



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



Newsletter

September 2017

Welcome to the Spring edition of the kContact newsletter. We would especially like to welcome our NSW partners in the study as this might be the first update you have received about kContact.

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide all participating services and other stakeholders regular updates about the study progress. As you know, the main aim of the kContact study is to develop and trial a model for managing contact between children in out-of-home care and their parents which will reduce current and future distress and improve children's relationships with their parents. We are hoping that this new model also will increase child and family wellbeing in the long term.

The trial has been already completed in Victoria and the ACT as a partnership between the Australian Catholic University's Institute of Child Protection Studies (based in Canberra) and the University of Melbourne in Victoria. This first arm of the study was funded by the Australian Research Council Linkage grant. The NSW arm of the study is funded by the

NSW Department of Family and Community Services and although it is run separately to Victoria and ACT, the same materials and methodology are being used across the three states and territories.

The NSW team have been very busy in the last few months recruiting parents, carers and workers for the baseline interviews at each service. The interviews collect information about the study children, their families and their contact arrangements before the intervention commences. We will do another round of interviews after the intervention. You will find some information about our interviewers and training staff for the NSW arm at the end of this brief newsletter. We will keep you regularly updated on the study process with the newsletter; the next one is due to come out before Christmas.

On behalf of the research team,

Aino



Project Update

The baseline interviews with parents, carer and workers are near completion in the four NSW services. Below is a breakdown of all baseline interviews to date:

	NSW	ACT	Vic.	Total
Parents	19	26	42	93
Carers	30	45	58	133
Workers	42	64	72	178
Total	91	135	172	349

As you might know, we are still trying to recruit a few more parents and carers of the study children in NSW. We greatly appreciate your ongoing support getting in touch with all the relevant adults for these children.

During an online video meeting on the 15 of August, the four NSW services: (1) Life Without Barriers (LWB), (2) Uniting, (3) CareSouth and (4) St Saviours were 'randomised' into two intervention sites and two comparison sites. The intervention sites for NSW are:

- LWB
- St Saviours

And the two comparison sites are:

- Uniting
- CareSouth

We are in a process of organising training with the intervention sites and we will keep in contact with the comparison sites - it's important they will carry on their 'business as usual' during this phase. This will allow the research team to compare whether the intervention makes a difference in the lives of the study children and their families. As you know, after the trial we will be able to offer the intervention training at the comparison sites.

While the NSW data is not in a form that could be reported at this stage, the interviews have been progressing well and the team as well as the parents, carers and workers have seemed to enjoy them. We have had particularly positive feedback from parents who appreciate the opportunity to share their stories and 'having their voice heard'.

We are in a process of analysing and reporting some of the baseline data, one from the carers' perspective and one from the parents' perspective on contact. While we cannot report on the study outcomes before the NSW trial has been completed, we will be sharing some really important aspects of the experiences of contact in the coming months.

Children's Study

Mr Rhys Thorpe is a PhD candidate who interviewed a group of children in the ACT as a part of his PhD. This project is a valuable addition to the larger study, particularly because we did not have the resources to interview children in Victoria or NSW.

Rhys is currently writing up his thesis and he wanted to share some of the most recent insights from the interviews with everyone in this newsletter:

"I've been reflecting again recently on the challenges associated with siblings attending contact, particularly (though not exclusively) where large sibling groups attend contact visits together. The few studies that have touched on sibling contact rightly underscore its importance for children and young people. They highlight furthermore, how sibling contact tends to be undervalued despite it often being less

complicated and a more positive experience for children.

