

# Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

*The artist is a young person who grew up in care.*

*"The banner shows many pathways through the care system with a carer or caseworker acting as a guide, ultimately leading to independence for every young person. Whether we live with family or strangers, study, work, or just try our best, the paths we choose and are guided through in our youth are what we use to prepare ourselves for the happiest adulthood we can achieve" Billy Black*

## **A profile of foster care and kinship care in NSW**

ACWA Conference 17 August 2016

Professor Paul Delfabbro



# Acknowledgement

We acknowledge Aboriginal nations as the first people of Australia and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

We remember the Stolen Generations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their families, communities and culture under past government practices.



# Ethics approval

- Human Research Ethics Committee
  - University of New South Wales HREC (HC10335).
- Aboriginal Ethics Committee
  - Approval from Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) of NSW Ethics Committee (766/10).
- NSW Department of Education
  - State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP) (2012260).
- NSW Population & Health Services Research Ethics Committee
  - Cancer Institute New South Wales (HREC/14/CIPHS/74).





# Who is conducting this study?

NSW Department of Family & Community Services with assistance from:

Study design and data analysis commenced in 2010

- Professor Judy Cashmore (University of Sydney)
- Professor Paul Delfabbro (University of Adelaide)
- Professor Ilan Katz (University of NSW)
- Dr Fred Wulczyn, Chapin Hall, University of Chicago
- Australian Institute of Family Studies

Data collection commenced in May 2011

- I-view, experts in social research data collection



# Outline

- Kinship care: why is this important and relevance to the key research aims of POCLS
- National and international evidence
- Principal areas of analysis
- Principal findings
- Study contact details



# The focus on kinship care

## POCLS Key Research Questions Addressed

- What are the backgrounds and characteristics of the children and young people entering OOHC including their demographics, child protection history, reasons for entering care, and duration of the legal order?
- What is the physical health, socio-emotional and cognitive/ learning development of children and young people entering OOHC compared with other children in the community?
- What are the placement characteristics and placement stability of the children, and how do these influence their outcomes?





# Kinship care

- Under-researched area in Australia; most studies have been on foster care
- AIHW (2014): 41% of children in foster care vs. 49% in relative/ kinship care (over 50% in NSW)
- The system is heavily reliant on this form of care
- Are any observed differences in outcomes between kinship and non-kinship care due to characteristics of the placement or differences in the children who are in the two types of care arrangement?
- Maintaining the wellbeing of kinship carers is very important



# National and international findings

There are a number of consistent findings and key themes in this area which can be examined in POCLS

## Theme 1: Vulnerability of Kinship Carers

- Often found to be single, older, lower SES, financially vulnerable
- High proportion of grandparents
- Often have poorer health / more health needs
- Limited training; difficulties in dealing with complex needs





# National and international findings

## Theme 2: Services and Supports

- Research emphasises the level of training received by kinship carers vs. foster carers
- Complexities associated with financial support and recognition of role
- Entitlement to services
- Formalisation of biological relationship may influence how relatives conceptualise their role as carers



# National and international findings

## Theme 3: Relationships

- Relative care may cause conflict/ challenges because of relationship with biological parents
- Family contact may be more difficult or easier depending on circumstances
- Evidence suggests greater stability in relative care, but slower reunification rates



# The focus of Wave 1 analyses

This first set of cross-sectional analyses based on Wave 1 data will examine **3** key areas:

- (1) The characteristics of kinship carers vs. foster carers
- (2) The characteristics of children placed into kinship vs. foster care
- (3) The nature of relationships in kinship vs. foster care





# Characteristics of carers 1

## Demographics:

- Age; Gender; biological relationship; Aboriginal status; financial wellbeing; employment; education level; household composition

## Carer wellbeing:

- Satisfaction with caring; K10 scores; health status

## Parenting:

- Parenting experience; ability to deal with complex behaviour; parenting style (warm, hostile)



## Characteristics of carers 2

- **Neighbourhood Quality:**
  - Quality of amenities
  - Social connections
  - Sense of safety and trust



# Characteristics of children

Do kinship carers look after similar kinds of children as compared to foster carers?

