Practices for fostering lifelong cultural connections for Aboriginal children in care

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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
Overview

• Acknowledgment of Country
• Welcome to session
• Overview of the Fostering Lifelong Connections project
• Developing video resources for the sector
• Video premier:
  • The Bridge
  • Building Bridges
• Reflections on fostering family and cultural connections
ARC Linkage - Fostering Lifelong Connections for Children in Permanent Care

Partner organisations
NSW DCJ, Barnardos Australia, CareSouth, Catholic Care Hunter Manning, Catholic Care Wollongong, Key Assets, Uniting, Wesley Dalmar

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

Research Centre for Children & Families: Sarah Ciftci, Dr Betty Luu, 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 Dr Robert Urquhart (Barnardos Australia)

Expert Reference Group: Experts-by-Experience and Experts-by-Profession
Project aim

Develop, test, embed, and disseminate relationship-building practices to encourage sustainable, positive relationships between children’s carers and families for children in long-term care (foster care, Kinship care, guardianship or open adoption)

Painting by Coomaditchie artists created with the FLC action researchers

The University of Sydney
Action research methodology and scaling up practices

Learning session 1 - Initiation
*Feb 2020*

Learning session 2 - Refinement
*Oct 2020*

Learning session 3 - Sustainability
*June 2021*

Learning session 4 - Dissemination
*February 2022*

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

1. Trauma awareness
2. Cultural safety and respect
3. Reflective practice
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice descriptions</th>
<th>Trial</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Debriefing</strong> - Meet or talk to child, parent and/or carer before and/or after visit about what worked well and what to improve.</td>
<td>Cycle 1, Wollongong &amp; Sydney</td>
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<td><strong>Facilitate Family Time at a distance</strong> - Assist children and families to use technology-based communication (e.g., video or calls/group chats) or no-tech exchanges of letters, artwork, photos</td>
<td>Cycle 1, Maitland &amp; Dubbo</td>
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<td><strong>Carer coaching</strong> - Maintain regular contact with carers before/after visits to offer feedback on their efforts and encourage reflection to improve future interactions with the child’s parents or other relatives.</td>
<td>Cycle 2, Wollongong</td>
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<td><strong>Co-regulation</strong> - 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.</td>
<td>Cycle 2, Sydney &amp; Maitland</td>
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<td><strong>Cultural connections</strong> – Document practices that support children connecting to their culture through their relationships and time spent with family.</td>
<td>Cycle 2, Dubbo</td>
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<td><strong>Hearing children’s voices</strong> - Work with carers to collect children’s immediate feedback after visits and discuss with carers and birth relatives</td>
<td>Cycle 3, Sydney &amp; Wollongong</td>
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<td><strong>Supporting sibling connections</strong>- Ask children about their siblings and whom they would like to see, implement creative ways to keep children connected</td>
<td>Cycle 3, Dubbo &amp; Maitland</td>
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Connections to Family and Culture – Dubbo team

- The videos were developed from a participatory action research collaboration with six Aboriginal caseworkers from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and Uniting in Dubbo.

- We documented their experiences with supporting Aboriginal children’s connections to family and culture over 6 months.

- We met monthly to reflect on their practice and discuss how we could translate their good practice into resources for the OOHC sector.
OUR VISION

An Australia where Original Nations people are respected, embraced and supported to live a life of their own design.

OUR MISSION

Working with Original Nations Australians to build a best practice model, creating social change through collaborative storytelling.

OUR PROCESS

We facilitate, document and distribute creative and collaborative conversations that explore ‘the real, the ideal and the bridge’.
Behind the Scenes - Desert Pea Workshop
DCJ caseworkers with mural that inspires them
Talbragar Wiradjuri Dancers

Talbragar Wiradjuri Dancers on Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Talbragar-Wiradjuri-Aboriginal-Corporation-ICN-8444-1706439449622347/
On Location with Uncle Ralph Naden

Uncle Ralph Naden, Yalmambirra Boogijoon Doolin Cultural School, Balladoran
Phone number: 02 6881177

The University of Sydney
Screening of Films

The Bridge: https://youtu.be/lrWOzxB98c

Building Bridges: https://youtu.be/KkZXFL2GoXQ
Key themes

- **Lost**: “I felt like there was something missing in me. Like I didn’t know who I was”.

- **Bridge**: "[we are] a bridge between our carers and families”

- **Belonging**: “it makes me feel connected … That knowledge, that love gave me strength”
Reflections on fostering family and cultural connections

1) What has it been like to be part of the Fostering Lifelong Connections project?

2) What were the main messages you hoped to get across in the videos?

3) If caseworkers could do one thing tomorrow to help foster a cultural connection, what would you suggest?
Advice for non-Aboriginal caseworkers

• Be respectfully curious. Ask questions.

• Listen to the voice of the child. Ask the child who they want to see, who they are missing and yearning to connect with.

• Get out into the community and talk with families. They know what is important to them.
Viewing Guide for films

A viewing guide for caseworkers and social workers can be downloaded [here](#)

Topics include:
- Strength in Culture
- Listening to the child’s voice
- The power of conversations
- Practicing cultural safety and respect

Each topic has a set of accompanying reflective questions and activities.
Contacts and links

Research Centre Email: rccf.research@sydney.edu.au
Fostering Lifelong Connections Website: https://rccf-fostering-connections.sydney.edu.au/

Talbragar Wiradjuri Dancers Email: lewis@lewisburns.com
Talbragar Wiradjuri Dancers Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/Talbragar-Wiradjuri-Aboriginal-Corporation-ICN-8444-1706439449622347/

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