

Newsletter

Education and out-of-home care

September 2025



Members of the research team and representatives from our project Partner Organisations came together in nipaluna/Hobart in May 2025

Much has happened in the project during 2025!

Since the start of this year we have been privileged to meet in person or virtually with so many people who have the best interests of students in care at heart. This has included meetings we hosted ourselves in May in nipaluna/Hobart; events we attended in Meanjin/Brisbane, Canberra and Naarm/Melbourne; and conversations with colleagues in Departments responsible for child protection as part of applying for jurisdiction approvals for our research. The widespread and deep commitment to the right of students in care to access high quality education are inspiring. Thank you all!

Kitty

Thank You

This project has been partially funded by the Australian Government through the Australian Research Council Linkage Scheme (LP2201001130). We are so grateful to our Partner Organisations for their co-funding and support, and for the work they do every day to nurture children and young people in out of home care. During 2025 relevant Departments in Tasmania, New South Wales and South Australia have granted permission for us to invite children and young people in out of home care to participate in our reach. We highly value this support from Departments to enable students in care to contribute their views.



Australian Government
Australian Research Council

Our team

The academic team:

UTAS: Prof Kitty te Riele
UTAS: Dr Michael Guerzoni
ANU: Prof Sharon Bessell
ACU: Prof Daryl Higgins
UniSA: Prof Anna Sullivan
Life Without Barriers: Dale Muarray
Berry Street: Dr Tom Brunzell
UTAS: Dr Emily Rudling
(postdoctoral research fellow)
ANU: Dr Cadhla O'Sullivan (research fellow)
UTAS: Shelley Stokes (PhD candidate)

The partner organisations:

Life Without Barriers
Berry Street Victoria
Mackillop Family Services
Key Assets Australia
Allambi Care
Anglicare NSW South, NSW West & ACT
Anglicare Victoria
Commissioner for Children and Young People
(Tasmania)
Stronger Smarter Institute

Update from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group (ATIRG) comprises a membership of staff from some of the Project's Partner Organisations (Allambi Care, Berry Street, Key Assets, Life Without Barriers, and Stronger Smarter Institute) alongside two of the Chief Investigators of the project.



ATIRG Chair Michael, with Aislinn Bury (Key Assets Australia) Tanya Lancaster (Berry Street), and Dyonne Anderson (Stronger Smarter Institute)

The Reference Group has an important role in assisting the researchers to establish inclusive and safe processes within our work as it pertains to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Reference Group has met on several occasions over 2025, two being on-line and the other being in person at the May 2025 nipaluna/Hobart joint meeting. At this meeting, the Reference Group had the opportunity to meet the Project Team in person, and talk about the project broadly, before having a closed session, followed by a lunch.

The meetings over the course of the year have included opportunity for the research team to seek advice on matters such as how our PhD student can consider approaching a potential research partnership with an Indigenous community, and more broadly on stakeholder engagement for the project.

We would like to express our thanks and appreciation for outgoing members Ms Dyonne Anderson, and Ms Aislinn Bury who is going on leave.

Publications

In March Kitty, Anna and Emily published a blog piece with colleagues Martin Mills, Deborah Lynch, and Annemaree Carroll who are doing ARC-funded research titled “Towards a School-Community Based Approach to Addressing Student Absenteeism”. The EduMatters blog is hosted by the Australian Association for Research in Education – the leading professional association championing educational research in Australia. Our piece reflects on the ways in which attendance is measured and understood in official reports.

You can access our piece here:

<https://blog.aare.edu.au/attendancematters-but-official-reports-dont-tell-the-whole-story/>

