

ADVANCING SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH - IMPACT CASE STUDY

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Title of Case Study:

THE WELL-BEING OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME CARE

Researcher and Institution

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1. CONTEXT

In the past two decades there has been increasing awareness of the need to improve the emotional and social wellbeing of children and young people living in out-of-home care. Prof Fernandez has led research in two related areas: (1) that has generated significant knowledge about children's attachment to new families; measured outcomes of foster care over the long term, and identified policy and practice implications that aim to respond effectively to children in need of stable family environments and reduce their risk of harm; and (2) that has explored life experiences of 'care leavers' (now adults) who lived in institutions (such as children's homes and orphanages) as children. The research was timely as it ran concurrent with the Australian Government's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

2. SUMMARY OF IMPACT

Improved professional understanding of a problem leads to new approaches: The research provides evidence of current experiences for children and young people in out-of-home care that informs policies and practices to enhance their well-being and safety in care and post-care, e.g., data collection in NSW about reunification; adaptation of Looking After Children tools for Barnados.

Improved community awareness: The research has contributed substantially to the compelling body of evidence that exposed historical widespread harm and trauma endured by children in institutional care. The learnings from this research are being applied to contemporary out-of-home care and after care to enhance favourable life outcomes for young people in, and leaving, out-of-home care.

3. RESEARCH UNDERPINNING IMPACT

The program of research incorporated 5 major projects:

1. Looking after children: Pathways in substitute care: Part 1 of a ten year longitudinal study of children in care (ARC Linkage Grant, 1998-2001). Researched outcomes in domains of attachment, health, emotional and behavioural development and education through an 8 year longitudinal follow up of children in out-of-home care. Involved simultaneous adaptation and implementation of the UK Looking After Children case management system in Barnados out-of-home care programs and establishment of the LAC Project as a joint venture of the School of Social Work and Barnados Australia, www.lacproject.org

2. Care matters: Capturing outcomes for children in foster care: Part 2 of a ten year longitudinal study of children in care (ARC Linkage Grant, 2009-2011). Analysed children's experiences and outcomes of foster care through an innovative multi-dimensional view of children's, foster parents', and caseworkers' perspectives. Generated knowledge about children's attachment to new families; measured outcomes of foster care in a multifaceted way, and identified policy implications of responding effectively to children in need of stable family environments to achieve healthy developmental outcomes and to their foster carers.

3. Pathways to permanency: A study of foster care reunification outcomes: Collaboration with Barnados (ARC Linkage Grant, 2005-2007). Researched the process, outcomes and potential of reunification decision-making involving children in need of temporary foster care. In a three year follow up study of three family reunification programs, this collaborative research undertook a systematic analysis of the process and circumstances in which family reunification is likely to lead to safety and positive outcomes for children, and

those in which alternative permanent care plans were indicated. This project generated evidence-based knowledge about reunification decision-making and identified policy implications of responding effectively to children in need of temporary foster care.

4. A national comparative analysis of child, family and service factors contributing to successful and unsuccessful reunification outcomes in out-of-home care: This project informed decision-making relating to the safe return of children to their families from protective care (ARC Linkage Grant, 2009-2011). Insights were obtained into the multiple factors that contribute to successful reunification and post reunification outcomes. The study identified children most at risk of remaining in care (e.g. Indigenous children), reviewed structural decision-making tools or specialist services to assist children to return home, and provided a nationally tested methodology for studying, recording, and measuring reunification processes and outcomes.

5. Forgotten Australians: Identifying long term outcomes for people who lived in institutional and other forms of out-of-home care. This research explored life experiences of care leavers, now adults, who lived in institutions (such as children's homes and orphanages) as children. (ARC Linkage, 2013-2016). 1) Explored patterns of older 'care leavers' experiences and life trajectories in care and post care; 2) Identified factors in past or present experiences that are protective or accentuate risks; 3) Identified current unmet needs and ways to support them. The project aimed to develop learnings for contemporary out-of-home care and after care to enhance life outcomes and transition services for care leavers.

4. DETAILS OF IMPACT

Approach to impact: Prof Fernandez stated that early in her research career she did not consciously plan activities for the purpose of achieving impact; she was aiming to build a body of knowledge to enable policy makers to make informed decisions. Her projects were based on industry partnerships and they all involved industry representation on Advisory Projects, which provides traction in gaining impact. For later projects, Prof Fernandez thought more strategically about where she published, and what she did, to disseminate findings and achieve impact. She acknowledged the need to balance both academic publication expectations and providing accessible information to reach the right people, such as reports to research participants and industry partners. For instance, she may target local journals that reach policy makers and practitioners even though they may have a low academic impact factor. She believes academics have an obligation to provide research in formats suitable to industry partnerships. She noted that as an academic and researcher, time for industry engagement is limited as she has to maintain a balance between research, teaching, and service to the community.

