



# 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*

## Caseworker contact and relationships with children 7-17 years in OOHC

**Australian Social Policy Conference 2019**

# Acknowledgement



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

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

# Research Questions



1. What are the factors that influence caseworker- child communication as perceived by children? Do different factors influence communication?
2. What are the factors associated with carer/caseworker communication? (Carer satisfaction examined in this presentation)
3. What influence does children's perception of caseworker communication have on child socio-emotional functioning over time?

# Issues covered in this study



- Child reports of quality of communication with their caseworker across the first three waves of the POCLS
- The relationship between caseworker communication and children's socio-emotional wellbeing as measured by the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL)
- Used various regression models to examine communication over time amongst children and their caseworkers, as well as carers.

# Measure of communication quality with children 7 years and older



Five items scaled 1 (never) and 5 (always):

1. Does your caseworker talk to you?
2. Does your caseworker listen to you?
3. Does your caseworker do what they say they will do?
4. Does your caseworker help you?
5. Does your caseworker explain decisions made about you?

# Measure of child's ability to contact caseworker with children 7 years and older



- Can you contact your caseworker when you need to?
  - Yes
  - No

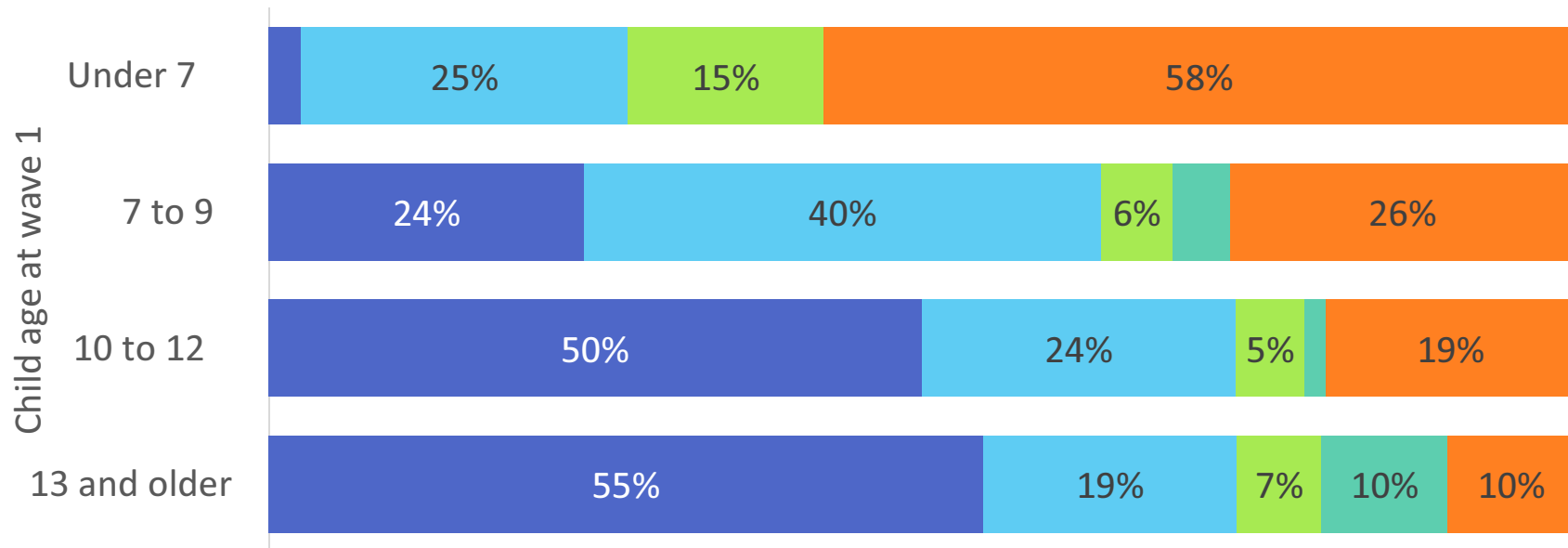
# Study group sample sizes



	Study Group	Sample size
1	Contact with caseworker over time	220
2	Communication quality	W1 235, W2 238, W3 228
3	Communication quality and socio-emotional wellbeing	219

Only study groups used in this presentation are shown here. More information about sample derivation can be obtained on request.

