



Pilot Study

March 2011

Pathways of Care study

Community Services (NSW Department of Family and Community Services) is undertaking *Pathways of Care*, a large-scale representative longitudinal study that will follow children and young people aged 0–17 years entering out-of-home care (OOHC) on Children’s Court orders for the first time.

Community Services is undertaking the *Pathways of Care* study with assistance from a consortium of Australian researchers through the Australian Institute of Family Studies (including the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of NSW, the University of Sydney and the University of Adelaide) and Chapin Hall Centre for Children at the University of Chicago.

I-view, who are experts in social research data collection, have been engaged to conduct the interviews with carers, children and young people participating in this study. The pilot study was undertaken by I-view.

Aim of the pilot study

As part of the preparation for the *Pathways of Care study*, a pilot study was undertaken to review and operationalise the recruitment process and the data collection procedures for the carer survey. Specifically the pilot undertaken in October–December 2010 was conducted to:

- review procedures for identification, validation and recruitment of children and young people into the study
- test interviewer training and fieldwork processes
- test the carer survey instrument.

Sample identification, validation and recruitment

A *Pathways of Care* specific Corporate Information Warehouse (CIW) report on the Key Information Directory System (KIDS) OOHC data that allowed filtering by care period, region, Community Services’ Centre, entry age, Aboriginal status, current parental responsibility, first ever entry, placement provider, placement purpose and latest order status was developed by Community Services’ Information Management Branch.

Children and young people identified in the CIW report were checked for study eligibility (first time entry to care during recruitment period and in care for six months). As per the recruitment process the downloaded information from CIW was then verified by regional staff and the information updated in KIDS if required.

Pilot sample

Thirty four children and young people entering care in February 2010 were selected for the pilot sample, ensuring that all regions were included. Of these, 21 were excluded due to changing family or placement circumstances. Letters were sent to 12 carers of study eligible children and all their carers agreed to participate.

Interviewer training and survey instrument testing

A three-day training program was conducted for I-view interviewers by Community Services staff. The program consisted of an overview of: the role of Community Services and OOHC practice; interviewing vulnerable families; the *Pathways of Care* study and the interviewer procedures manual; the survey instrument modules; an opportunity to practice asking the interview questions; and a demonstration of direct measures including height, weight and language assessment.

The interviews were conducted with nine carers by trained I-view interviewers in Newcastle, Central Coast, Sydney, Blue Mountains and Dubbo, and included foster and kinship carers, different ages, different levels of carer experience

and one interview was conducted in a language other than English. The pilot interviews tested questionnaire length, modes of data collection, and carers' views on question format and clarity.

Parts of the survey instrument were also tested by Community Services staff at Community Services Managers Client Services briefings, consultations with non-government organisation (NGO) OOHHC providers, and with Aboriginal carers through a carers support group.

A debriefing session was conducted with the I-view interviewers to feedback the issues to the Community Services researchers on the pilot interview experience.

Key findings

- The selection of the sample using the CIW extract worked well..
- The majority of children and young people who were initially selected but no longer eligible were moving from placement and being restored to their parents.
- The mix of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) and Computer Assisted Self Interviewing (CASI) worked well and the time taken to complete the interview ranged from one hour 25 minutes to three hours, with mean interview duration of two hours and six minutes (excluding time taken for stops/interruptions).
- The language other than English interview went substantially over time due to extra time required for translation of questions, explaining concepts and how to answer the scales.
- Experiences of the carers reported by the interviewers varied but there were no major issues with the questionnaire, including the more sensitive self-completion sections. However the interviewers identified that some modules were repetitive and some of the language in the standardised measures was inappropriate in Australia.
- The carers said that they would participate in the next wave of annual interviews.
- The interviewers reported that they found working on this study enjoyable and overall the data collection procedures for the pilot survey worked well and the interviewer training was adequate.
- The Aboriginal carers who participated in focus groups and interviews stated that overall, the questionnaire would be acceptable to Aboriginal carers. The following specific comments from Aboriginal carers were noted for subsequent revision of the questionnaire:
 - too long and some questions repetitive
 - sections on case planning not directly applicable to kinship care placements
 - interview should provide opportunity for carers to relate their experiences of caring.
- The study design limited to three age cohorts (0–3 months, 3–5 years and 12–14 years) was queried during the questionnaire consultations and regional briefings.

Recommendations to improve recruitment processes, data collection procedures and the carer survey

- The sampling strategy for the main study needs to be revised to only include children who are on final Children's Court orders
- The sampling strategy for the main study needs to be revised to include all ages
- Some modifications to the sample recruitment processes will improve the processes
- A dedicated regional *Pathways of Care* e-mail box is required for data verification prior to sample recruitment
- KiDS data verification of both Community Services and NGO case-managed clients needs to be undertaken by Community Services regional staff
- The carer questionnaire needs to be shortened by at least 8% or ten minutes, repetition in modules needs to be removed and some of the language used in the standardised measures was inappropriate in Australia
- The language and translations needs of carers would need to be profiled so that sufficient numbers of bi-lingual interviewers are available. Translation of the questionnaire into key languages was recommended.

