

ADVANCING SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH - IMPACT CASE STUDY CLARE TILBURY

Title of Case Study:

SCHOOL TO WORK TRANSITION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE

Researcher and Institution
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1. CONTEXT

There is increasing attention in the child protection field to improving life outcomes for children and young people, beyond their immediate protection from abuse or neglect. Evidence primarily from the UK and US indicated lower educational achievement for children in care compared to peers, but there was limited research on the transition to work and employment outcomes. The researchers set out to investigate how child protection authorities prepared young people for this transition in Queensland, and what could be done to improve career preparation for young people in care. This work was timely and responsive as national interest was evident in the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020*. Federal, State, and Territory Governments agreed to improve support for young people leaving care as a priority, in recognition of the financial and social costs of poor adult outcomes for care leavers. The research program forms part of Tilbury's broader research agenda on performance measurement in child protection.

2. SUMMARY OF IMPACT

Impact on policy: The research led to improved understanding among policy makers, professionals, service providers, and carers about the actions needed to help young people get work-ready, and more focus in policy documents on education and employment in planning for the transition from care.

Impact on service delivery: The research provided evidence to inform an intervention program, *Ignite Aspirations*, in one Queensland region to (1) equip foster and kinship carers to provide career planning support to young people; (2) provide tailored career advice to young people in care; (3) raise awareness of the importance of this issue to child protection practitioners; and (4) establish a social enterprise to give young people in care work experience. New practice tools in the form of a career booklet and website were developed for young people in care. These are promoted nationally by CREATE Foundation (advocacy by and for young people in care) and regularly requested by practitioners in government and nongovernment agencies who work with young people in care. Based on the booklet and website, the Department developed a digital app (sortli) to promote access to information and resources for young people.

3. RESEARCH UNDERPINNING IMPACT

The program of research, conducted 2006-2018, has three strands:

1. Understanding the educational needs of children and young people in care. Educational participation and success is key to career development. These four industry-funded projects highlighted the extent of educational needs for children in care and evaluated interventions to respond to these needs. They provided evidence for more resources and caseworker attention to be directed to educational attainment.

- 2009: Study examined educational status and needs of school-aged children placed in foster care in south-east Qld (n=39). Using clinical data mining, data were collected about school experiences, attendance, educational achievements and needs, health needs, and supports provided. The study detailed the barriers to satisfactory participation and attainment at school and the need for better linkages between child protection, education, and health systems.
- 2009: A literature review was conducted for the Out-of-Home Care Education Working Party (a collaboration between out-of-home care agencies and education providers) to inform a report that was widely used to advocate for more services and more attention to education for children in care.

- 2010: Evaluation of the Educational Specialist role in out-of-home care services, designed to better assess and respond to complex educational needs.
- 2010: Evaluation of the Edmund Rice Education Youth+ Bridge Program, an education intervention for young people 12-15 years who were not attending school.

2. Career development for children and young people in care. These studies provided a detailed examination of preparation for the school to work transition and demonstrated the need for specific interventions to enhance career development and employment outcomes for this population.

- 2006 Griffith University New Researcher Grant - A qualitative study of practitioner perspectives on school to work transitions for young people in care found that career development was not well-understood, practitioners were pessimistic about prospects for children in care, and little attention was paid to helping them develop work aspirations.
- The preliminary study laid the foundation for an ARC Linkage Project in partnership with the Queensland Government - Promoting successful further education and work transitions for young people in state care. A mixed method study (surveys and interviews) compared career development processes for 202 in-care and not-in-care young people. Longitudinal interview data were obtained from young people in care in 3 waves. The overall picture was one of young people in care lacking the encouragement, resources and capacity to realistically plan for the job they want. Young people in care had lower occupational and educational aspirations, engaged in less career planning, and perceived more career barriers than their peers. Foster carers, caseworkers, and school staff were also interviewed and this revealed a lack of clarity about what support could be provided by different personnel involved with children in care.
- An extension of this project in 2008 enabled the development of on-line workbook, followed by a 2011 extension that evaluated new initiatives undertaken in one region, both funded by the Queensland Government.

