

# March 2018 Research update

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**NEWS FROM THE DIRECTOR**

We are well into another productive year at ICPS, with several key projects due to conclude in 2018.

Of particular note are the kContact and MESSI projects, funded by the Australian Research Council, which are in their final stages and will be releasing findings over 2018. kContact is a Linkage study led by Professor Morag McArthur, Associate Professor Stephanie Taplin, and Professor Cathy Humphreys (University of Melbourne), as well as government and community partners.

It has developed and trialed an enhanced model of managing and supporting contact between children in care and their birth parents, and has been conducted in Victoria and the ACT. It was also extended into NSW with funding from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services. Find out more about this study in the Project Spotlight.

The State Intervention with Babies study led by Associate Professor Stephanie Taplin, will commence in 2018 and is also funded by the Australian Research Council. It aims to increase our knowledge about the nature, extent and impact of the removal of infants and newborns from their mothers. It will be conducted in two Australian jurisdictions,

NSW and WA, and involves collaborations with investigators in England and the USA.

December saw the conclusion of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. ICPS was privileged to be part of the research program of the Royal Commission, providing valuable insights into children's views and perceptions of safety in institutions, as well as the opportunities for preventing child sexual abuse, through access to information, education and support. A Research to Practice Issue has been developed on this topic, which can be accessed on page 3 of this update, along with other media articles and publications released over the last few months.

ICPS supported the ACU to establish the Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal, which provides a central pathway to the range of ACU research projects, professional development opportunities and capacity-building tools that aim to support institutions to better safeguard children and young people from sexual abuse and other forms of harm.

We are keen to partner with organisations to assess and monitor children's perceptions of safety within their own institution. More information about the Portal and how your organisation can get involved is provided on page 5 of this update.



**Professor Daryl Higgins**

Director, Institute of Child Protection  
Studies

# kContact: Keeping contact between parents and children in care



Keeping contact between parents and children in care

## ABOUT THE STUDY

kContact is an Australian Research Council funded Linkage Project (LP130100282) that started in Victoria and the ACT in 2014, and is a joint initiative between ICPS, the University of Melbourne, and a number of government and community partners.

The project received additional funding from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services in 2016 to extend the study to NSW sites, using the same methodology. We currently have 183 children included in the study across 15 out-of-home care (OOHC) agencies in the three states and territories.

## WHY THE STUDY?

When children are removed from their parents by the state protective services, the only way to maintain relationships with the birth family is through contact ('access' in Victoria), which is normally facilitated through OOHC services.

However, there is no existing evidence around best practice for parental and family contact between, or even within, the states and territories. The kContact project developed and trials an evidence-based model around parental contact, one of the first of its kind.

## AIM

To develop and trial an enhanced model of managing and supporting contact between children in care and their birth parents. The intervention focuses on supporting the birth parent(s) in relation to contact through planning, practical guidance and emotional support provided by case workers before and after each contact visit.

The aim of the intervention is to reduce current and future distress related to contact, improve children's relationships with their birth parents, and may increase successful reunifications in the long term.

## GROUNDBREAKING METHODOLOGY

As far as can be ascertained, kContact is the first ever randomised controlled trial specifically targeting parental contact for children in OOHC.

It has been conducted in two phases:

Phase 1 reviewed all existing literature and consulted with key stakeholders to develop an enhanced model of contact between children in OOHC and their birth parents, and designed a manual, training and support for the model.

In Phase 2, the project team developed the detailed methodology for the trial to test the effectiveness of the contact model, working closely with services in ACT and Victoria. Agencies were randomly allocated into 'intervention' and 'control' sites, with the intervention sites trained and supported in running the kContact intervention. The trial has been completed in Victoria and ACT, and the NSW trial will be finalised in 2018.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the model, we collected information about 183 study children and their contact, on two occasions - before and after the intervention in the intervention sites. The information was collected from three informants, including the child's (1) birth parent(s), (2) current foster or kinship carers, and (3) case workers or contact workers. The main outcomes from all three states and territories will be published in the second half of 2018, and include measures on child wellbeing, child-parent relationships, the nature and quality of contact, and carers' openness and attitudes about contact.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

While the project ultimately aims to improve children's contact and their relationships with their parents, the project will also provide practical tools around parental contact for OOHC agencies, foster parents and individual workers.

In addition, the project outcomes will inform policy on how to best support parental contact regarding training and financial resources for agencies and foster families.