# Child-reports of caseworker contact over time, by child age at entry to care



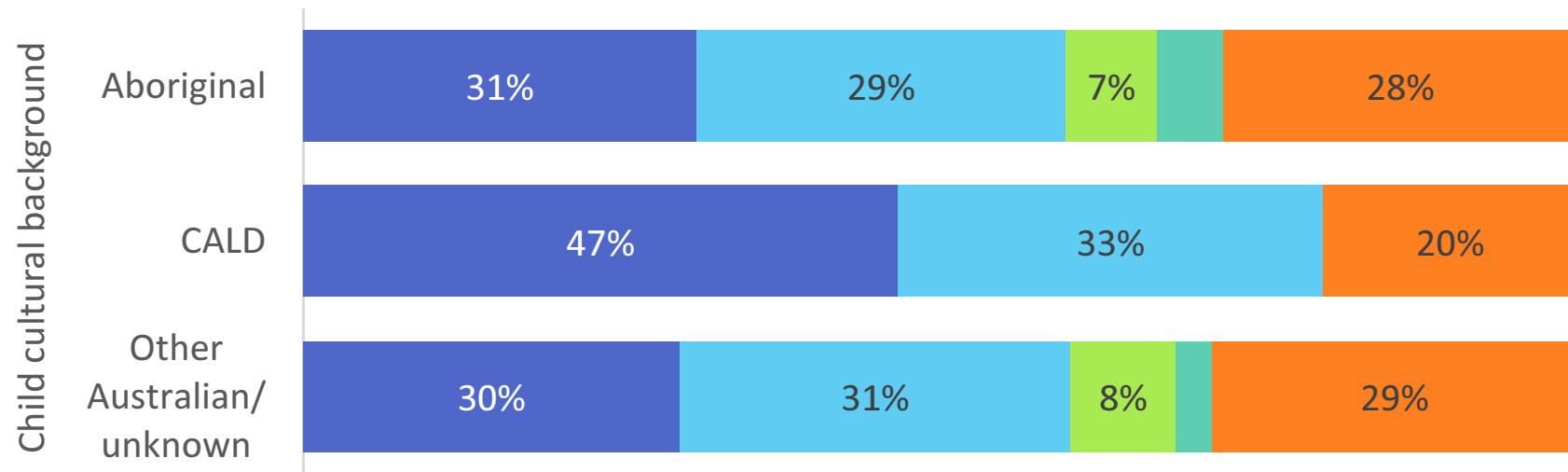
Percentage of respondents

- Always able to contact caseworker
- Ability to contact caseworker improved across time
- Ability to contact caseworker decreased over time
- Ability to contact caseworker mixed across time
- Never able to contact caseworker