3. Transition from care program effectiveness. Many young people leave care at 18 years, often having to leave a placement and live independently at the same time they are aiming to join the workforce or undertake further education. Two government-funded studies evaluated the implementation and effectiveness of services designed to improve support for young people in the transition to adult life, managing jobs, housing, education, social networks and independence. Both used a combination of administrative data and interviews with stakeholders and clients.

- 2010 Evaluation of Life Without Barriers transition from care program
- 2017 Evaluation of Next Step After Care program

4. DETAILS OF IMPACT

Approach to impact: The program of research aimed from its beginnings to influence policy, service delivery, and professional practice, with the goal of improving educational participation and work outcomes for children and young people in care. The approach was to tackle an internationally-significant, practice-relevant problem in partnership with policy-makers and practitioners. Planning for impact started in the planning phase via discussions about the nature of the problem to be investigated, what previous research had found, and current policies and practices. Even this stage prompted a review of policy by the Queensland department. Partnerships were activated at both policy and practice levels of the organisation to facilitate buy-in to participate in the research, and continuous consideration of the research findings and implications for practice.

Impact on policy: The research program exposed the lack of career planning for young people in care, lack of role clarity in responding to needs, and

provided impetus and evidence to inform policy changes in Queensland in three directions: (1) encouraging aspiration – exposing young people to information, experiences, and role models from a range of careers to see the opportunities available to them; (2) raising expectations – helping young people to identify their skills and interests and match these to future careers so that they can develop realistic expectations; and (3) increasing self-efficacy – helping young people to succeed at school and develop the confidence to pursue their career goals. The Department of Child Safety developed new policies that elevated their response to career development in school-to-work transition policies, <https://www.qld.gov.au/youth/family-social-support/planning-transition-independence>

Submissions on policy and law reform: Prof Tilbury made a submission to the Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry which featured findings of the research on the need to improve the educational and career needs of children in care: http://www.childprotectioninquiry.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/161358/Tilbury_Clarre.PDF

The Commission's final report (2015) cited the research on p.236 and recommended that the Department of Education continue to ensure that schools take responsibility for educational outcomes for children in care and that the child protection responsibilities for the Department of Education be specified in Minister Charter Letters and in senior executive performance agreements.

Impact on service delivery: The research was part of broader efforts to improve supports for young people leaving care. It cannot be claimed that the research directly led to service delivery changes but it provided impetus and evidence for change. In partnership with industry, the researchers translated findings into easy-to-use practice resources to ensure accessibility.

- A career booklet was developed for young people http://createyourfuture.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Out-of-Care_2012.pdf. The resources are promoted by CREATE nationally. Positive feedback from young people who used the career booklet was reported in a review of the resources in *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*, 36, 96-97.
- The career booklet was drawn upon for an app development titled *sortli (sort out your life)*, a digital resource widely used by young people <http://createyourfuture.org.au/about-me/leaving-care/sortli/>

The research highlighted the need for services that directly aimed to improve the school to work transition:

- The *Ignite Aspirations* program was developed and commenced in one Queensland region to (1) equip foster and kinship carers to provide career planning support to young people; (2) provide tailored career advice to young people in care; (3) raise awareness of the importance of this issue to child protection practitioners; and (4) establish a social enterprise to give young people in care work experience.
- The government funded nongovernment organisations to improve pathways to higher education and employment for young people in care, allocating funding for (1) a transition from care service; (2) a statewide 'Next Step After Care' service; and (3) 'Care to Achieve' scholarships for young women leaving care <https://www.thsmithfamily.com.au/campaigns/care2achieve-scholarship-for-young-women-leaving-care-qld>

Impact on quality of life for young people in care

Young people in care are likely to have benefitted directly from the resources developed, but the research did not evaluate whether and how their career skills and outcomes improved. The research features and advocates for the involvement of young people and their carers, so that their experiences and perspectives can inform service models.

5. ENGAGEMENT

To engage with industry, disseminate research findings, and increase impact, Prof Tilbury has used the following strategies:

- A research project steering committee comprised of researchers and industry representatives was established to provide advice on research design, data collection, and analysis and planned dissemination activities.
- Presentations to practitioners and policy makers throughout the life of the project, and ongoing.
- Involvement in sector working parties and advisory bodies.