Important from a policy and research perspective (child characteristics and carer type may be confounded)

**Child demographics:** Age; Aboriginal status

**Child adjustment:** How settled in placement

**Child's needs:** Disability status; health status and conditions; internalising and externalising behaviours (CBCL, BITSEA); psychological wellbeing; cognitive functioning (WISC; PPVT)





# Relationships and contact

- **Relationship with carer:** What is the quality of the child-carer relationship in kinship vs. foster care?
- **Family relationships:** What is the nature and frequency of contact with other family members in kinship vs. foster care?
- **Policy relevance:** If kinship care is associated with slower reunification does this necessarily mean a loss of contact with biological families?



# Comparison groups and statistical tests used

In these analyses, 3 groups were compared: foster carers; grandparents and other relatives.

**Statistical notes:** Categorical variables compared across groupings using chi-squared tests; metric variables using One-way ANOVA and post-hoc comparisons.



# Carer 1 demographics

	<b>Foster care N (%) (n = 470)</b>	<b>Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)</b>	<b>Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)</b>	<b>Total N (%) (n = 872)</b>
Gender (F)	432 (91.9)	227 (91.9)	139 (89.7)	798 (91.5)
CALD	58 (12.3)	40 (16.2)	20 (12.9)	118 (13.5)
<u>Age group</u>				
18-40 years	141 (32.3)	5 (2.1)	73 (47.7)	219 (26.5)
41-50	185 (42.2)	67 (28.6)	44 (28.8)	296 (35.9)
51-60	87 (19.9)	101 (43.2)	32 (20.9)	220 (26.7)
61+	25 (5.7)	61 (26.1)	4 (2.6)	90 (10.9)
Aboriginal carer	70 (14.9)	33 (13.3)	52 (33.5)	155 (17.3)





# Carer 1 demographics (cont)

	Foster care N (%) (n =470)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)	Total N (%) (n = 872)
<u>Marital status</u>				
Single / Never married	5 (1.9)	3 (3.1)	0 (0.0)	8 (1.9)
Married/ defacto	253 (96.6)	95 (96.9)	64 (100.0)	412 (97.2)
Widowed	1 (0.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.2)
Separated/ Divorced	3 (1.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (0.7)
<u>Highest education</u>				
Year 11 or less	139 (29.5)	115 (46.6)	53 (34.1)	307 (35.2)
Diploma	183 (38.9)	79 (32.0)	56 (36.1)	318 (36.4)
University degree	81 (17.3)	17 (6.8)	19 (12.3)	117 (13.5)
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<u>Mean (SD) age</u>	45.9 (11.6)	55.5 (9.7)	41.5 (10.8)	47.8 (12.1)
<u>No own children raised</u>	2.10 (1.76)	3.59 (1.65)	2.41 (1.62)	2.57 (1.82)



# Carer employment status

	Foster care N (%) (n = 470)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)	Total N (%) (n = 872)
<u>Carer employment</u>				
<u>Carer 1: Employment</u>				
Paid work	179 (38.1)	75 (30.3)	64 (41.3)	318 (36.5)
Unpaid work <sup>a</sup>	13 (2.8)	5 (2.0)	4 (2.5)	22 (2.5)
No job	277 (58.9)	166 (67.2)	87 (56.1)	530 (60.8)
<u>Carer 2: Employment</u>				
Paid work	399 (79.6)	114 (60.0)	89 (73.6)	602 (69.0)
Unpaid work	4 (0.8)	4 (2.1)	0 (0.0)	8 (0.9)
No job	97 (19.4)	72 (37.9)	34 (28.3)	203 (23.3)



# Carer financial wellbeing

	<b>Foster care</b> N (%) <i>(n = 470)</i>	<b>Grandparents</b> N (%) <i>(n = 247)</i>	<b>Other relatives</b> N (%) <i>(n = 155)</i>	<b>Total</b> N (%) <i>(n = 872)</i>
<u>Ability to raise \$2,000</u>				
Easily	284 (60.4)	125 (50.6)	64 (41.3)	473 (54.2)
With sacrifices	106 (22.6)	52 (21.1)	51 (32.9)	209 (24.0)
Drastic measures	30 (6.4)	20 (8.1)	7 (4.5)	57 (6.1)
Could not do it	42 (8.9)	44 (17.8)	31 (20.0)	117 (13.4)
<u>Financial position</u>				
Comfortable or Very comfortable	391 (83.2)	182 (73.7)	113 (72.9)	686 (78.7)
Just getting by	76 (16.2)	61 (24.7)	39 (25.2)	176 (20.2)
Poor/Very poor	1 (0.2)	3 (1.2)	3 (1.9)	7 (0.8)