**EduResearch
Matters**

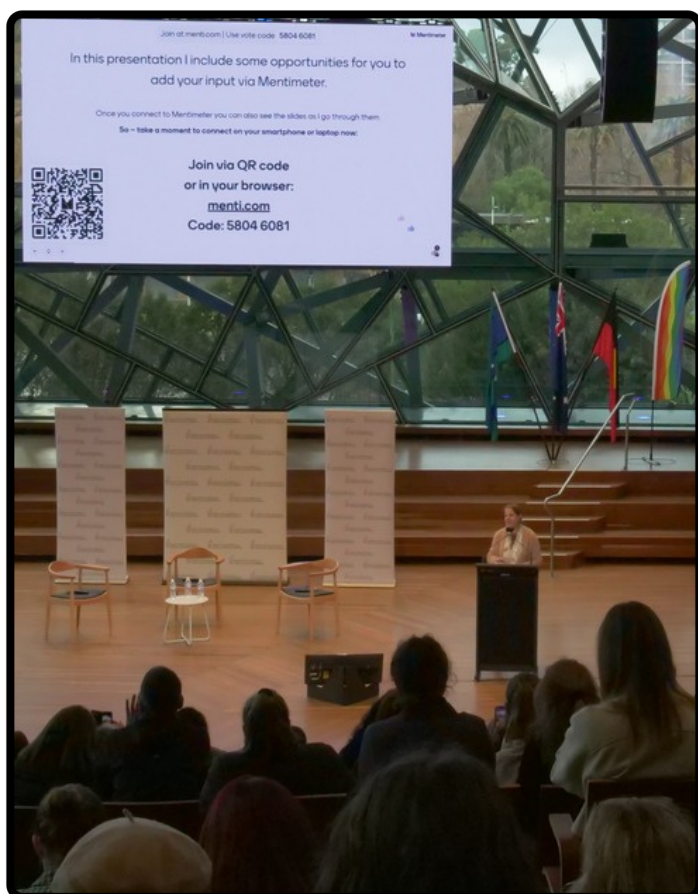
A voice for Australian
educational researchers



Attendance matters – but official reports don't tell the whole story

By Kitty te Riele, Martin Mills, Deborah Lynch, Emily Rudling, Annemaree Carroll and Anna Sullivan

Students are now back at school for Term 1. Campaigns around attendance by education departments around Australia are reminding students and families 'every day counts'. And [extensive evidence](#) shows being at school supports academic achievement and school completion. It also benefits emotional wellbeing and social connectedness.



Kitty presenting at the CfECFW Forum in Naarm/Melbourne in June

In June Kitty was invited as keynote speaker for a forum in Melbourne by the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. The forum was focused on education, with the title: “Opening Doors, Changing Lives: Celebrating the power of education for care experienced children and young people”.

As part of the forum audience members provided their ideas about reasons why students in care miss out on school and what can be done in the out of home care and education sectors to enable these students to be at school. The responses were captured in word clouds, available here:

https://www.utas.edu.au/_resources/documents/for-community-and-partners/underwood-centre/publications-about-the-project/CfECFW-word-clouds.pdf

Listening to children and young people

Method 3 of this research project is all about ensuring children and young people in care can share their views and experiences. We are offering two opportunities for them to participate: 1) child-centred research workshops (ages 7-12), and 2) surveys and research conversations (ages 13-18).

Child-centred research workshops

Three child-centred research workshops with children in care have been held in Tasmania, led by Sharon and Cadhla, with support from Partner Organisations Key Assets Australia and Life Without Barriers. Research team members Kitty, Michael, and Emily also joined the workshops. Twenty children participated across the three workshops. The workshops are based on extensive research and practice by Sharon with children in Australia and overseas (see: <https://childrenspolicycentre.org/latest-news/more-for-children-rights-based-methodology/>)

The workshops use a rights-based, child-centred methodology and draw on standpoint theory, and the assumption that the people who are a part of a particular social group have unique knowledge because of their social position. The workshop methods are designed with the perspectives of children in mind, and thus encompass informed consent, and activities including “things I like to do,” “trash, treasure, recycling,” “pulling down fences,” role-play, poster-making, and debriefing.



The research team are hoping to hold some more child-centred workshops in other Australian jurisdictions in 2025.

Listening to high school students

With support from our partner organisations and Departments in TAS, NSW and SA we have started inviting students in care of high school age to participate in an online survey in Term 3, 2025. The survey makes it possible for young people to take part regardless of geographic location, i.e. especially in more regional and remote areas. To make it as inclusive as possible we are grateful to all the carers and case workers who are helping young people to read the invitation and the survey. The survey is a chance for young people to share with us:

- What would help students in out-of-home care to be at school,
- Experiences of missing school and reasons for being absent.

We are looking forward to learning from what young people tell us in their surveys. Later in 2025 and into early 2026 we will offer opportunities for some young people to have a research conversation with us, so we can learn from their expertise in more detail.