- Development and distribution of practice resources.
- Preparation of industry reports available to be posted on agency websites.
- Targeted meetings with policy makers to advocate for change, undertaken jointly with industry partners.

Significant industry appointments, memberships and awards

Appointments to reference and advisory groups provide opportunities to use research findings to influence policy and practice. Prof Tilbury has held appointments in high level government and industry bodies, such as:

- 2016-current Member, Stakeholder Advisory Group – provides expert advice to the Department of Child Safety on the development, implementation and monitoring of child and family reform policy and programs.
- 2016-2017 Member, Queensland Family and Child Commission Advisory Council <https://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/advisory-council>
- 2013-2016 Board Member, Forde Foundation Board of Advice, providing financial aid to Forgotten Australians and people living in institutional care as children
- 2014-2015 Member, Research Advisory Committee for Royal Commission Institutional Responses to Sexual Abuse
- 2012-13 Member, Advisory Committee for the Child Protection Commission of Inquiry
- 2009-12 Member, Queensland Government Child Safety Innovators Group

Professional development and training

Clare Tilbury is engaged extensively with child protection practitioners from NGOs and government in Queensland and has made many presentations on this program of research, including:

- 2007-2009 during project implementation, annual progress seminars to inform departmental staff of emerging findings and discuss practice implications.
- 2009 Invited to facilitate cross-government meeting on new child protection policy proposal 'Future Directions'
- 2010 presentation at Australian Child Welfare Association Conference
- 2012 Launch of career planning website, career booklet, and carer tip sheets.
- 2012 Posted 1600 copies of career development booklet to young people in care and distributed multiple copies to each child safety service centre.
- 2012-2016 organised annual Qld Child Protection Research Network symposiums bringing researchers and practitioners together to discuss current research
- 2013 presentation to North Coast Child Safety out-of-home care forum
- 2013 presentation to Create Conference
- 2015 presentation to North Coast Child Safety out-of-home care forum
- 2016 presentation to Zonta Brisbane

Reports for Industry

Industry research reports enhance access to research for policy makers and practitioners:

- Tilbury, C. (2011). *Evaluation of LWB Transition from Care program*, commissioned by Department of Communities.
- Walsh, P. and Tilbury, C. (2011). *The Bridge Program Evaluation Report* commissioned by Edmund Rice Education Australia Youth +
- Tilbury, C. and Working Group on Education for Children and Young People in Out-of-home Care (2011). *Education Matters*.
- Creed, P, Tilbury, C., Buys, N., Crawford, M., and Praskova, A. (2012). *Out of care and onto further education, training and work: Career and life planning for young people in care*. Brisbane: Griffith University.
- Tilbury C and Comerford L. (2016). *Career Aspirations Strategy: Career Guidance for Young People in Care in the North Coast Region: Evaluation report*, commissioned by Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

Significant industry partnerships

Prof Tilbury secured repeat research grants and contracts on this program of research with Queensland Department of Child Safety, Life Without Barriers, and Edmund Rice Education Youth+.

In 2011 she was appointed to the Life Without Barriers Carol Peltola Chair that recognized her research in this field, and in 2016 was appointed to the Leneen Forde Chair of Child and Family Research, a partnership between Griffith University and the Department of Child Safety. Both these roles had an aim of promoting research into practice. The Minister Hon. Shannon Fentimen on awarding the Leneen Forde Chair stated: "Professor Tilbury has been appointed to strengthen research in these fields and to help us best inform child and family reforms". <https://app.secure.griffith.edu.au/news/2016/04/22/griffith-professor-leads-child-protection-research-in-queensland/> 22 April 2016.

Research supervision and teaching

Two PhD graduates supervised on this topic have significant appointments in the child protection sector with direct influence on practice, including promoting a focus on improving life outcomes for children in care.