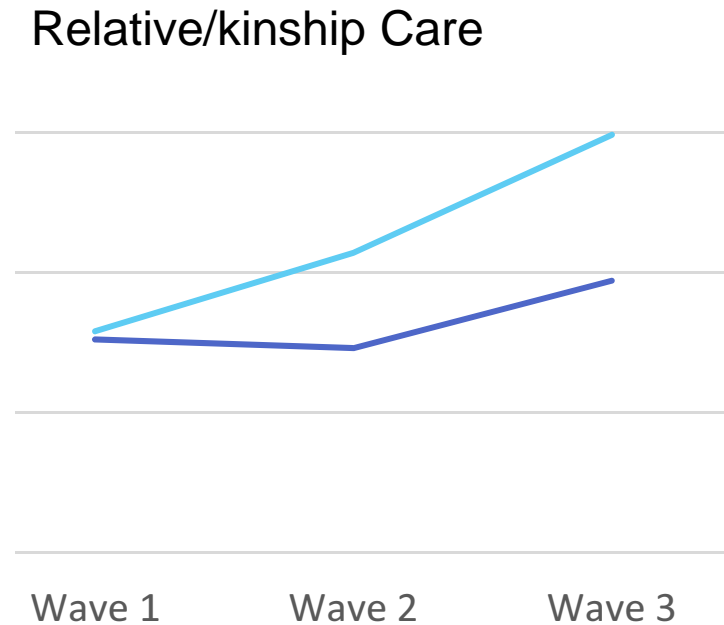
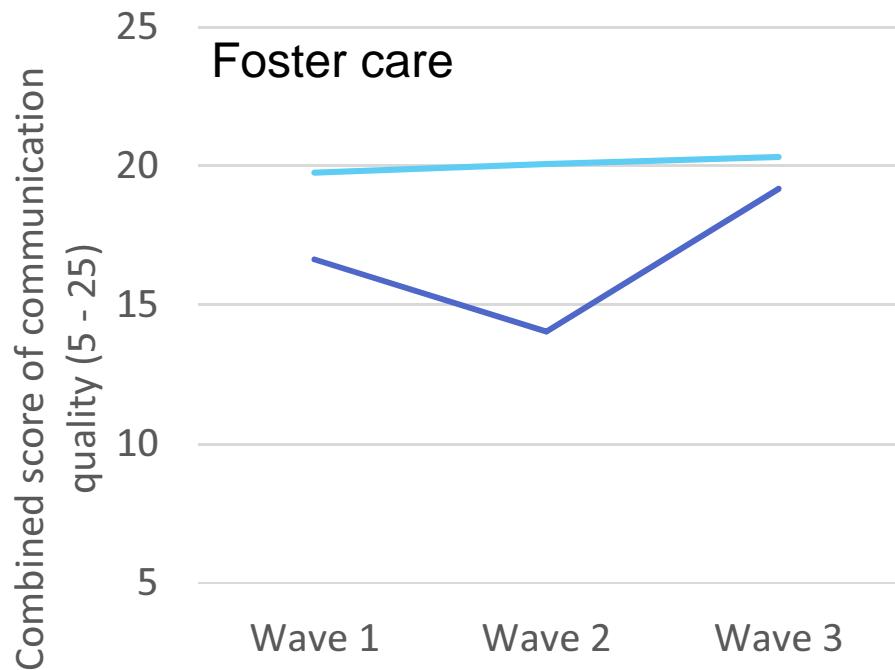
# Caseworker contact over time, by child cultural background



Percentage of respondents

- Always able to contact caseworker
- Ability to contact caseworker improved across time
- Ability to contact caseworker decreased over time
- Ability to contact caseworker mixed across time
- Never able to contact caseworker