May 2025 Forum in nipaluna/Hobart

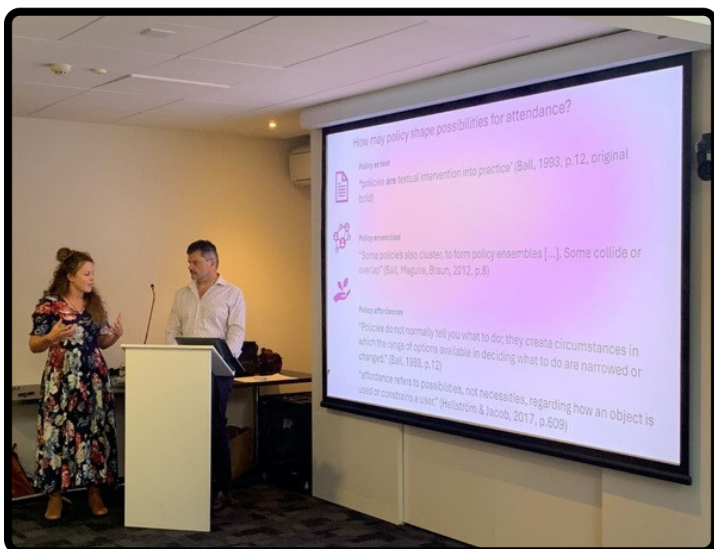
We all know that getting together in person is so valuable. This was proven again in May, when over the course of three days the research team was able to meet in nipaluna/Hobart with representatives from our Partner Organisation, members of the project's Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander Reference Group, and education and care stakeholders from around Tasmania.

A world cafe style workshop with stakeholders from the education and care sectors was facilitated to identify solutions to various issues experienced by students in care and which impact on school attendance. Rich cross-sectoral discussion highlighted opportunities to supporting students in care, such as reducing interruptions to the school day, reducing stigma, and enabling carer authorisation on school related activities.

In meeting with our Partner Organisation (PO) colleagues, they shared specific examples of how their organisations are supporting the education of students in care. Examples include ways in which POs are enabling children and young people to have input and for the organisation to act on their ideas. The collaborative sharing of expertise proved to be highly useful both for each other, and for the research team. The research team provided updates about work on the policy analysis, child centred research workshops, and input from people in the care sector.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group met in person for the first time, and also connected with the research team for a yarn to share stories and build relationships.

The research team thank all attendees for their contributions. We hope to hold a national roundtable towards the end of the project in 2027.



Emily and Daryl, and Sharon and Cadhla presenting to project partner organisations

Engaging with stakeholders

In addition to the forum in nipaluna/Hobart in May, team members have been privileged to hear from stakeholders at several other events. The throughline across all those events is the strong commitment from stakeholders to supporting students in care to be at school. People from across different sectors are also very aware of the significant barriers for accessing school faced by students in care and of the pressures that school staff, OOHC staff and carers are already under. We are so grateful to stakeholders for sharing their insights and supporting our research.

Building Caring Communities

Research team members Kitty, Emily, and Shelley along with Life Without Barriers representative Clea North travelled to Meanjin/Brisbane for the Building Caring Communities Conference facilitated by Life Without Barriers and Allambi Care in June. Kitty, Emily, Shelley, and Clea facilitated a workshop “Why school attendance matters, and what you can do to help”. Twenty-six delegates attended the world-cafe session.



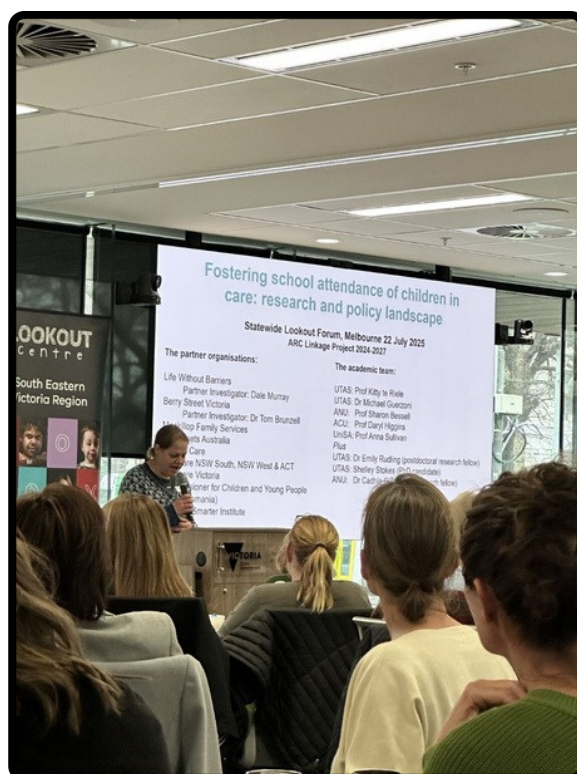
Clea, Emily, Kitty, and Shelley at the Building Caring Communities Conference in meanjin/Brisbane in June