Impact on public policy: In research on the OOHc experiences of children and young people, Prof Fernandez and her research partners have made a significant impact on policy. Reunification studies provided a nationally tested methodology for studying, recording, and measuring reunification processes and outcomes. Neither the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) child protection reports nor the NSW Department of Community Services had a data field for reunification in their child protection database, even though it is the first option in the guardianship framework. The Dept was prompted by the research to introduce a reunification field, enabling them to monitor this important outcome. During the Wood Inquiry (2008), Professor Fernandez lodged a submission identifying high rates of placement turnover for children in care and the need for better monitoring and ensuring the stability for children in care. The Inquiry report made recommendations based on this submission.

Impact on service delivery: Prof Fernandez aimed to disseminate her research in a mix of academic and practitioner forums. By exposing the issues and experiences of children in care and post-care, the research findings informed new service delivery in relation to decision-making tools and specialist services to assist children to return home, and improved case management systems in Barnardos' out-of-home care programs. The Barnardos *Looking After Children* (LAC) and SCARF case management systems that were developed through this research program have been licensed and introduced in other child welfare agencies across Australia and internationally.

Impact on quality of life of community members: An impact case example that was prepared by Professor Fernandez is reproduced in part below to illustrate the policy and public awareness impact of the research beyond academia.

Impact Example

No Child Should Grow up Like This: Identifying Long Term Outcomes of Forgotten Australians, Child Migrants and Stolen Generations - a 3 year investigation to increase understanding of the lived experience of adults who were raised in out-of-home care in the 20th Century. Concurrent with the Australian Government's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse this research widened the scope of inquiry to build knowledge on the life trajectories of adult care leavers capturing the range of maltreatment they experienced including physical abuse, sexual molestation, psychological abuse, nutritional and educational neglect and oppressive child labour practices. Negative consequences in adulthood including physical and mental health impairments, disrupted family relationships and alienation from culture and marginal educational and employment outcomes are highlighted. Situated in a human rights and trauma framework it identifies coping mechanisms and resilience factors in the post care experience of survivors with a view to provide a knowledge and empirical base to underpin responsive policy and service development for their current and future wellbeing, and importantly, to extend learnings from this research to contemporary care systems which serve 43,000 children currently in care, nationally, who will be future care leavers. The research elicited and analysed data from multiple sources across metropolitan, regional and rural Australia (669 research participants in surveys, 92 in personal interviews and 79 in focus groups). The research was launched in 2015 by Justice McClellan, Chair, Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The research monograph and video of the launch are available at: www.forgottenaustralians.unsw.edu.au A copy of the full Research Report is provided in a separate attachment.

The NSW Minister of Community Services, the Hon Brad Hazzard, in launching the findings of this research at a public function at UNSW on 12.12.16, acknowledged its policy impact noting: *"This research will help each of the Attorneys General in State and Territory jurisdictions to come up with a collaborative and co-ordinated approach that will assist these most vulnerable groups. This report comes at a very appropriate time because, as Minister, I am saddened and appalled at the number of children coming into care, currently 43,000, and the disproportionate representation of Aboriginal children in care - a third of all children in care. This knowledge will be a part of the steel that will make it possible for me to make the changes we need to make lives better for children."*

In her keynote address at this launch Robyn McQuiggan, Deputy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner reiterated *"This evidence base which holds at its heart the voice of the people who have been affected by these horrendous experiences are so important for the development of policy for those who have been in care."*

Professor Mark Courtney, University of Chicago attests its social justice impact *"This is an invaluable contribution to Australia's efforts to account for the disservice done to its children .. to make amends .. to learn from past mistakes to inform current practice. The breadth and depth of the data go far beyond what previous Inquiries in Australia and overseas have produced."*

Dr Brian Babington, Convenor, National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing in his Foreword highlights *"This study is the first national project of its type in Australia ... If there is an overwhelming message from this study to practitioners, policy makers and service deliverers and community it is this: Listen with renewed care and compassion to those who lived in children's institutions, let each determine what they need from us to have the best possible lives."*

The findings relate to issues that are pivotal to policy, service provision, training and to life outcomes for children in care. They have been influential at multiple

levels in the human services sector, legislative review, policy development and direct practice. This research was designed to have a high social and policy impact by collaborating with six community partners in the human services sector who perceived the need for research evidence with which to argue for policy change and advocate for services for these vulnerable groups. This process of change is underway as evidenced by the observations of lead organizations in the sector:

