



Fostering Lifelong Connections: Collaborative action research on Family Time practices

NSW Department of Communities and Justice
Research to Practice Webinar

**Less talk of contact, more talk of
family time: how to build enduring
connections for children in care**

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Research Centre for Children & Families



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SYDNEY



We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.

Tree of Knowledge - pokerwork on kangaroo skin, Lynette Riley, 2010

<http://Sydney.edu.au/kinship-module>



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ARC Linkage - Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care



Research Team

Chief investigators: Associate Professor Amy Conley Wright, Professor Judith Cashmore AO, Dr Lynette Riley, Dr Susan Collings

Research Centre for Children & Families: Sarah Ciftci, Dr Betty Luu, Megan Mitchell, Suzanne Pope

Partner investigators: Professor Elsbeth Neil (University of East Anglia) & Professor Peter Pecora (University of Washington & Casey Family Programs), Matthew Jones (NSW DCJ) and Robert Urqhart (Barnardos Australia)

The University of Sydney

Partner Organisations

- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- Barnardos Australia,
- CareSouth,
- Catholic Care Hunter-Manning,
- Catholic Care Wollongong,
- Key Assets,
- Uniting,
- Wesley Dalmar

22 Caseworkers and 11 Casework Managers from partner organisations are the study's action researchers.

4 study sites: Dubbo, Maitland, Sydney, Wollongong

Expert Reference Group

Experts-by-Experience Young people, mothers, carers

Bobby Hendry, Miimi Morris, Malcolm Sky, Jacqui Kaelle, Billy Black and Tegan Whittaker

Experts-by-Profession

Mariaelena Albu, Professor Judy Atkinson, Sue Burrati, Sue Foley, Steve Kinmond, Associate Professor Loyola McLean, Rowena Medland, Bernadette Wood, Ananda Hall

Permanency with lifelong connections

Aim: Build practices for improving quality interactions between children and their birth and permanent care families

