



## A newsletter for participants in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

### Executive Director Message

Hi, my name is Stuart Malcher and I am currently the acting Executive Director of Family and Community Services Insights, Analysis and Research (FACSIAR) in the Department of Communities and Justice which is conducting the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (known as POCLS). I would like to extend my thanks to you all for taking the time to participate in this Study and tell us about your experiences.



Stuart Malcher, A/ Executive Director,  
Family and Community Services  
Insights Analysis and Research  
(FACSIAR)

In my previous role I worked as the Director Community Services for South Western Sydney District where I was responsible for the delivery of child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC) services. From that operational perspective I am passionate about

using evidence and the Study findings to improve the services we provide and ultimately the long-term outcomes for the kids and families we serve.

The Study has now been going for 10 years and is providing detailed information about the pathways, experiences and development of children who experience OOHC. We will be starting data collection again in 2022 and look forward to your continued support and participation!

### What's on in 2022?

Planning is currently underway to start the 6<sup>th</sup> round of interviews with children, young people and caregivers in around April 2022. Children who entered OOHC as infants will be going into high school during this wave, providing valuable information on this key transition point in a child's development.

The questions will mostly be the same as what you answered last time, although there may be some small changes here and there to improve the information we collect. Sometimes we also add a few new questions, such as those related to the COVID-19 pandemic which were added in the last round.

We also changed to telephone interviewing during the last round so that the Study could continue despite the impact of the pandemic. We are currently looking at whether to use telephone or face-to-face, or a combination of both, in round 6 of interviews.

In this round we are also planning on contacting young people who have turned 18 during the Study and left care. We want to understand how these young people are going with their wellbeing, education and employment, and what services and supports they need.

### If you change contact details

We hope that you continue to be part of the Study in 2022 and we look forward to interviewing you again. If you change your address or phone number please let us know by calling the researchers at the Department of Communities and Justice on 1800 997 960 or I-view who conduct the interviews on 1800 105 088.

# How is the study tracking?



## Message from I-view who conduct the interviews



Andy Cubie Director, I-view

Our team has continued to enjoy the privilege of interviewing so many children and their caregivers who have taken part in this important study over the last 10 years. It has been greatly rewarding to hear about and see the way the children and young people have grown and developed over that time, and to collect your views on casework, services and support.

Most in-person interviewing had to stop during the last round of interviews in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We were thrilled that almost 300 caregivers, and the children and young people they care for, agreed to complete the interview by telephone. We know it's often a long interview, but every piece of information collected provides valuable data for the research team and will help improve services and support in the future.

We are currently planning the best way to carry out the next round of interviewing, starting around April 2022. We look forward to talking to you again soon!

## Organisations supporting the Study and participants



The CREATE Foundation represents the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience. We support the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study which is collecting the stories of individuals as they have move through care from childhood to adulthood which will be invaluable for decision-makers charged with improving the care experience and aiming to achieve better outcomes for young people. A strength of the project is that it has attracted the involvement of respected researchers, both local and international. **Dr Joseph McDowall, Executive Director (Research) CREATE Foundation**

Young people can contact the CREATE Foundation on 1800 655 105.



The aim of the My Forever Family is to see all children receive the care they deserve, and all carers receive the support and training they need. We are pleased to continue our ongoing support for the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study during the next round of interviews. The study has been of significant benefit to inform responses to children in care and provide improved supports for carers. It is invaluable to hear the perspectives of children, young people and caregivers to inform our service system. **Miriam Maloney, Head of Engagement and Advocacy**

For carer support please contact My Forever Family on 1300 782 975.

# After 10 years, what has the Study told us?

## Health and development

Most children are in good physical health and the majority of children have normal socio-emotional wellbeing and cognitive development. However, over time children are less likely to be in the normal range for socio-emotional wellbeing.



## Educational outcomes

The majority of children in care are in the normal range of cognitive and learning development. This Study shows that about one-third of children are developmentally vulnerable when they start school (three times greater than for all children) and have lower achievement on reading and numeracy (NAPLAN) across Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.



Participation rates in NAPLAN were also lower than for all NSW children and by Year 9 only 68% of the children in this Study participated in NAPLAN.

Up to a third of children in this Study experience some difficulty in understanding the work in class, frequently don't complete assignments, projects or homework on time, and are reported by caregivers as having academic or other problems at school.



## Children's relationships

Children are more likely to have more frequent – at least monthly – face to face time with siblings than with other family members.

Fathers are less likely to have contact with their children but it seems to be positive when it occurs.

More caregivers, than not, indicated that the child needed more frequent or consistent time with family members and time spent with family appears to meet most children's needs 'very well' or 'fairly well'.

At least monthly contact increases the likelihood of children having a good relationship with each of their family members.

