Research Update from the Institute of Child Protection Studies

February 2015

This quarterly update provides an overview of research projects currently being implemented by the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS), Australian Catholic University. ICPS aims to enhance the well-being of children, young people and families through quality research, evaluation, training and community education. ICPS is based within the Learning Sciences Institute Australia, in the Faculty of Education and Arts. Current research projects at ICPS include:

- kContact: Keeping contact between parents and children in care;
- Developing an understanding of how children understand and experience safety in institutions;
- Refugee Communities Intercultural Dialogue: Building relationships, building communities;
- Child Protection Practitioner Study;
- The needs and experiences of biological children of foster carers; and,
- Outcomes of identifying AOD use during pregnancy on women, their parents and their children.

See also New Publications at the end of the Update. For more information about ICPS Research Updates, contact erin.barry@acu.edu.au.

kContact: Keeping contact between parents and children in care

This research aims to develop guidelines and trial an enhanced model of delivering contact between children in care and their birth parents. A draft literature review to inform the guidelines has been completed following a review by an expert panel of child welfare academics. Stage 2 has received ethics approval to trial the practice enhancement intervention, which will commence shortly. The site randomisation has been completed for the intervention and comparison sites and meetings are being held with the partner agencies to discuss recruitment and data collection. Three children’s reference groups have been held to develop the methodology for the children’s study in the ACT.

This project has been funded by the Australian Research Council, with significant partner contributions, and is being carried out by Prof Morag McArthur and Dr Stephanie Taplin, ICPS; and Prof Cathy Humphreys, University of Melbourne. They are supported by Dr Tracey Bullen, Project Manager; Rhys Thorpe, ICPS PhD
Candidate; and Dr Margaret Kertesz, from the University of Melbourne. For more information, contact tracey.bullen@acu.edu.au.

**Developing an understanding of how children understand and experience safety in institutions**

This project aims to better understand how children conceptualise, experience and respond to safety issues in institutional contexts. The first stage included workshops with three children and young people’s reference groups and an adults’ advisory group, and 10 focus groups with participants aged 4-18 in QLD, NSW, VIC and the ACT. This stage helped us better understand what children and young people need to be safe and to feel safe, and to get a sense as to how they believed adults and institutions were responding to their safety concerns. Stage 2 (to be conducted in May) will engage children and young people in an on-line survey to gauge the extent to which they think the institutions they engage with reflect the characteristics that children and young people think are important in keeping kids safe. We hope that the study not only informs the work of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, which commissioned the study, but also the way that the community sees, supports and protects children and young people more broadly.

The study is being conducted by Dr Tim Moore and Prof Morag McArthur, in partnership with colleagues from ACU, QUT and Griffith University. We are pleased to also support the Centre for Children and Young People (SCU), which is conducting a nested study focusing on children and young people with disability that draws on our approach and findings. For more information, contact tim.moore@acu.edu.au.

**Refugee Communities Intercultural Dialogue: Building relationships, building communities**

This research aims to provide in-depth and contextualised data about how services may better support refugee parents to care for their children, and understand the social resources and connections required by refugee parents and their children to support positive parenting skills and family relationships. Data collection is now complete with 50 interviews with families in the ACT and South Australia and a national online survey conducted. Analysis of this data is underway and a report will be provided to the Department of Social Services in May 2015.

This project has been funded by the Department of Social Services, and is being implemented by Vicky Saunders, Steve Roche and Prof Morag McArthur, in partnership with the Australian Centre for Child Protection. For more information, contact vicky.saunders@acu.edu.au.
Child Protection Practitioner Study

This project aims to inform the further development of child centred practice that will assist children to participate in child protection practices, in appropriate and meaningful ways. The research findings will inform the development of policy and practice strategies that will increase children’s meaningful participation in child protection decision-making. The first stage of the research is to survey statutory child protection agency workers across all Australian state and territories. The second stage will be to interview statutory child protection workers. Ethics approval has been granted by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Committee, and the online survey has been sent out for its first round of data collection. Data will be collected from all participating jurisdictions between February and March 2015.

This study has been funded internally, and is being implemented by Steve Roche, Prof Morag McArthur, and Elise Woodman. For more information, contact elise.woodman@acu.edu.au.

The needs and experiences of biological children of foster carers

The study aimed to deepen our understanding of the experiences and impacts of fostering on biological children of foster carers, by answering the following research questions: 1) What are the needs and experiences of the biological children of foster carers within the ACT? And, 2) What are the policy and practice implications of these children’s needs and experiences for the ACT foster care sector?

Although the study was limited in time and scope, it included three distinct research phases. Phase one included a systematic and targeted literature review on the issue of biological children of foster carers. Phase two allowed for consultations with key stakeholders to identify the current policy and practice responses for biological children of foster carers in the ACT and Australia. Phase three involved the research team conducting a series of focus groups with foster carers and their biological children (aged 8-18 years) in the ACT. A report was published in late 2014, which is available on the ICPS website.

This project was conducted by Jayna Farnham and Christine Dean, Social Work students conducting their final placement with ICPS. This research placement was supervised by Steve Roche and Debbie Noble-Carr under the direction of Prof Morag McArthur at the ICPS. For more information, contact debbie.noble-carr@acu.edu.au.

Outcomes of identifying AOD use during pregnancy on women, their parents and their children

This project aimed to describe policies and practices across Australia, review the literature on the identification of maternal alcohol and other drug use, and identify ‘best practice’ in the management of
substance-using pregnant women. Policy makers, practitioners and other key stakeholders were interviewed in each jurisdiction. The literature, policies and practice information and interview data were synthesised, and a report was provided to the ANCD.

This project was funded by the Australian National Council on Drugs. For more information, contact stephanie.taplin@acu.edu.au.

**New Publications**


