

## MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 26 October 2016

### **Children to be seen and heard at national symposium about child safety**

The need to listen to children and improve their confidence in adults to respond is the central focus of national symposium about children's safety in institutions the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is hosting in Sydney on Friday 28 October.

This symposium will share findings from two studies commissioned and published by the Royal Commission, followed by a panel discussion with children and young people. Commissioner Helen Milroy will introduce the research and outline how it will contribute to the Royal Commission's work.

Researchers from Australian Catholic University (ACU) and Southern Cross University (SCU) spoke with children and young people, including those with a disability, about the safety issues they face in institutional contexts and how these can be addressed.

Dr Tim Moore and Professor Morag McArthur from the Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS) at ACU will report on the Children's Safety Study, a national project that engaged children and young people between the ages of four and 18. The study was conducted in partnership with the Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University, and prompted a nested study conducted by SCU, which spoke to children and young people with disability.

The Children's Safety Study included focus groups with children and young people across Australia to hear their views and perceptions of safety. This was followed by a national online survey of young Australians, which invited children and young people to share their views about safety in institutional contexts, such as school, church, sports programs and holiday camps. The study culminated in two major reports: [\*Taking Us Seriously: Children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns\*](#) (2015); and [\*Our Safety Counts: Children and young people's perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns\*](#) (2016).

Lead researcher Dr Moore highlighted the value of holding a symposium which focuses specifically on hearing the views and voices of children and young people.

"Victims of institutional child sexual abuse often report that when they were children they were given few opportunities to talk with adults about their abuse and that when they did adults did not take their concerns seriously," Dr Moore said.

"This symposium demonstrates the value of directly talking to children and young people about their safety concerns and in fostering partnerships between adults and children to identify, prevent and respond to issues such as child sexual abuse."

Participants in the study reported that although they believed that it was unlikely that they would

encounter an adult who might abuse them, they felt that it was important to know more about the risks of abuse and assault and what they should do. Only a third of young women reported that they would know what to do because they had talked about it at school.

“We frequently heard that young people want opportunities to discuss these types of issues but that adults are often reluctant to do so. Participants felt that this was because adults felt uncomfortable talking to children and because children may be reluctant to raise concerns when they had little faith in adults’ ability to appropriately respond.”

“The children and young people we spoke to had very clear and consistent ideas about what they wanted and needed to be and feel safe in institutions. They felt adults could keep children and young people safe by respecting them; asking what they’re thinking, feeling, seeing, and what they need; watching what other adults are doing; listening to what children are saying; standing up and speaking out when issues arise; doing what they’re supposed to do and what they say they’ll do; and informing children and young people about what’s being done to protect them.”

Dr Moore said there were significant implications arising from the study, to inform institutions about how they could better ensure children’s safety. “Children and young people need to have confidence that adults take their safety seriously and that they will respond in appropriate ways. Having frank and open conversations with young people, particularly those who feel ambivalent about institutions’ ability to keep them safe, is vital as is providing them with the skills to seek support when they and their peers are unsafe”.

ICPS has developed an animation summarising the key findings from the two children’s studies. It will be launched at the symposium and sent to all the schools that participated in the study.

Presenters:

- Professor Morag McArthur and Dr Tim Moore, *Institute of Child Protection Studies, ACU*
- Dr Sally Robinson, *Centre for Children and Young People, SCU*
- Panel of children and young people

### **Event details**

Friday 28 October 2016, 9am-12.30pm

University Hall, University of Technology Sydney

15 Broadway, Ultimo NSW 2007

### **Resources**

[Royal Commission Give Us A Say symposium](#)

[Taking Us Seriously: Children and young people talk about safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns](#) (2015)

[Our Safety Counts: Children and young people’s perceptions of safety and institutional responses to their safety concerns](#) (2016).

[Children’s Safety Study animation](#)

**Media Contact: Jen Rosenberg, [jen.rosenberg@acu.edu.au](mailto:jen.rosenberg@acu.edu.au), 0407 845 634**