Listening to the views of young people

Relational



Ongoing contact with birth family



Legal

Developing workforce skills and processes

Life story work

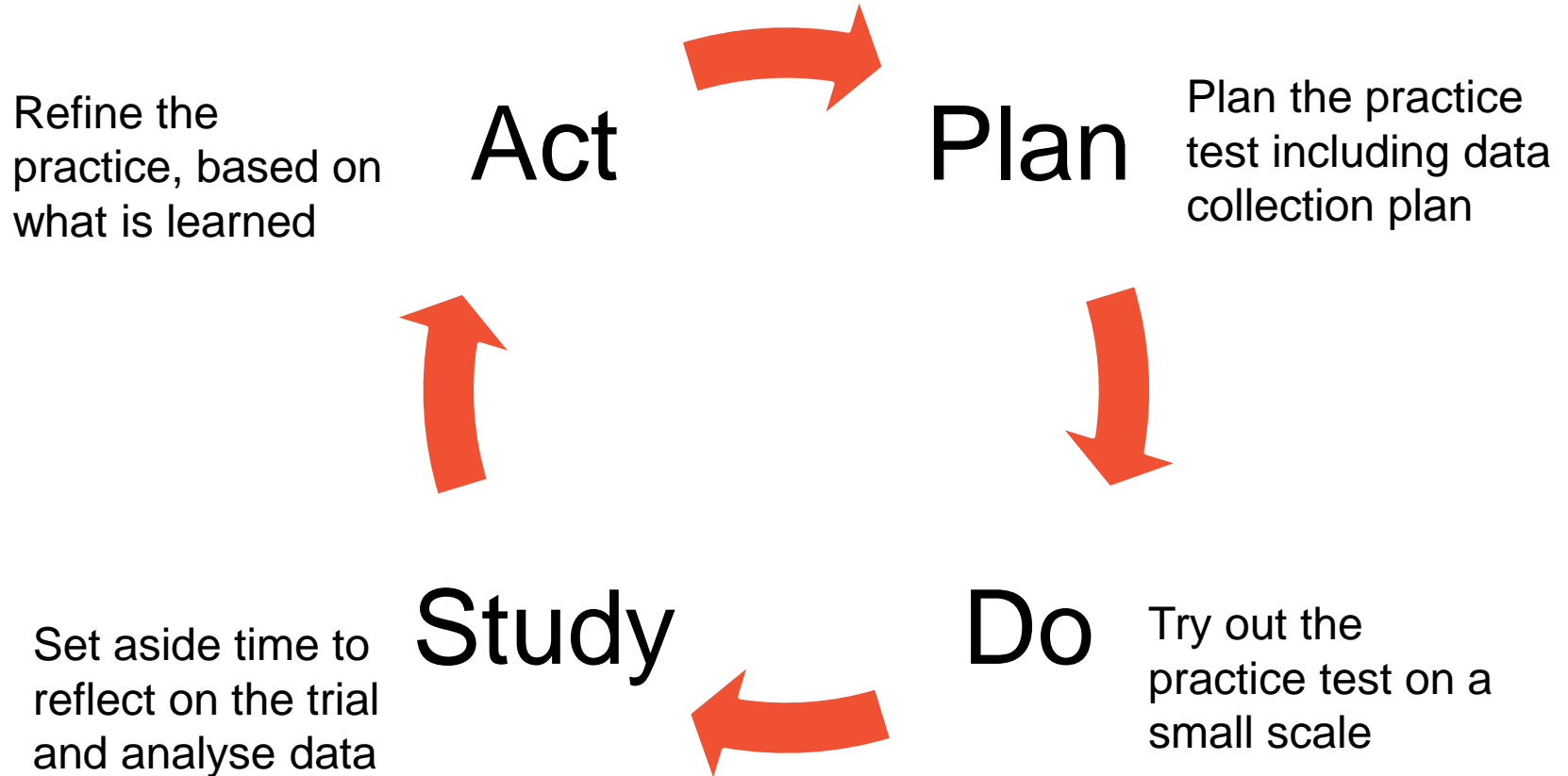
Cultural connection

Home



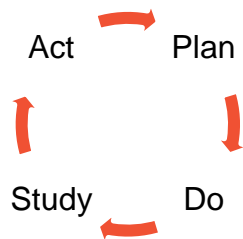
Developing relationship-building practices

Method: Breakthrough Series Collaborative

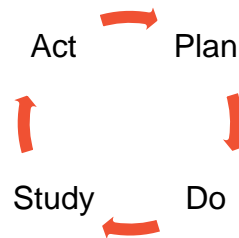


Method: Breakthrough Series Collaborative

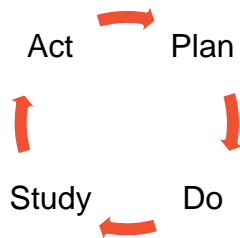
Learning session 1-
Initiation
Feb 2020



Learning session 2-
Refinement
Oct 2020



Learning session 3-
Sustainability
May 2021



Learning session 4-
Dissemination
Nov 2021

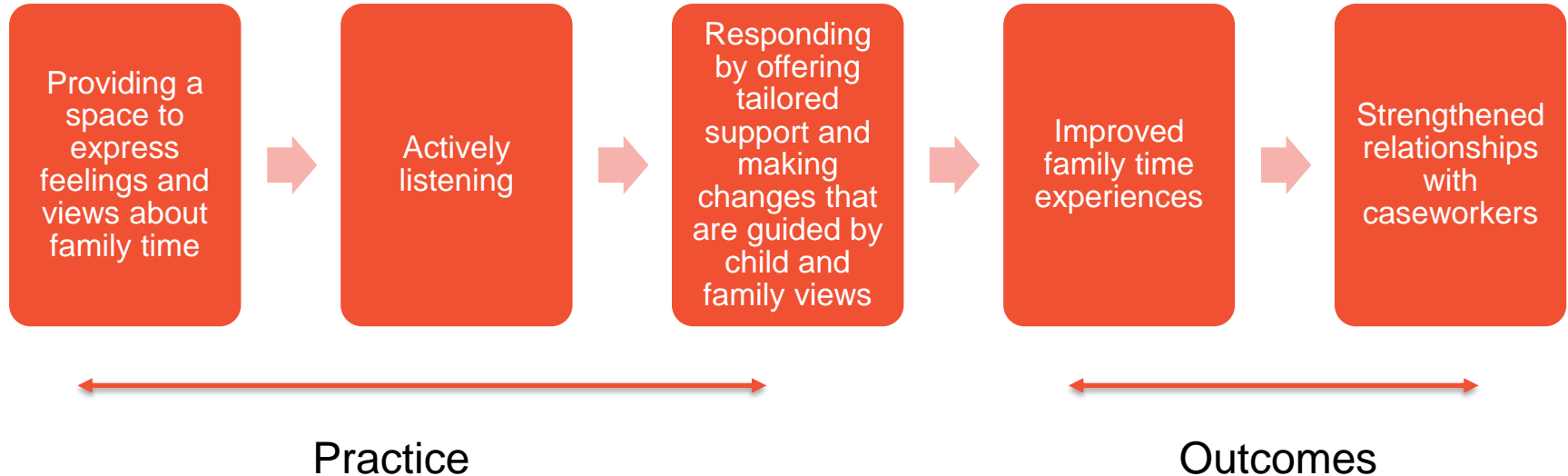
Scaling up in Partner
Organisations and resource
development for the sector
Dec 2022

Menu of practices being trialled so far...