Overall the findings indicate that sustained family time, and close relationships with caregivers and family, are associated with better socio-emotional wellbeing.



## Cultural connections

The proportion of Aboriginal children in the Study with cultural connections has increased. This includes children involved in discussions about their cultural identity and heritage, socialising with their birth community and engaged in cultural events and/or festivals.

The Study also shows that Aboriginal children and young people who maintain cultural connection by socialising with their birth communities after entering care have healthy socio-emotional wellbeing.

## Placement stability

More than half the children on final orders had less than 3 distinct placements after 5-6 years in care and two-thirds of children interviewed had been in their current placement for more than 6 years.

Children with a history of placement changes are at higher risk of moving again in the future.

Placements are less likely to breakdown when caregivers are satisfied in their caring role and supported by caseworkers.

## Caseworker communication

The quality of communication with caseworkers was better for older children, irrespective of the age they entered care.

Caregivers were generally satisfied with both their ability to reach their caseworker and the assistance provided by their caseworker.

Contact with caseworkers was not associated with changes in a child's socio-emotional wellbeing during the first three rounds of interviews (over a five year period).

## Children living with guardians

Children who transitioned to guardianship orders when the legislative amendment was proclaimed in October 2014 have similar socio-emotional wellbeing outcomes to children who remained in relative/kinship care in OOHC. The Study will continue to monitor children's wellbeing overtime with more rounds of data collection.

# 16<sup>th</sup> ISPCAN European Congress

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This year Merran Butler, Chief Investigator and Marina Paxman, Study Manager presented on the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study at the virtual 16<sup>th</sup> International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) European Congress. They spoke about the Study design and how children in the Study are developing over time.

A second presentation by Associate Professor Melissa O'Donnell and Fernando Lima on the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study focused on the developmental needs and service provision for infants entering care.

## New reports and policy roundtables

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With 10 years of data and more to come, the potential for research across a wide range of areas is enormous! We are really excited to have research papers completed by 16 national and international leading academics.

We will be holding four online policy roundtables in February 2022, and one roundtable at a later date\*, where the Study Advisory Group made up of senior government and non-government organisations will discuss key insights with the researchers with a focus on how the new knowledge can improve outcomes for children and young people who experience care. The roundtables will also be a good opportunity for the Advisory Group members to inform the POCLS team of current priority policy questions that the Study giving them new evidence to inform their work.

The roundtable themes are:

1. Child development, wellbeing and children with a disability
2. Cultural connections and family time
3. Education and youth justice
4. Casework and support
5. Permanency pathways and outcomes – restoration, guardianship, adoption, out-of-home care\*

## Research creates new knowledge

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It is really important to collect the experiences from everyone involved in raising children including Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and non-Aboriginal parents, relative/kinship carers, foster carers, residential care workers and adoptive parents.

It is also very important to hear from children and young people about their experiences.

By participating, you are helping us learn more about how to raise happy healthy children and young people and what culturally appropriate services and support you need.

For a reminder on why we do this study, watch our video:

[www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care/videos](http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care/videos)

For more information visit our webpage: [www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care](http://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care)

# Meet our POCLS Study Working Group

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Judith Cashmore AO is a Professor of Socio-legal Research and Policy and Professorial Fellow in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, at the University of Sydney.



Dan McAullay is an Associate Professor at Edith Cowan University and Director, Aboriginal Research and Director of the Centre for Improving Health Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families.



Amy Conley Wright is an Associate Professor of Social Work and Policy Studies at the University of Sydney and Director of the Research Centre for Children.



**Melissa O'Donnell** is an Associate Professor and Deputy Director of the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia.



Andy Cubie is a Director at I-view, the specialist data collection division of the research company Ipsos, specialising in the design and management of social surveys.



Michael Tarren-Sweeney is a Professor and clinical child psychologist, epidemiologist, child developmental theorist at the University of Canterbury, New Zealand.



Melissa Green is a Professor at the University of NSW and is the lead scientific investigator of the NSW Child Development Study, a longitudinal investigation of over 90,000 children.



Michelle Townsend (PhD) is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Wollongong.



Ilan Katz is a Professor in the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales. He directed the centre from 2005-2011.



Fred Wulczyn is a Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the University of Chicago and the Director of the Center for State Child Welfare Data.



Tina Navin Cristina is the Deputy Director of Data and Operations at the Sax Institute, and has oversight of data, analysis, and participant management for the 45 and Up Study.



Ben Edwards is an Associate Professor and Senior Fellow at the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods where he is focused on policy relevant research on child and youth development.



Alan Taylor (PhD) is an Honorary Senior Lecturer in the School of Psychological Sciences, Macquarie University.

## Ethics approvals for the Study

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- University of NSW (HC10335; HC16542)
- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW (766/10)
- 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).

