

# Research to Practice Series

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## INSTITUTE OF CHILD PROTECTION STUDIES

### Interviews with practitioners: How Keeping Kids Central training shapes practice

#### Author

- Ms Alex Cahill

The Institute of Child Protection Studies has been delivering the Keeping Kids Central (KKC) training to practitioners since 2007. The training focuses on adopting a child-centred approach and is based around six key principles that support child-centred practice. KKC draws on research conducted with children and young people who shared their insights into what makes them feel safe.

The training aims to improve the lives of children and young people. It also aims to help child protection workers and services deepen awareness of child-safe and child-centred practice in the child, youth and family welfare sector and provides implementation support. This paper draws on interviews with three experienced practitioners who have completed KKC training and use the principles in their practice.

It is no coincidence that the aims of the training complement the aims of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted 30 years ago, the Convention has played a central role in improving the lives of children and young people around the world.

Given the complementary aspirations of the Convention and the training, this Research to Practice paper #30 is an opportunity to hear from practitioners reflect on the ways in which the training enhances practitioner capacity to identify and respond to the rights, needs and aspirations of children and young people.



# Full interview recordings

We interviewed three child protection workers from the ACT Government Community Services Directorate (CSD) about their thoughts and reflections after they took part in the Keeping Kids Central (KCC) training. We sought feedback about whether their practice changed after the training, particularly after learning about the KCC child-centred, child-focused approach. And if it did, how their practice changed.

Several key themes emerged which we describe in this paper along with practitioner's descriptions of their experiences.

## Interview with Lauren Ellerton



## Interview with Paula McGrady



## Interview with Carolyn Jackson-Grievess



## Method

We conducted informal, conversational interviews with 3 practitioners during October 2020.

The practitioners represent different work areas across the CSD. Each practitioner is a case manager and has different interactions with children and young people involved with care and protection.

## Interview questions

We supplied each participant with the following interview questions in advance:

- When did you complete the KKC training?
- How did completing the KKC training influence your day-to-day practice with children and young people?
- Describe some of the key strategies/concepts you took away from the KKC training?
- What are some of the ways the Child and Youth Protection Services supports practitioners to be more child centred and child focussed in their practice? Are there any other strategies you use to engage with children and young people?

The interviews ran from 25-35 minutes and were recorded and transcribed via Microsoft Teams.

**View the full recording of each interview by clicking on the thumbnails at left.**

# Theme 1. Creating safe places

## Taking a child-friendly environment with you

To grow and develop, children and young people need safe and secure environments and adults who will protect them from harm.

Child-safe practice values children and young people. It prioritises their needs and safety, recognising the power imbalance between them and adults. It entails keeping children and young people safe from physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or other harm and creating environments where children and young people can talk about their worries safely.

**Related KKC Principles:** [Keep me Safe](#), [I'm One of a Kind](#), [Make it Fun](#)

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### Practitioner reflections on creating safe spaces

**Paula:** “[The training] reminded me about focusing on the children ... recognising their strengths ... [and] taking a child-friendly environment with you.”

**Carolyn:** “We have activities and games that you can pick up and take with you when you leave the office ... we have a little backpack ... we just put it in there.”

**Carolyn:** “I went to do an assessment ... all different ages, and they all wanted to stay together. We ... did quite a few [KKC] activities ... I remember them laughing and talking about the activities ... we were able to gather honest answers from them.”

**Carolyn:** “I really like the hand activity. I find that one useful ... it can tell us very quickly five things that are important to that child or young person.”

**Carolyn:** “Children and older young people can be shy or may not want to open up ... if you do an activity while you talk, they don't notice.”

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## Theme 2. Safety from the child and young person's perspective

Children and young people who took part in the research\* that informed Keeping Kids Central told us it was important for adults to spend time with them to understand what they were feeling and what they wanted and needed to feel safe.

Children and young people don't always feel unsafe even though adults might see a situation as unsafe. Conversely, children and young people sometimes feel unsafe even though adults might think that they're safe.

Children told us that they often worried about and were afraid of things even when adults around them believed that they were doing alright or thought that they were now safe and out of harm's way. And sometimes, parents' feelings of safety often influence children's feelings of safety.

These things help children and young people feel safe:

- knowing what's happening and who's looking after their families and that things are going to get better
- having stability and predictability – chaos often causes feeling of instability and fear
- participating in decision-making about solutions; participation increases children's sense of safety – find opportunities for them to talk about their fears, concerns and any safety issues and discuss what they need
- having time to get to know a worker – children and young people typically want adults to spend time with them, to build trust and allow opportunities for important disclosures to occur overtime.

**Related KKC Principles:** [Keep me Safe, I'm One of a Kind](#), [Keep me in the Loop](#)

## Theme 2. Safety from the child and young person’s perspective (cont.)

### “ Practitioners describe what they have learned from children and young people about their perceptions of safety

**Carolyn:** “Saying you have seen the child or young person is just ticking a box. It’s about really seeing and hearing their voice.”

**Paula:** “In many homes and communities, they don’t have the prettiest of things, but you know what, [a child or young person’s] foundations are there, and that’s what we want to keep people focused on, those foundations.”

**Paula:** “We see the home and the child through a cultural lens, it’s very different to how a non-Indigenous worker sees that family ... so even though the child might only have a mattress as a lounge, it doesn’t matter ... if that child is happy and you feel that the child is safe and loved, it doesn’t matter if they don’t have a three-seater lounge.”

**Lauren:** “[Practitioners] need to let [children and young people] know they are unique and take the time to get to know them. This can be done effectively, in a short amount of time, when we act with empathy and sincerity. We need to bring it back to the child or young person.”