- Reeny Jurczynszyn, PhD 2014. Care to Higher and Further Education. Employed as Manager, Child Protection and Forensic Medical Service, Children's Hospital and Health Service, Queensland Health.
- Meegan Crawford, PhD 2015. The Role of Carers and Caseworkers in the Transition from School-to-Work for Young People in Care. Employed as Director, Practice Connect, Qld Dept Child Safety, Youth and Women.

Prof Tilbury co-authored a child protection textbook, *Good Practice in Child Protection*, which is used extensively by novice professionals and in undergraduate teaching in social work, human services, and allied health.

6. RESEARCH INCOME

The program of research attracted over \$0.6million in funding.

Category 1 (international and national competitive)

1. Creed, P., Tilbury, C., and Buys, N. Promoting successful further education and work transitions for young people in state care, 2007-2009. ARC Linkage Project \$201,000.

Category 2 (government)

2. Venables, J. & Tilbury, C. Evaluation of Next Step After Care program, 2017. Department of Child Safety \$197,815.
3. Tilbury, C., Creed, P., & Buys, N. Supporting successful school to work transitions for young people in care, 2011. Department of Child Safety \$27,272.
4. Tilbury, C., Creed, P., & Buys, N. Rural and remote issues – school to work transitions, 2008-2009. Department of Child Safety \$123,000.

Category 3 (Other industry)

5. Tilbury, C. & Walsh, P. Evaluation of Bridge Program, 2012. Edmund Rice Education Youth+ \$26,555.
6. Tilbury, C. Evaluation of Transition from Care program, 2011. Life Without Barriers \$18,662.
7. Tilbury, C. Evaluation of educational specialist role, 2011. Life Without Barriers and Edmund Rice Education \$26,180.
8. Tilbury, C. Literature review for Education Matters, 2010. Edmund Rice Education \$3,625.
9. Tilbury, C. Educational status and needs for children in care, 2009. Life Without Barriers \$9,090.

Other funding

10. Tilbury, C. Preliminary Examination of Issues Associated with the School to Work Transition for Young People in Care and Recent Care Leavers, 2006. Griffith University New Researcher Grant \$10,934.

7. RESEARCH OUTPUTS

Selected academic publications

1. Tilbury, C., Creed, P., Buys, N., Osmond, J., & Crawford, M. (2014). Making a connection: school engagement of young people in care. *Child & Family Social Work*, 19, 4, 455–466. doi:10.1111/cfs.12045
2. Creed, P., Buys, N., Tilbury, C., & Crawford, M. (2013). The relationship between goal orientation and career striving in young adolescents. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 43, 7, 1480–1490.
3. Creed, P., Tilbury, C., Buys, N., & Crawford, M. (2011). Cross-lagged relationships between career aspirations and goal orientation in early adolescents. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 78, 1, 92–99.
4. Crawford, M., Tilbury, C., Creed, P., & Buys, N. (2011). The Role of Carers and Caseworkers in the School-to-work Transition of Young People in Care. *Australian Social Work*, 64, 4, 459–474. doi: 10.1080/0312407X.2010.537353
5. Creed, P., Tilbury, C., Buys, N., & Crawford, M. (2011). The career aspirations and action behaviours of Australian adolescents in out-of-home-care. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 33, 9, 1720–1729.
6. Buys, N., Tilbury, C., Creed, P., & Crawford, M. (2011). Working with youth in-care: implications for vocational rehabilitation practice. *Disability & Rehabilitation*, 33, 1125–1135. doi: 10.3109/09638288.2010.521614
7. Tilbury, C., Creed, P., Buys, N., & Crawford, M. (2011). School to work transition for young people in care: perspectives of young people, carers and professionals. *Child & Family Social Work*, 16, 3, 345–352.
8. Tilbury, C. (2010). Educational status of children and young people in care. *Children Australia*, 35, 4, 7-13.
9. Tilbury, C., Buys, N. and Creed, P. (2009). Perspectives of young people in care about their school-to-work transition, *Australian Social Work*, 62, 476-490.
10. Crawford, M. & Tilbury, C. (2007). Child protection workers' perspectives on the school to work transition for young people in care. *Australian Social Work*, 60, 3, 308-320.