# Household structure

- Grandparents generally had fewer people in the household
- Relative carers were less likely to report that their home was suitable for extra children
- Foster carers were more likely to have larger houses with more rooms
- ‘Other relatives’ appeared to have the most precarious housing arrangements (48% were renting); 39% had mortgages; only around 10% were full owner occupiers.



## Health status of carer

	<b>Foster care</b> <b>N (%)</b> <b>(n = 470)</b>	<b>Grandparents</b> <b>N (%)</b> <b>(n = 247)</b>	<b>Other relatives</b> <b>N (%)</b> <b>(n = 155)</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>N (%)</b> <b>(n = 872)</b>
<u>Health (last month)</u>				
Good to excellent	431 (91.8)	210 (85.0)	134 (86.4)	775 (88.9)
Fair	31 (6.6)	31 (12.6)	14 (9.0)	76 (8.7)
Poor/Very poor	8 (1.7)	6 (2.4)	7 (4.5)	21 (2.4)
<u>Carer 1</u>				
<u>Health condition<sup>1</sup></u>				
Yes	31 (6.6)	25 (10.1)	14 (9.0)	70 (8.0)
No	439 (93.4)	222 (89.9)	141 (91.0)	802 (92.0)
<u>Carer 1</u>				
<u>Medical condition<sup>2</sup></u>				
Yes	120 (25.5)	93 (37.7)	39 (25.2)	242 (28.9)
No	350 (74.5)	154 (62.3)	116 (74.8)	620 (71.1)



## Health status of carer (cont)

	Foster care N (%) (n = 470)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 247)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 155)	Total N (%) (n = 872)
<u>Kessler</u>				
<u>classification</u>				
Low distress	392 (84.5)	169 (69.3)	110 (74.3)	671 (78.4)
Moderate	57 (12.3)	53 (21.7)	26 (17.6)	136 (15.9)
High	13 (2.8)	18 (7.4)	6 (4.1)	37 (4.3)
V. High distress	2 (0.4)	4 (1.6)	6 (4.1)	12 (1.4)
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Mean Kessler score	13.0 (3.43)	14.4 (5.27)	14.2 (5.59)	13.6 (4.48)





# Neighbourhood variables

	<b>Foster care</b> M (SD) (n = 470)	<b>Grandparents</b> M (SD) (n = 247)	<b>Other relatives</b> M (SD) (n = 155)	<b>Total</b> M (SD) (n = 872)
Close knit neighbourhood	2.33 (1.00)	2.42 (1.01)	2.43 (.95)	2.37 (1.02)
People help one another	2.15 (.86)	2.28 (.87)	2.28 (.93)	2.28 (.93)
Don't get along	3.92 (.76)	3.77 (.79)	3.88 (.76)	3.87 (.77)
People can be trusted	2.13 (.80)	2.29 (.78)	2.33 (.85)	2.21 (.81)
Good place to raise children	1.39 (.64)	1.62 (.88)	1.58 (.85)	1.43 (.76)
Social Cohesion and Trust	8.63 (2.83)	9.12 (2.70)	8.97 (2.70)	8.97 (2.70)

Foster carers more consistently gave better ratings to their neighbourhoods



## Parenting variables

- POCLS included some measures of emotional responsiveness and the warmth of relationships
- Grandparents were more likely to tell the child how happy he or she made them and to feel close when the child is upset.
- Other relatives were less likely to report being able to get close to the child compared with the other groups.
- Grandparents reported a warmer and less hostile parenting style than the other two groups



# Dealing with complex behaviour

POCLS included a measure of the extent which carers felt confident in being able to deal with complex behaviour. Grandparents were generally more confident.