Providing groups of siblings with meaningful time with a parent during a contact visit, on the other hand, seems much more complex. For the Children's Study, a few participants clearly valued "family time" and fondly recalled moments where siblings and parents all played together. Indeed for some, this "family time" was identified as their favourite part of visits. Many participants however, were more interested in connecting, having fun and spending time with their parents rather than their siblings. For these children, attending visits with siblings who also sought their parent's attention often made things difficult. A number of children talked about being "left out", and feeling as though they were "hidden... on the sideline of everything." One young man, to describe how he felt on visits, chose a picture of a turtle weighed down with a ship's anchor. He explained that this was how he felt when he was stuck with his siblings rather than spending time with his parents. A young woman, to represent what her visits felt like, chose a picture of a dog trapped outside in the rain. She felt she was, "getting left out, like in the rain, because she [mum] was doing everything with my brother." Other participants recalled times when their parents had struggled to manage the behaviours of their siblings and become angry or upset, ruining their limited time together.

I expect these stories are familiar to those working in the field. Obviously there are many good reasons for having family contact, where groups of siblings and parents come to spend time together. On the other hand, the experiences shared by the participants in the Children's Study offer important

reminders to consider the impact of siblings and to search for ways to try and balance the complex wishes and needs of everyone on a contact visit."
(Rhys Thorpe, PhD student)

Introducing the NSW team

The team for the NSW arm of the study includes A/Prof Stephanie Taplin, Prof Morag McArthur and Dr Aino Suomi as well as Dr Debbie Noble-Carr, Ms Renee Crowe and Ms Sharyn Guerin about whom we have included a little introduction below.



Dr Debbie Noble-Carr

Debbie provides training support for the NSW arm. She also conducted some of the interviews and provided training support for the ACT arm of the study. She is based in the ACT and her main role is to train the intervention sites and provide ongoing support for the sites throughout the intervention. Debbie has a Bachelor and PhD degrees in Social Work. Over the last 15 years Debbie has worked as a researcher and managed research projects at various government and non-government organisations including: Carers Australia, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Catholic University. Debbie has completed projects on issues such as young carers,

adoption, children experiencing homelessness, children affected by parental alcohol or other drug use, younger mothers and breastfeeding, and identity and meaning in the lives of vulnerable young people. Debbie also has extensive experience in developing and providing professional development in the areas of child centred practice and family aware youth work practice. Debbie can be contacted on debbie.noble-carr@acu.edu.au.



Ms Renee Crowe

Renee is one of our two interviewers in the ICPS team for the NSW arm, based in south of Sydney. She holds an Honours degree in Social Work and has worked for a number of years in direct casework and community development roles with vulnerable children and families in both government and non-government sectors. Over the past ten years Renee has worked on research projects concerning transcultural mental health issues, integrated service delivery for families experiencing multiple disadvantage, risk assessment in the identification of vulnerable children, and adolescent residential care. Renee can be contacted on renee.crowe@acu.edu.au



Ms Sharyn Guerin

Sharyn is our other interviewer for the NSW arm of the study and she is based in the west of Sydney. Sharyn is a provisionally registered psychologist and is currently completing her Masters of Clinical Psychology. Sharyn is trained to conduct psychometric testing and intervention for children and adults and is currently completing her placement at the Mary Aikenhead Clinic where she sees predominantly children presenting with a variety of learning problems and diagnoses. Sharyn has also worked at Lifeline for the past two years and has received extensive training in suicide and crisis intervention. Sharyn can be contacted on sharyn.guerin@acu.edu.au

And the winner is...

We have conducted a draw for the workers who participated in the baseline interviews in NSW for a \$100 gift voucher.

The winners in NSW are....

Mr Scott Canning from Uniting

and

Ms Marita Leach from LWB

Congratulations, and thank you to everyone who helped with or participated in the interviews.

Next activities

- Finalise baseline interviews for NSW and drafting articles reporting the baseline results for ACT, Vic. and NSW.
- Complete data entry of the NSW baseline up interviews.
- First reports on the baseline interviews.
- Commence intervention training in NSW.
- Full analysis of the data from the follow-up interviews and intervention in Victoria and the ACT will be held over until the NSW data can be added.

If you have any queries or comments about the project or if you would more information, please contact the project manager, Aino Suomi (details below)

Project Team

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Marymead Child and Family Centre
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CareSouth (NSW)
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