys



Sandra Hooper



Thelma Quartey



Denis Mortlock



Francine King



Janice Skorich



Liz Haworth



Nicole Lambkin

We all really appreciate the time and commitment that children, young people and caregivers who are part of this study have given to answer our questions and take part in the activities.



Our team of interviewers loved having the opportunity to find out how the children and young people had been progressing over the last few years.