# Change over time in child-reports of quality communication with caseworker by placement type and service provider



Service provider across all waves

Service provider across all waves

— FACS Foster Care  
— NGO Foster Care

— FACS Relative/Kinship care  
— NGO Relative/Kinship care

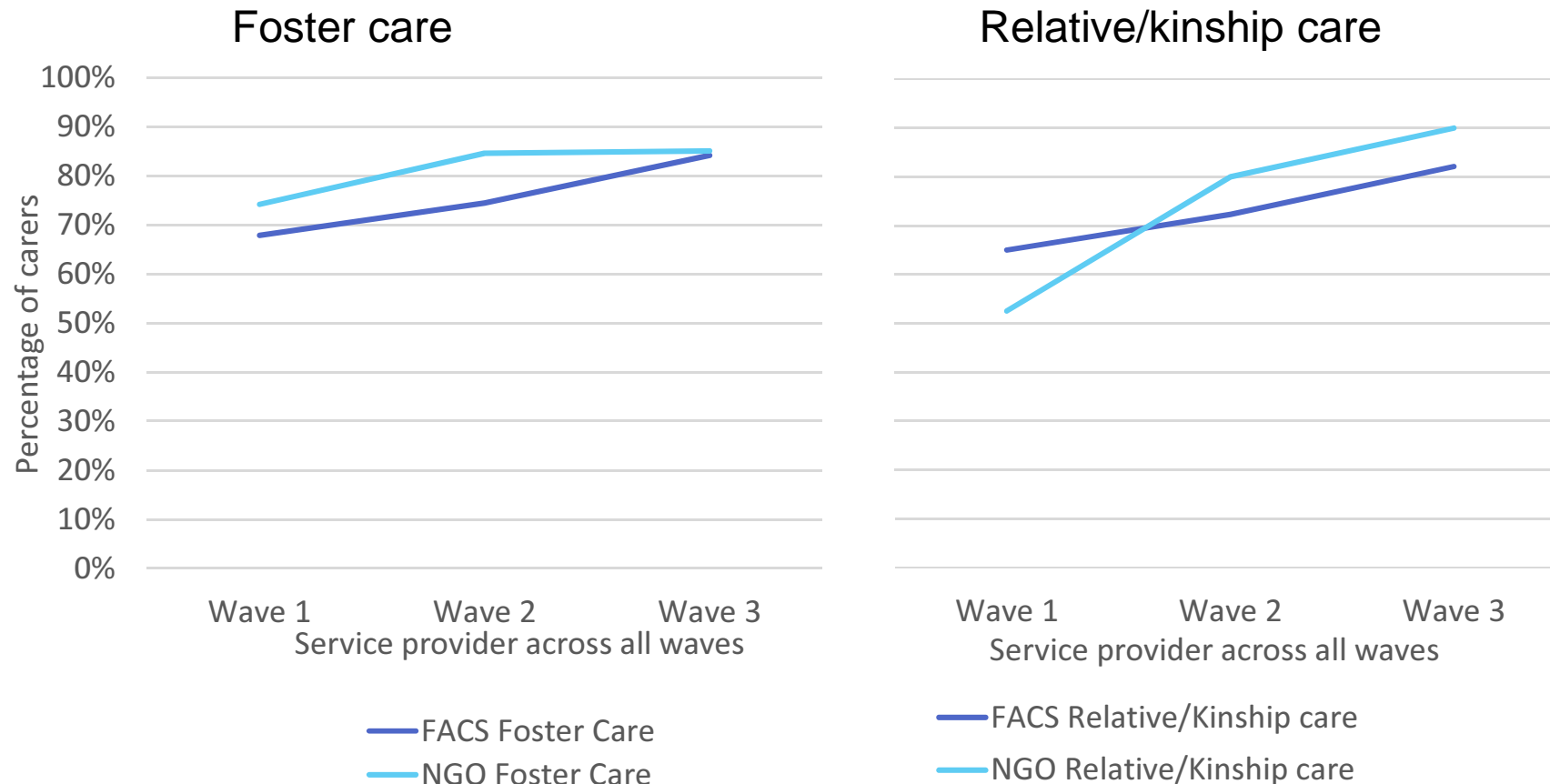


Communities & Justice

Note: Average n across waves: FACS foster care = 42, NGO foster care = 62, FACS relative/kinship care = 52, NGO relative/kinship care = 45. These are population averages. Cross sectional analysis used in this slide. Regression results are broadly similar.

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# Carers satisfaction with ability to contact their child's caseworker over time