**Lauren:** “[Practitioners] need to engage and develop a relationship with the child or young person ... to get down to their level. Another good strategy I use in interviews is developing the child or young person’s self-esteem as part of the interview.”

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### 6 Principles of Keeping Kids Central

Click below for complete list of activities and information about each principle



Keep me safe

I’m one of a kind

My family’s special

Make it fun

Keep me in the loop

Who else matters?

# Theme 3. Giving ‘weight’ to the voice of the child and young person

Children and young people can easily become invisible, particularly when support for parents is driven by crisis or limited by time. Try to understand children and young people as individuals as well as part of a family.

Adopting a child-centred focus will open up opportunities to be attentive to a child or young person’s needs and wishes. With your radar always on them, you can prioritise their views and needs and not make assumptions about whether they are ok or not.

Children and young people tell us that even looking at them, smiling or giving them a quick ‘thumbs up’ can powerfully communicate that you are aware of and thinking about them. These little micro messages only take a second but can be felt for some time after.

Related KKC Principles: [I’m One of a Kind](#)

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## Practitioners describe how they give weight to the voices of children and young people

**Lauren:** “Listen to what children and young people say ... give it due weight. Not only what they are saying ... but what could be happening for them? ... what are they trying to tell you by their behaviour?”

**Lauren:** “I recently did an appraisal of a case where two children had been abused in care. They had been disclosing different types of abuse over 18 months ... I weighted their disclosure higher than the information from the carer ... a child-focused lens changed the whole perspective ... the children were removed ... When I re-interviewed the carer through that same lens, he presented six variations of perpetrator behaviour.”

**Carolyn:** “Whenever I am documenting anything for meetings, the courts or conversations about different families ... the first things we say is, ‘Well, what does the child want? How do you think they’ll feel in the future if we make this decision?’ ... It’s really focused on the child and hearing the views and wishes of the child.”

**Lauren:** “I use a whiteboard and I draw a stick figure of the child or young person in the centre and ask staff to tell me about the risks in their environments ... I encourage them to talk about all the risks and to explore what is going on for the child or young person in their world.”

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## Theme 4. Supporting disclosures from children and young people

Children and young people will disclose abuse to a trusted adult. They may tell you very clearly what happened to them. Or they may disclose in other ways including:

- talking about something a friend has experienced or needs help with
- hinting that they want to be asked something
- suddenly refusing to see or visit someone
- exhibiting concerning sexualised behaviour (this is a complex area – seek help, as needed).

Following a disclosure, children and young people may either minimise the abuse or its impact. They might withdraw or retract their report, saying they told a lie.

Their disclosure may also be unintentional or in response to a situation or discussion. Disclosures can be a process that takes days, weeks or longer. Children and young people may test the waters with a trusted adult over time. Treat any disclosure seriously and act.

Related KKC Principle: [Keep me Safe](#)

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### Practitioner reflections on supporting disclosures from children and young people

**Paula:** “Make sure that the child feels believed ... it’s the one opportunity that you may get ... they could be helping you to wash up and they are triggered by something ... if you’re busy cooking and not paying attention, then you might miss the opportunity.”

**Paula:** “It’s your opportunity to hear them and work towards giving them a voice straight up ... it sets them on the right path ... that they can trust people and feel believed, that they can come and tell you anything that might concern them.”

**Carolyn:** “If you haven’t worked in child protection ... you might find it hard to ask some of the tougher, trickier questions. The KKC activities help you do this.”

**Lauren:** “You need to look at the bigger picture ... you may be interviewing a young girl who has low self-esteem. You might ask her why she feels this way ... not just move to the next questions. We need to understand why they feel this way.”

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## Theme 5. Reflective practice

Reflective practice is important for not only new staff but also for staff who have held long term positions. Even workers aware of child-focused and child-centred practice can lose this perspective when working with families in crisis. Taking time out from work and participating in training can help workers to reflect on their current practice. These moments can help them contemplate ways to bring child-centred and child-focused practice into their daily practice.

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### How practitioners describe their reflective practice

**Paula:** “We’ve got to step back and remind ourselves to listen to the child and to make sure that they feel like they are believed, no matter what, whenever they speak about something traumatic or something that’s happened.”

**Carolyn:** “We have lots of discussions about children and young people and the importance of their voice. We look at current research in adoption and permanency to ensure that our practice is current and reflective of best practice.”

**Lauren:** Every family needs support sometime in their life ... This is the global messaging – it’s about saying, we all need a little bit of help. With our new staff they often don’t know what to say or do ... It’s like they think their job is to just go in, interview and leave. But it’s not.” ”

#### Acknowledgments

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#### \* Reference

Moore. T. & Layton. M. (2010). [Kids R Central](#), Institute of Child Protection Studies, Canberra



# About the Institute of Child Protection Studies

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.

The ICPS Research to Practice Series is supported by a grant from the ACT Community Services Directorate. The grant assists to enhance outcomes for children, young people and families through enhancing the skills and practice of the workforce, increasing awareness in the community, and contributing to evidence-based policy outcomes.

[www.acu.edu.au/icps](http://www.acu.edu.au/icps)

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## Contact us

The Institute of Child Protection Studies has offices in Canberra and Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

We invite you to visit our website for details about our staff and other publications. Or get in touch if you have any queries.

Phone: (02) 6209 1228 (Canberra)

Phone: (03) 9230 8732 (Melbourne)

Email: [ICPS@acu.edu.au](mailto:ICPS@acu.edu.au)

Website: [www.acu.edu.au/icps](http://www.acu.edu.au/icps)

Twitter: [@ACU\\_ICPS](https://twitter.com/ACU_ICPS)

Postal address: PO Box 256, Dickson, ACT 2602

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