## INVESTIGATORS

Professor Morag McArthur  
Associate Professor Stephanie Taplin  
Professor Cathy Humphreys (University of Melbourne)

Project Managers: Dr Aino Suomi, and Dr Debbie Noble-Carr

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

Bullen, T., Taplin, S., McArthur, M., Humphreys, C., Kertesz, M. (2017). [Interventions to improve supervised contact visits between children in out-of-home care and their parents: A systematic review](#). *Child and Family Social Work*, 22(2), 822-833.

Taplin, S., Bullen, T., McArthur, M., Humphreys, C., Kertesz, M., & Dobbins, T. (2015). [kContact, an enhanced intervention for contact between children in out-of-home care and their parents: A protocol for a cluster randomised controlled trial](#). *BMC Public Health*, 15, 1134.

### RESEARCH REPORTS

Bullen, T., Taplin, S., Kertesz, M., Humphreys, C., & McArthur, M. (2015). [Literature review on supervised contact between children in out-of-home care and their parents](#). Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU.

### PRACTICE-BASED PUBLICATIONS

Bullen, T., Taplin, S., & Barry, E. (2015). [Supporting quality contact visits for children in out-of-home care](#). Research to Practice Series, Issue 10. Canberra: Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU.



## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about the kContact project, contact [Stephanie Taplin](#).

# In the media

## **'IT WAS US AGAINST EVERYONE': HOW ABUSE SURVIVORS WILL KEEP PUSHING FOR CHANGE**

Melissa Davey, *The Guardian*,  
14 December 2017

This article discusses the conclusion of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, and the future for advocates.

Professor Daryl Higgins also discusses the need for leaders of organisations to change their attitudes, in order to keep children safe in future.

## **ACT HAS HIGHEST RATE OF INDIGENOUS CHILD CARE, PROTECTION REPORTS IN AUSTRALIA**

Daniel Burdon, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January 2018

Professor Morag McArthur reflects on the ACT having the highest rate of Indigenous child care and protection reports in Australia, and the second-highest rate of Indigenous children on protection orders in 2016-17.

## **BARRIERS REMAIN FOR CHILDREN OF PRISONERS DESPITE 2013 REPORT, STUDY FINDS**

Doug Dingwall, *The Canberra Times*,  
15 February 2018

This article reports on research conducted by ICPS into the experiences of children with incarcerated parents.

# New publications



## **#19 Opportunities for Prevention: Improving access to information, education and support about child sexual abuse**

Vicky Saunders, Morag McArthur  
Research to Practice Series, Issue 19

Issue 19 of the ICPS Research to Practice Series explores the opportunities for preventing child sexual abuse through improving access to information, education and support; the relevant target groups; and implications for policy and practice. It is based on a study conducted by ICPS for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which examined the service needs and help-seeking behaviours of professionals, parents, community members and individuals in relation to concerns about child sexual abuse, as well as the functions and effectiveness of existing services.

## JOURNAL ARTICLES

Moore, T., McArthur, M., Death, J., Tilbury, C., & Roche, S. (2018).

*Sticking with us through it all: The importance of trustworthy relationships for children and young people in residential care.* *Children and Youth Services Review*, 84, 68-75.

Pridmore, W., Levy, M., & McArthur, M. (2017).

*Slipping through the cracks: Examining the realities of a child-friendly prison system.* *Child and Youth Services Review*, 83(3), 226-231.

Roche, S., Barker, J., & Turton, P. (2017).

*Understanding family conflict as it relates to young people experiencing homelessness.* *Parity*, 30(10), 28-30.

Woodman, E., Roche, S., McArthur, M., & Moore, T. (2018).

*Child protection practitioners: Including children in decision-making.* *Child and Family Social Work*.





## Selected research updates



### **KCONTACT: KEEPING CONTACT BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN IN CARE**

This 3 year ARC Linkage Project has developed and trialled an enhanced model of managing and supporting contact between children in care and their birth parents, and is being conducted in the ACT and Victoria. NSW FACS has funded an extension of the project into NSW. See the Project Spotlight for more information.



### **MESSI: MANAGING ETHICAL STUDIES ON SENSITIVE ISSUES**

This 3 year ARC Discovery Project aims to better understand and address the tensions between the protection of children and young people and their participation in social research about sensitive issues. A national online survey of young people, parents and professionals concluded in 2017.

### **ENCOURAGING AND SUSTAINING QUALITY CARE TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE**

This 3 year project is being conducted in collaboration with the Australia Foster Care Association, and seeks to help address the difficulties in recruiting and retaining skilled foster carers, by identifying the most effective strategies

to attract, support and retain successful foster care families. The second phase of the project, a qualitative study to identify successful and new approaches to recruitment, support and retention of foster care and kinship carers, has now been completed.