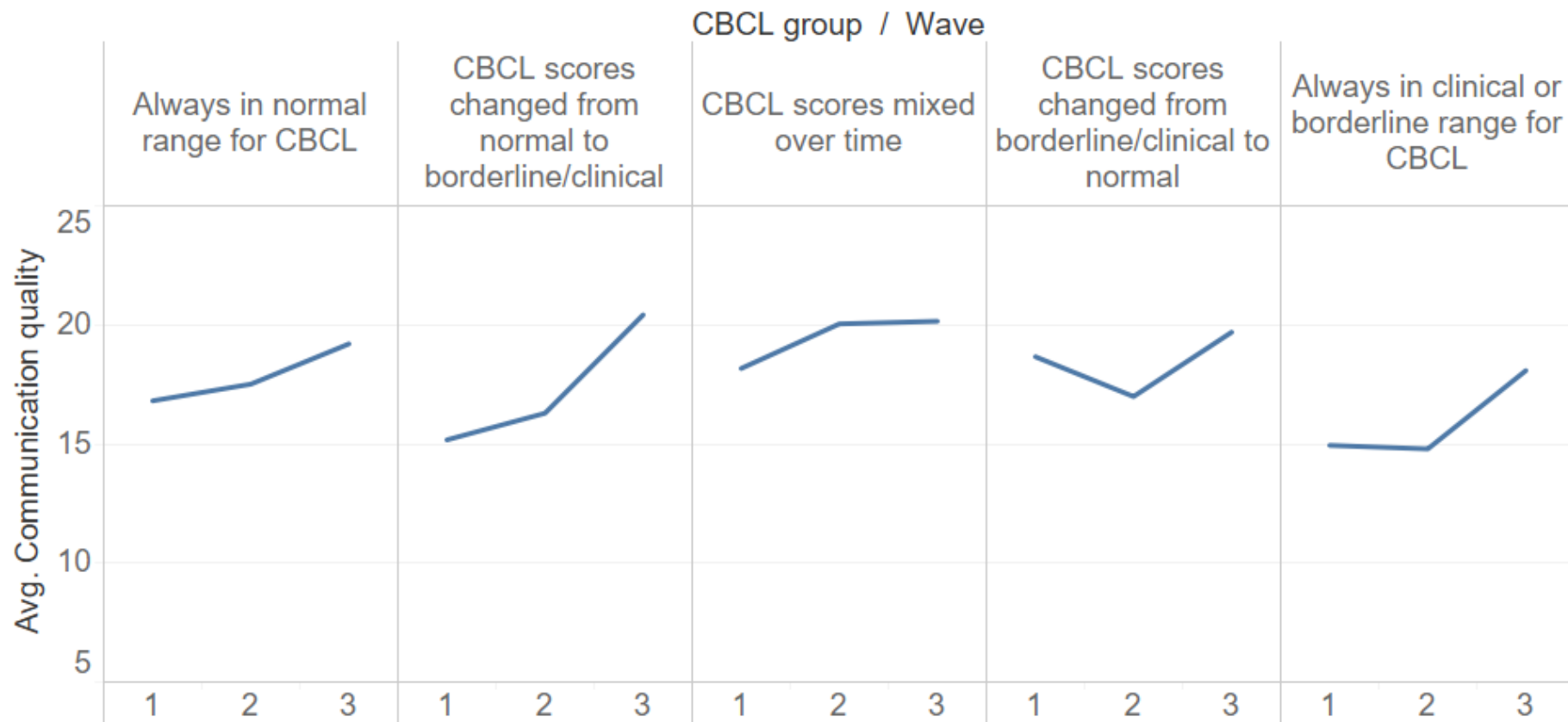


Note: Average n across waves: FACS foster care = 173, NGO foster care = 307, FACS relative/kinship care = 202, NGO relative/kinship care = 119. These are population averages. Cross sectional analysis used in this slide, regression results are broadly similar.

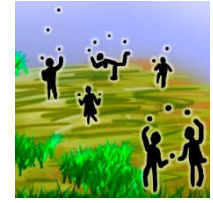
# Communication quality over time by change in child behaviour scores



- No statistically significant associations between communication quality and change in CBCL scores



# Overall findings



- Over the 3 waves of the POCLS, quality of contact with caseworkers improved for both children and carers.
- Although there were some differences between groups of children in levels of contact no particular groups showed more increases in contact over the 3 waves.
- Many children had poor contact over all 3 waves, in particular those who entered care at a younger age.
- CALD children had higher levels of contact with caseworkers, as did their carers.
- Contact with relative/kinship carers improved over the 3 waves.
- Contact with caseworkers was not associated with changes in wellbeing over the 3 waves.

# Conclusion



- There are a number of explanations for these findings:
  - Length in time in care may make children more willing to contact caseworkers
  - This could be a cohort effect – change in policy may have resulted in higher levels of contact in more recent years.
- Other factors such as carer quality and service availability may have been more important than caseworkers in improving wellbeing.

# Policy changes



- Significant policy changes have affected the POCLS cohort over the 3 waves.
- Prior to 2014 many children in OOHC not allocated a caseworker
- Safe Home For Life - Started in 2014
  - Recruitment of large number of caseworkers and casework support workers
  - Introduction of guardianship
  - Preparation for FACS to become accredited by Children's Guardian
  - Focus on permanency – restoration, guardianship, adoption
- Required greater levels of contact with caseworker and better quality casework.

# Implications



- It might be useful to place more emphasis on supporting contact with caseworkers when children are entering care.
- The period after entry into OOHC may be a good opportunity to identify carers who would like more support.
- It may also be useful to consider methods of providing contact with younger children to ensure that any issues that children are experiencing can be discussed with caseworkers.
- Caseworkers also need to make contact with children who have entered care at a young age and do not have ongoing direct contact.



# Further information



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