	<b>Foster care</b> <b>M (SD)</b> <b>(n = 661)</b>	<b>Grandparents</b> <b>M (SD)</b> <b>(n = 383)</b>	<b>Other relatives</b> <b>M (SD)</b> <b>(n = 215)</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>M (SD)</b> <b>(n = 1259)</b>
Efficacy score	8.5 (12.90)	11.3 (12.16)	8.9 (12.68)	9.4 (12.70)





# Children in different placement types

	Foster care N (%) (n = 661)	Grandparents N (%) (n = 383)	Other relatives N (%) (n = 215)	Total N (%) (n = 1259)
<u>Gender</u>				
Boys	333 (50.4)	186 (48.6)	103 (47.9)	622 (49.4)
Girls	328 (49.6)	197 (51.4)	112 (52.1)	637 (50.6)
<u>Ethnicity</u>				
European Australian	328 (49.6)	200 (52.2)	95 (44.2)	623 (49.5)
Aboriginal	257 (38.9)	116 (30.3)	91 (42.3)	464 (36.9)
CALD	56 (8.5)	38 (9.9)	16 (7.4)	110 (8.7)
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
Age (months)	56.3 (46.9)	62.9 (46.0)	65.9 (53.9)	60.0 (48.0)

Children in FC are younger; Children with other relatives more likely to be Aboriginal