### **STATE INTERVENTION WITH BABIES**

This 3 year ARC Discovery Project aims to increase knowledge about the nature, extent and impact of the removal of infants (< 1 year old) and newborns (< 31 days old) from their mothers. It will be conducted in two Australian jurisdictions, NSW and WA.

The study will provide recommendations for best practice in relation to prenatal reporting responses, and identify appropriate early intervention strategies which may reduce the need for babies to be removed from their parents.

### **IDENTIFYING STRATEGIES FOR TALKING TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN EXPERIENCING FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The Department of Social Services have funded ICPS to conduct a scoping study which aims to identify strategies for talking to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experiencing family and domestic violence.

The study will identify the barriers and enablers to directly engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children about their experiences of family and domestic violence, identify what is needed for them to feel safe about

researchers exploring these experiences, and identify or develop resources and guidance for researchers, service providers and parents. Interviews are currently being conducted.

### **CHILD PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS: STATUTORY RESPONSES FOR CHILDREN EXPERIENCING FAMILY VIOLENCE ABOUT FAMILY VIOLENCE**

The Department of Social Services have funded ICPS to develop a profile of the children and families reported to child protection with issues of domestic and family violence; identify and map service responses, including the use of safety plans and other actions taken, such as referrals; and identify implications for how community-based and government services can better recognise and respond to violence.

### **EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS FOR 12-15 YEAR OLDS IN CANBERRA, ACT**

The ACT Community Services Directorate has commissioned ICPS to conduct an exploratory study into the experiences of homelessness for 12-15 year olds in Canberra. ICPS is recruiting 16-19 year olds (who experienced homelessness whilst aged 12-15), to participate in in-depth interviews. Those interested in referring young people to the study can contact [Debbie Noble-Carr](#).

[Click here](#)

for more information about these projects and other current studies and completed projects.



# Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal

[safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au](https://safeguardingchildren.acu.edu.au)

## ABOUT THE PORTAL

The ACU Safeguarding Children and Young People Portal provides a central pathway to the range of ACU research projects, professional development opportunities, and capacity-building tools that aim to support institutions to better safeguard children and young people from sexual abuse and other forms of harm.

**Research and resources:** Access a range of research reports and resources, including our research for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

**Practice Tools:** Over the coming months, ICPS will be providing resources to support organisations to keep children and young people safe.

**Qualifications and professional learning:** ACU provides a range of formal learning opportunities for new students and professionals seeking to develop specific skills and knowledge related to safeguarding children and young people.

**Self-assessment:** ICPS will be providing surveys and other resources that organisations can use to self-assess their progress towards supporting conditions of safety in organisations for children and young people (subject to a fee and sign-up procedure).

**Researcher profiles:** Find out more about the expertise of ACU staff relating to the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

## REGISTER TO GET INVOLVED IN THE AUSTRALIAN SAFE KIDS AND YOUNG PEOPLE SURVEY

ICPS developed the Australian Safe Kids and Young People Survey (ASK-YP Survey), which measures how safe children and young people feel within organisations; the extent to which children and young people believe organisations demonstrate that they are child-safe; the organisation's responses to safety issues, risks and barriers to safety within institutions; and how children and young people believe they and their organisations would respond if a child or young person was harmed.

We are inviting organisations to register to use the ASK-YP survey to gauge and monitor children's perceptions of safety within their own institution.

Organisations may include:

- Individual services, clubs, teams, schools, or groups;
- Organisations and services that work across a range of locations, jurisdictions and service contexts;
- Membership organisations such as sector peaks, industry groups, federated bodies and clusters of services and programs;
- Funding bodies and government agencies that contract services, supports and programs delivered to children and young people.

The ASK-YP survey, which has been peer-reviewed by the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee, can assist organisations to assess children and young people's perceptions of safety within their organisation, and track changes over time.

For more information about the ASK-YP Survey, email [askyp@acu.edu.au](mailto:askyp@acu.edu.au).



[Click here](#)

for more information about the portal and to access research and other resources.

# ICPS Staff

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for more information about ICPS research and professional staff.

## Contact us

ICPS has offices in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney.

The Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at the Australian Catholic University aims to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families through quality research, evaluation, training and community education.

ICPS research strengths include promoting children's participation, strengthening service systems and informing practice, and supporting child-safe communities.

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