Dr Rebecca Gray, Manager, Relationships Australia (National service provider) *observes "As a service organization we bear witness to what these people deal with - trauma, stigmatization and lack of trust... We feel vicariously relieved by this Report which provides a window through which the public can view the challenges, adaptations of these people who live with this ... and funders can appreciate the resources needed to respond to them."*

David Hill, former child migrant, former Director of ABC and expert witness, UK Independent Inquiry into Sexual Abuse of Children states *"This research has no feel good stories and happy endings... Child migrants came here with a promise of a better life - an unfulfilled promise ... This report is going to throw light on the current care system - young people are leaving care are still likely to be uneducated, experience homelessness, be involved in the criminal justice system, suffer poor mental health ... exactly the scenario portrayed in this research on children in past care systems - many lessons from this research report."*

Social impact is also reflected in the invitations to present findings, policy briefs, offer consultation and training as follows:

- 1) Invited presentation in an International Symposium on Historic Abuse in Spain hosted by EUSARF (15.09.16)
- 2) Invited presentation for Forgotten Australians Justice Alliance Community Forum 14.2.16 to inform their campaign for redress.
- 3) Invited presentation to National Conference of KNOWMORE (organization providing free legal aid to navigate the Royal Commission composed of lawyers, social workers and cultural engagement advisors).
- 4) Invited presentation to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Workforce Support Unit of the Aboriginal at their Stolen Generations Workforce Support Forum (15.3.16) Aboriginal Health College.
- 6) Invited consultation with national representatives of the Executive of the Healing Foundation 21.01.2016.
- 7) Requests from local schools to contribute curriculum modules on Forgotten Australians and Child Migrants.

Media The significance of the findings resulted in extensive media coverage (print, radio and TV) as below:

Sydney Morning Herald: <http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/no-child-should-grow-up-like-this-unsw-launches-report-into-institutional-care-20161210-gt88ox.html>

Guardian Australia: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/12/australian-children-pre-1990s-care-suffered-lifelong-disadvantage-says-report?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

ABC Radio Australia <http://www.radioaustralia.net.au/international/2016-12-12/abuse-victims-worry-about-being-locked-in-cupboards-not-being-loved-if-returned-to-care/1638898>

SBS World News Australia

<http://www.sbs.com.au/news/video/830704195880/SBS-World-News-12-December-630-part-2>

UNSW Newsroom: <http://newsroom.unsw.edu.au/news/social-affairs/unsw-led-research-reveals-devastating-impact-growing-care>

<http://www.theage.com.au/nsw/no-child-should-grow-up-like-this-unsw-launches-report-into-institutional-care-20161210-gt88ox.html>

As direct consequence of the media coverage Professor Fernandez participated in an interview with the BBC to discuss this study's findings on Child Migrants and was invited to participate in the UK Inquiry on Child Migrants.

5. ENGAGEMENT

Significant industry appointments, memberships and awards Appointments to reference and advisory groups recognise the expertise of Prof Fernandez in out-of-home care research and provide opportunities to use research findings to influence policy and practice

Prof Fernandez chairs the Research Forum of ACWA (an industry peak body), serves on its Critical Friends Advisory Group, and has undertaken major roles in

organizing National and International Conferences on Children's Wellbeing and Child Welfare: Chair, Scientific Committee of the Biennial National Conferences of the Association of Child Welfare Agencies, Australia in 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016, which is a major forum for practitioners.

She has been a research adviser to major projects commissioned by the Department of Family and Community Services NSW such as 1) Five year longitudinal study of children in care; 2) Research review on permanency planning; 3) Licensing Standards and Regulation in Children's Services; 4) Relationship between Child Protection and Children's Services; 5) Evaluation Framework for the Implementation of the *Children & Young Person's (Care and Protection) Act 1998* and a member of consortia evaluating projects such as 'Families First' and 'Stronger Families and Communities Initiative'. She has been a consultant to the NSW Community Services Commission in its reviews on 1) Contact between Children in Care and their Families; and 2) Children in Foster Care.