# Child wellbeing



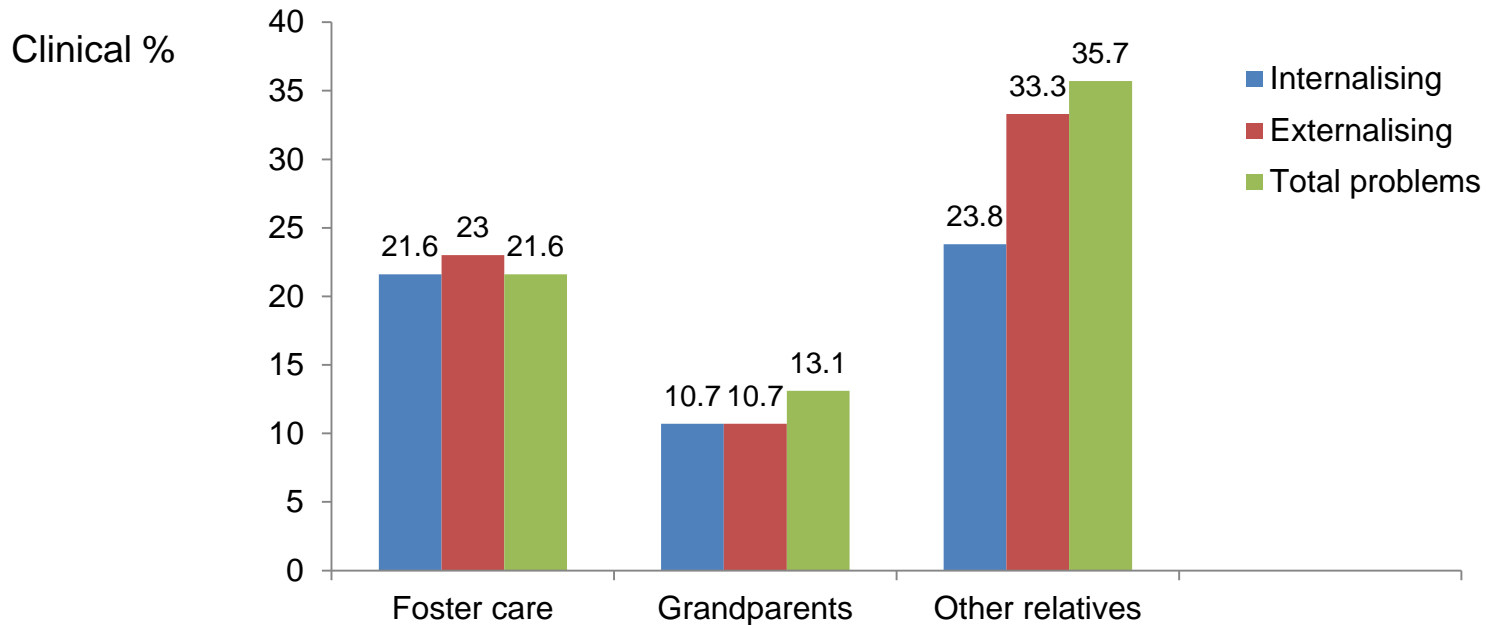
# Child Behaviour Checklist

Children are scored based on over 100 items. There are 3 aggregated scores: internalising (e.g., depressive type symptoms); externalising (e.g., behavioural issues); and Total problems (the sum of these two). Classifications are based on standardised cut-off scores. The clinical cut-off of 64+ refers to the top 10% most severe cases; 60-63 is borderline; and, under 60 is in the normal range. These figures are based on comparison samples drawn from the community.





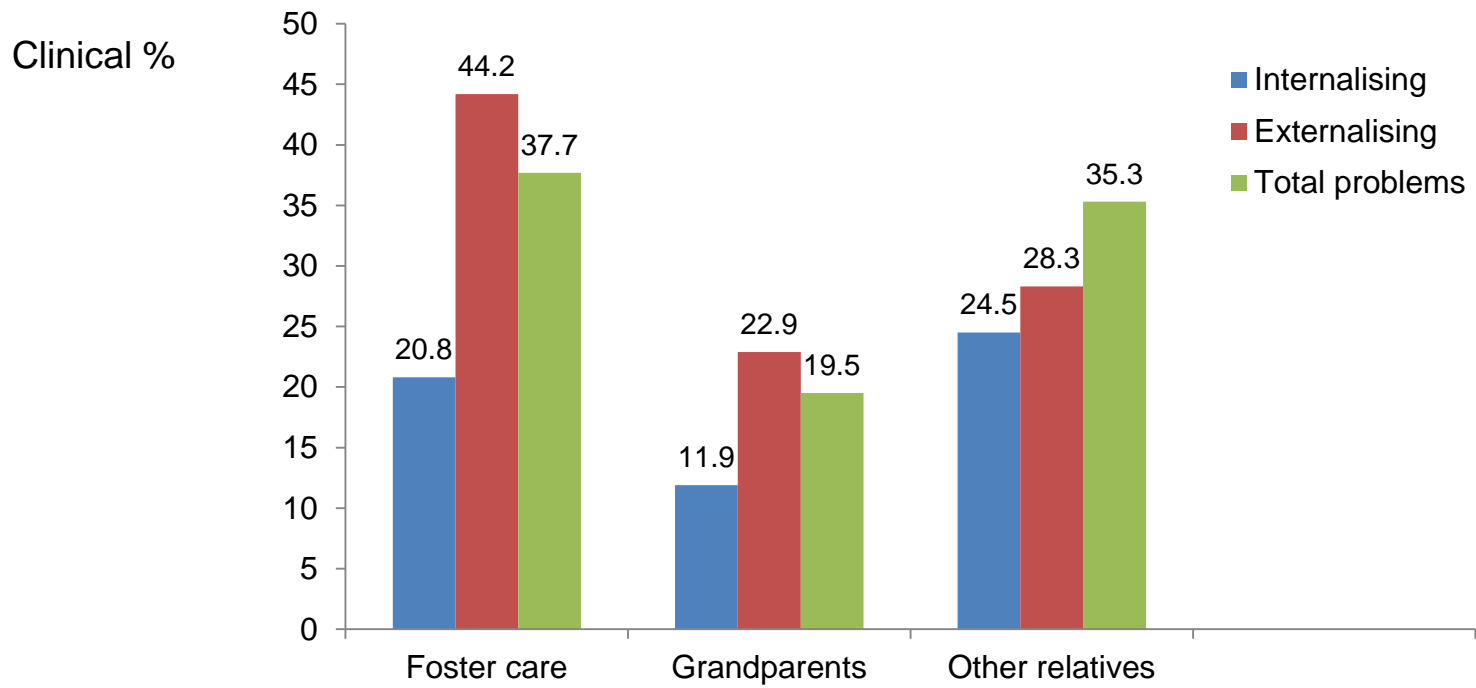
# CBCCL comparisons (age 3-5)