ACT stakeholder roundtable

A stakeholder roundtable was held in the ACT in July 2025, with Sharon and Cadhla representing the research team. About 20 people across service providers, government departments, peak bodies and the human rights commission attended. The participants shared deep understandings of many of the complex and intersecting factors that contribute to children and young people in OOHC not being in school.

LOOKOUT

Kitty represented the research team at the Lookout statewide forum in naarm/Melbourne in July. Lookout is a Department of Education program in Victoria that supports the educational engagement of children and young people living in care. Kitty gave a keynote address about the project and also facilitated a world-café workshop with over 56 delegates contributing to the session.



Kitty at the LOOKOUT forum in naarm/Melbourne in July

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Kitty attended the education forum by the CfECFW in Naarm/Melbourne in June. Apart from her own keynote (see page 3) she met with colleagues from partner organisations and other stakeholders in Victoria. Care-experienced young people were at the forefront for this forum, as co-MC, presenters and panel hosts.

The Australian Network for Aschool Attendance (ANSA)

The Australian Network for School Attendance (ANSA) hosted its inaugural conference in Naarm/Melbourne, September. ANSA is the Australian chapter of the International Network for School Attendance (INSA). Daryl and Dale presented a keynote address about the project “Fostering better school attendance for kids in out-of-home care: Why we need to, and what can be done.”

The Australian Sociological Association

Data from the Building Caring Communities Conference and the LOOKOUT Workshop will be analysed with the data from the National Carers Conference workshop data (August, 2024) and contribute to Method 2: sector perspectives. Emily and Kitty will present on behalf of the research team at The Australian Sociological Association (TASA) conference in Naarm/Melbourne. Our presentation Carers’ Perspectives on Barriers and Enablers for School attendance for Young People in Out-of-Home Care is under the Sociology of Education stream and is at 9-11am on Wednesday 26th November.



Dale presenting at the ANSA conference in naarm/Melbourne in September



Dale and Daryl after their presentation at the ANSA conference

Update from PhD candidate, Shelley Stokes

In late August, Shelley successfully completed her confirmation of candidature, receiving strong endorsement from Faculty and external experts on the rigor and feasibility of her research project. Shelley's project is titled "Exploring community-partnered solutions for school attendance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in OOHC."

In her first year, Shelley has:

- Completed her PhD literature review.
- Completed the coursework for her Graduate Certificate in Research at the University of Tasmania.
- Begun liaising with colleagues and community contacts to seek advice regarding co-design part of her research.
- Completed the Stronger Smarter Institute Leadership Program.
- Assisted with Method 2 data collection at the Building Caring Communities Conference in Brisbane.
- Assisted with data analysis for Method 2: sector perspectives.
- Shelley (and Michael) have been invited to attend Gunya to the Bunya's with Cherbourg.

We are delighted to celebrate Shelley's achievements and look forward to seeing what she accomplishes in her second year!

It takes a village

We are delighted to be working with the next generation of researchers in this project. We would like to acknowledge excellent work done by the following casual Research Assistants:

- Samantha (University of South Australia) is assisting Anna with compiling a literature review.
- Zekantha Byard (University of Tasmania) will be working with Kitty to analyse grey literature.
- Thanh Hai Phan (University of Tasmania) will be working with Kitty on data collection for Method 2: sector perspectives.



Shelley at the Stronger Smarter Institute Leadership Program. (Image sourced from SSI's LinkedIn page)

Thank you for reading!

<u>Check out our website!</u>	Email us: eduoohc@utas.edu.au
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