Professional development and training

Prof Fernandez routinely engages with industry through seminars such as these recent examples:

- Fernandez, E. A. (2017). Uprooted from everything that attaches you: Long-term outcomes of former child migrants in care in Australia, Department of Education, University of Oxford, Public Seminar 15 October 2017.
- Fernandez, E. A. (2017). Analysing child protection and reunification processes and outcomes in Australia. Invited Presentation to senior government advisors, Department of Education, Westminster, London
- Fernandez, E. A. (2017). Children between Families: Reunification Research Overview and Policy Implications, Department of Family and Community Services, 5 December 2017.
- Fernandez, E. & Blunden, H. (2016) The Lived experience and Long-Term Outcomes of Australian Care Leavers, 'Pathways to Protection and Permanency: Getting it Right for Children, Young People and Families', Association of Children Welfare Agencies, Sydney, Australia, 15th-18th August 2016

Media and public awareness

Prof Fernandez has generated a high media profile as demonstrated in the case example. She is regularly sought out for media comment on matters relating to children in OOHC and adults who endured institutional abuse as children.

Significant industry partnerships

Prof Fernandez has longstanding links with the NSW Department of Family and Community Services, Barnados Australia, and the Association of Child Welfare Agencies.

6. RESEARCH INCOME

Category 1 (international and national competitive)

1. Fernandez, E., Jung-Sook Lee; Courtney, M; Stein M; Foote W; Cheers D; Pocock J; Gray R; Walsh K; Conroy S. *Forgotten Australians: Identifying long term outcomes for people who lived in institutional and other forms of out-of-home care*, 2013-2016. ARC Linkage grant (with Barnados, Micah Projects, Berry St and others) \$340,000.
2. Fernandez, E. Del Fabro, P., Kettler, L. *Care matters: Capturing outcomes for children in foster care*, 2009-2011. ARC Linkage Grant \$169,600.
3. Fernandez, E. and Del Fabbro, P. *A national comparative analysis of child, family and service factors contributing to successful and unsuccessful reunification outcomes in out-of-home care*, 2009-2011. ARC Linkage Grant (multiple state government partners) \$426,000.
4. Fernandez, E. *Pathways to permanency: A study of foster care reunification outcomes*, 2005-2007. ARC Linkage Grant \$222,000.
5. Fernandez, E. *Looking after children: Pathways in substitute care*, 1998-2001. ARC Linkage Grant with Barnados Australia \$257,000.

Category 3 (Other industry)

Fernandez, E. Literature review on permanency planning, undertaken under contract.

7. RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Selected academic publications

1. Fernandez, E. A. (2017). Pathways to protection and permanency: getting it right for children, young people and families. *Developing Practice: The child youth and family work journal*, (47), 2-12.
2. Fernandez, E., Lee, J., Foote, W., Blunden, H., McNamara, P., Kovacs, S., Cornefert, P. (2017). 'There's More to be Done; Sorry is Just a Word': Legacies of Out-of-Home Care in the 20th Century', *Children Australia*, vol. 42, pp. 176 - 197, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/cha.2017.29>
3. Fernandez, E., Delfabbro, P., Ramia, I., Kovacs, S. (2017), 'Children returning from care: The challenging circumstances of parents in poverty', *Children and Youth Services Review*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.008>
4. Fernandez, E., & Lee, J. S. (2017). Experiences and Outcomes of Adults Who Endured Maltreatment as Children in Care in Australia in the Twentieth Century. in *Child Maltreatment in Residential Care History, Research, and Current Practice* (pp. 419-460). Springer. Retrieved from <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319579894>
5. Fernandez, E., Delfabbro, P., Ramia, I. O., & Kovacs, S. (2017). Children Returning from Care: The Challenging Circumstances of Parents in Poverty. *Special Issue, Children and Youth Services Review*. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2017.06.008
6. Fernandez, E., Zeira, A., Vecchiato, T., Canali, C. (eds.), (2015). *Theoretical and Empirical Insights into Child and Family Poverty: Cross National Perspectives*, Children's Well-Being: Indicators and Research Series, Springer, Switzerland, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-17506-5>
7. Delfabbro, P., Fernandez, E., McCormick, J., Ketter L. (2015) 'An Analysis of Reunification from Out-of-Home Care in Three Australian States', *Child Indicators Research*, vol. 8, pp. 359 - 373, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12187-014-9238-6>
8. Fernandez, E. (2014), 'Child protection and vulnerable families: Trends and issues in the Australian context', *Social Sciences*, vol. 3, pp. 785 - 808, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci3040785>
9. Fernandez, E., Atwool, N. (2013). 'Child protection and out of home care: Policy, practice, and research connections Australia and New Zealand', *Psychosocial Intervention*, vol. 22, pp. 175 - 184, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5093/in2013a21>
10. Fernandez, E.A., (2011), 'Child Inclusive Policy, Practice and Research', Guest Editor, *Children and Youth Services Review, USA*. Special Issue, vol. 13,4.