Clinical problems lowest in grandparent group



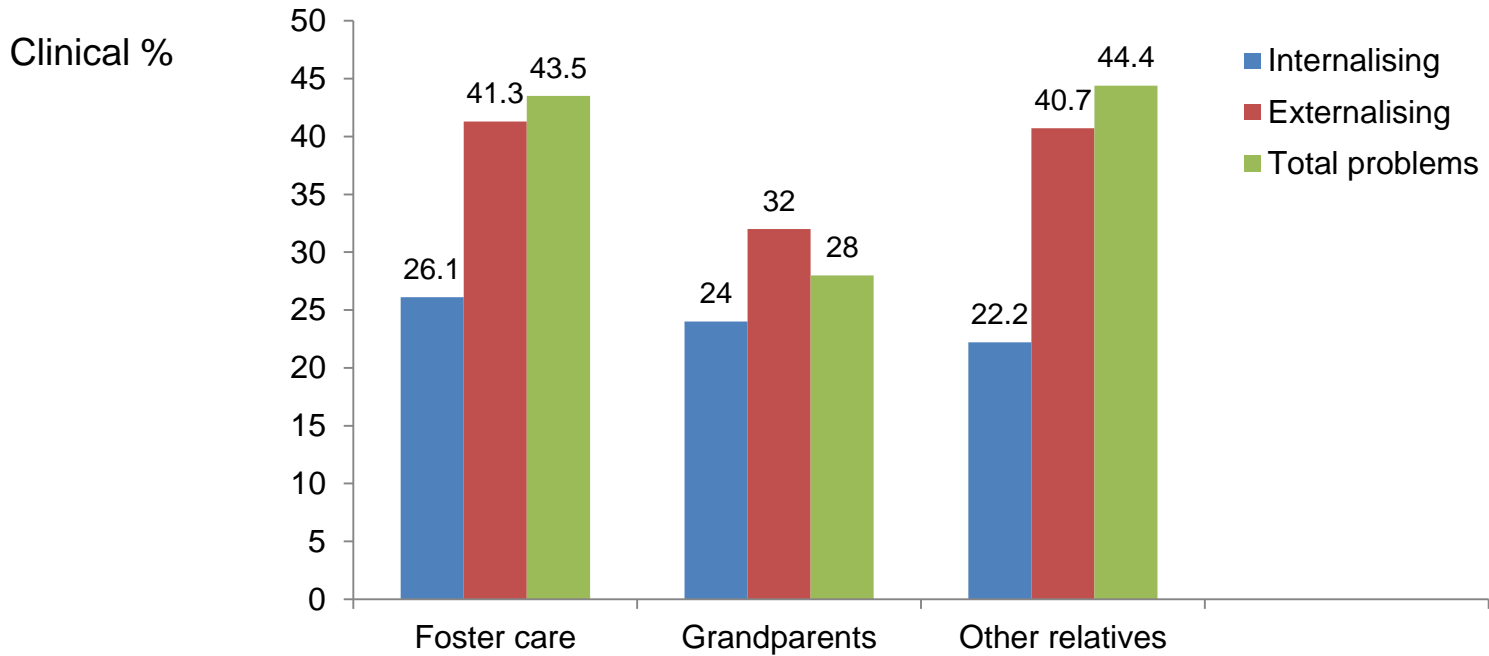
# CBCCL comparisons (age 6-11)



Clinical problems lowest in grandparent group



# CBCCL comparisons (age 12-17)



Conduct disorder lower in grandparent care





## National % CBCL clinical cases

	6-12 years	13-17 years
Internalising	13.3	16.4
Externalising	12.7	19.6
Total	14.1	18.9

From Sawyer et al. (2007), Medical Journal of Australia.  
National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (2001).