Practice descriptions	Trial
Cultural mentoring - Identify at least one cultural feature that is a strength to build on for the child and include an activity related to this in visits.	Cycle 2, Dubbo
Carer coaching - Maintain regular contact with carers before/after visits to offer feedback on their efforts and encourage reflection to improve future interactions with parents[relatives].	Cycle 2, Wollongong
Co-regulation - Assist birth relatives and carers to reflect on and understand their own emotions so they can respond sensitively to children's reactions and manage behaviour that arises before/after visits.	Cycle 2, Sydney & Maitland
Debriefing - Meet or talk to child, parent and/or carer before and/or after visit about what worked well and what to improve.	Cycle 1, Wollongong & Sydney
Facilitate Family Time at a distance - Assist children and families to use technology-based communication (e.g., video or calls/group chats) or no-tech exchanges of letters, artwork, photos	Cycle 1, Maitland & Dubbo

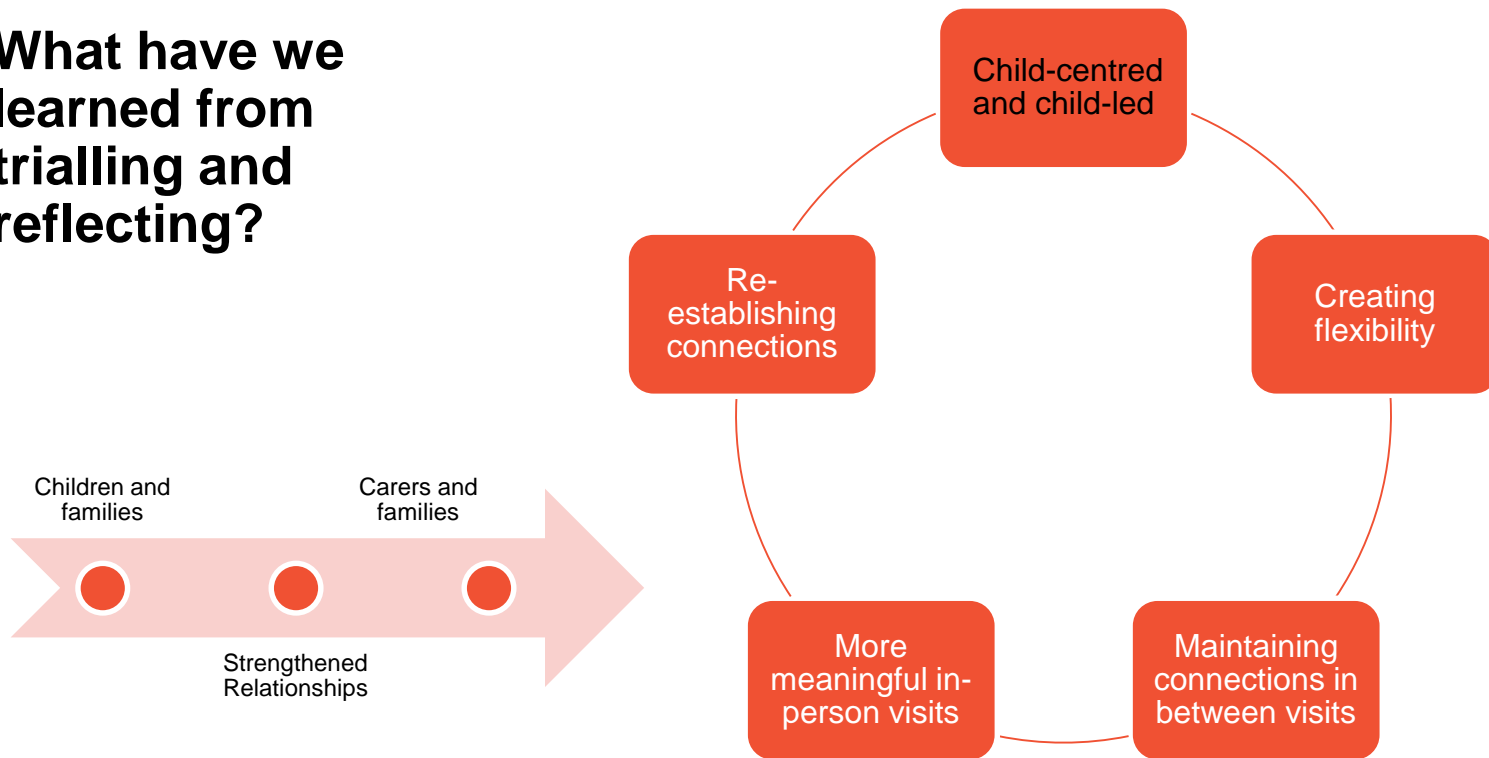
Debriefing

What have we learned from trialling and reflecting?



Family Time from a Distance

What have we learned from trialling and reflecting?



Key messages

What is the goal of family time?

Contact should be:

- **highly accessible**
- **emotionally low-key**
- **focused on relationship development**

Contact should emulate normal relationships as closely as possible!

Key messages

Foster children have unanimously experienced neglect and grief of loss.
The point of family time is to foster multiple secure attachments, just like those enjoyed by children who are not in care.

Frequent & Accessible

video chat
text
send videos
write letters
regular phone call

Emotionally Casual

stay casual
stay familiar
focus on chatting
focus on cooperative
games

Focus on relationship development

children need more secure attachments
children need skills to manage difficult
relationships
children need frequent, safe, casual
contact with people long-term

Contact should emulate normal relationships as closely as possible!

Different ways of thinking

Contact

- Contact is *transactional* – being in the same place at the same time to tick off court requirements

Family Time

- Family Time is *relational* – it's about the quality of the interaction to build connection, and involves communication as well as visits