# Ages and Stages (ASQ) Raw Scores

	<b>Foster care M (SD) (n = 431)</b>	<b>Grandparents M (SD) (n = 224)</b>	<b>Other relatives M (SD) (n = 125)</b>	<b>Total M (SD) (n = 780)</b>	<b>F (2, 776)</b>
Communication	42.0 (16.53)	46.2 (14.97)	40.9 (17.46)	43.0 (16.36)	6.16**
Gross motor skills	46.6 (17.55)	50.7 (15.02)	46.1 (16.04)	47.6 (16.71)	5.38**
Fine motor skills	41.3 (16.72)	44.7 (14.34)	40.4 (16.97)	42.2 (16.30)	4.10*
Problem solving	42.2 (15.04)	45.3 (14.34)	39.7 (16.96)	42.7 (15.27)	6.03**
Personal-Social	44.5 (14.24)	48.1 (13.33)	45.3 (13.53)	45.7 (13.95)	4.85*



# Cognitive functioning

	<b>Foster care M (SD) (n = 304)</b>	<b>Grandparents M (SD) (n = 211)</b>	<b>Other relatives M (SD) (n = 108)</b>	<b>Total M (SD) (n = 623)</b>
PPVT	90.0 (13.81)	93.9 (13.25)	89.9 (12.23)	91.3 (13.47)
WISC	7.66 (3.07)	8.65 (2.74)	8.40 (2.70)	8.14 (2.92)

Although the effect was small, children with grandparents had slightly higher scores on the Peabody Vocab Test and on the WISC (general intelligence)





# Relationships



# Quality of relationship with carer

	Foster care M (SD) <i>(n = 661)</i>	Grandparents M (SD) <i>(n = 383)</i>	Other relatives M (SD) <i>(n = 215)</i>	Total M (SD) <i>(n = 1259)</i>
How settled is the child	1.17 (0.46)	1.16 (0.43)	1.25 (0.57)	1.18 (0.47)
How well do they know the child	1.18 (0.41)	1.09 (0.33)	1.20 (0.45)	1.16 (0.40)
How well is child going	1.31 (0.53)	1.28 (0.51)	1.36 (0.61)	1.31 (0.54)
Quality of relationship with child	1.25 (0.47)	1.13 (0.36)	1.30 (0.52)	1.30 (0.52)

Grandparents reported knowing the child better and having a better relationship than the other two groups.



## Good relationship with other family members

	<b>Foster care</b> N (%) ( <i>n</i> = 661)	<b>Grandparents</b> N (%) ( <i>n</i> = 383)	<b>Other relatives</b> N (%) ( <i>n</i> = 215)	<b>Total</b> N (%) ( <i>n</i> = 1259)
Mother	183 (27.7)	183 (47.8)	78 (36.3)	444 (35.3)
Father	110 (16.6)	144 (37.6)	40 (18.6)	294 (23.4)
Siblings	299 (45.2)	211 (55.1)	103 (47.9)	613 (48.7)

Children with grandparents were more likely to have good relationships with other family members





## Overall level of family contact

- Children living with grandparents were more likely to have contact with both their mother and father as well as with other siblings
- Face-to-face unsupervised contact and overnight stays were more common for children living with grandparents



## Summary and conclusions

- There are clear differences in the characteristics of different carer groups
- Not all kinship/ relative carers are the same
- Grand-parents tend to be most vulnerable groups with respect to their physical health, mental health and financial situation
- Children placed with grandparents tend to score better on measures of socio-emotive wellbeing and have better relationships with their carers and families
- It is unclear whether these differences in the children are due to a selection effect ('better adjusted' children get placed with grandparents) or whether exposure to grandparent care makes a difference



## Conclusions (cont)

- The results provide no evidence to suggest that kinship/ relative care is a lesser form of care with respect to child outcomes
- There is evidence, however, that kinship/ relative carers and, in particular, grandparents may benefit from greater support
- There is a need for ongoing longitudinal investigation of the effects of exposure to different forms of care
- There is some confounding of Aboriginal status and the 3 carer groups ('other relatives' are more likely to be Aboriginal)
- More detailed analyses of variables by Aboriginal status are planned
- The findings need to be read in conjunction with the findings from other reports relating to service supports and usage.





# Acknowledgements

- **Children and young people** who are participating in the study
- **Carers and birthparents** who are participating in the study
- **FACS district staff, caseworkers, childcare workers and teachers** who assisted with sample recruitment and completed on-line surveys
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- **Stakeholders and experts** who have provided support, assistance and advice
- **FACS Analysis and Research** who are funding and leading the Study





## Further information

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