



A newsletter for participants in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)

Executive Director Message

As the Executive Director of the Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR) branch within the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, I am pleased to support our Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study, which we are proud to say is the first large-scale prospective longitudinal study of children in out of home care (OOHC) in Australia. This unique and important study has gathered over ten years of comprehensive and significant evidence to contribute to the field of research and to inform policy and practice on the ground.

This year has been an exciting one for the POCLS, as we embrace new approaches to our work and welcome new partners to the project. We started the year with establishing our new POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel which will enrich our work and provide a dedicated Aboriginal perspective to the methodology, analysis and strategic research agenda.

We have co-designed our first Aftercare Survey, to speak to young people in the study cohort who are now 18 years and over. We are eager to hear their stories and learn from their experiences to improve the OOHC experience for others.

POCLS continues to lead efforts within the department to establish meaningful engagement and shared-decision making with our Aboriginal stakeholders and work towards implementing the Family is Culture Recommendations. We remain committed to reducing the over representation of Aboriginal children in care and supporting families to stay together wherever possible.



Jessica Stewart,
Executive Director,
FACSIAR, DCJ

What's on in 2024?

The POCLS has started the 6th round of interviews with children and caregivers, and these will continue into 2024. For the first time, we will also be interviewing the young people in the Study aged 18-25 years, implementing the newly developed 'Aftercare Survey' to hear about their experiences of leaving care, what's happened to them since and any after care support they may have received or still need. The information gathered will continue to be used to inform policy and support services.

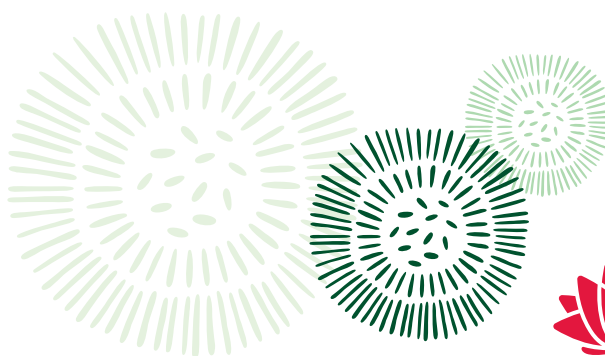
We'd like to interview you again

We hope that you continue to be part of the Study and we look forward to interviewing you again.

Please let us know your new contact details by calling:

- researchers at DCJ **1800 997 960**
- Ipsos/-view who conduct the interviews **1800 105 088**
- or email Pathways@facs.nsw.gov.au

For a reminder on why we do this Study, please visit:
www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care



How is the Study tracking?



We hope you continue to be part of the Study in 2023-24 and with your help, we can keep participation high!

Organisations supporting the Study



The CREATE Foundation represents the voices of children and young people with an OOHC experience.

Phone (02) 9267 1999
Email create@create.org.au



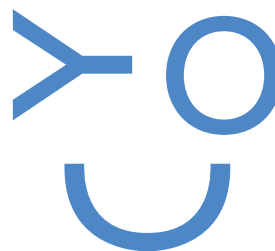
My Forever Family's goal is to see that all children in OOHC receive the care they deserve, and all carers receive the support and training they need.

Phone 1300 782 975



AbSec is the peak organisations for Aboriginal children and families in NSW, particularly those impacted by the child protection system.

Phone (02) 9559 5299
Email admin@absec.org.au



DCJ's Youth Consult for Change is a group of young people who give feedback on projects and issues that affect children and young people in OOHC.

Email youthconsultforchange@dcj.nsw.gov.au

Capturing the voices of young people: Aftercare Survey Design

The POCLS invited young people from CREATE, AbSec and DCJ's Youth Consult for Change group to pilot the Aftercare Survey and provide their feedback before it is delivered to the Study cohort in 2024. Participants said they found the questions very valuable and important to allow young people to share their experience of their time in care and after leaving care.

"I met with the team in charge of developing and administering the POCLS [aftercare] survey, ...to provide feedback necessary to improve or alter the survey in a way that is both suitable and practical for those it's being administered to. I found my involvement in the pilot program to be incredibly valuable, to provide feedback from the receiving end. We provided feedback on how each question may be framed in a more meaningful way, from a more trauma-informed perspective, and to introduce additional options for "select an answer" questions. We highlighted inclusivity and openness as additions to the survey to ensure each young person being administered the survey felt as though their voice was heard and valued. Having been included in the pilot program, I believe more young people with a care experience should be given the chance to have their voice and experiences heard and they be given the chance to provide the feedback needed to improve the way in which care is provided to them throughout their experiences."

CREATE Youth Participant

How the Study has informed policy and practice

Intensive Support Services

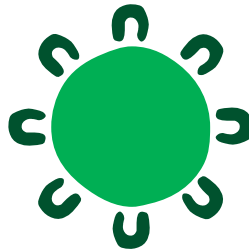
The POCLS data is used to produce Evidence to Action Notes to improve services and supports to children and young people living in OOHC and their families. These Notes have been widely distributed to DCJ Intensive Support Services (ISS) staff for professional learning and used across the ISS programs to inform practice.

The POCLS was part of the evidence base in the development of the **Elver Program model** of care, which provides multidisciplinary trauma informed mental health assessment and intervention service to children in OOHC (aged 6-17 years) affected by chronic trauma – in partnership with NSW Health. POCLS evidence has also been referenced in a range of forums and conferences highlighting the developmental vulnerabilities of children living in OOHC.

Caseworker Development

Findings from the POCLS, particularly on education and carer support, have been included in the **Caseworker Development Program** that all new DCJ caseworkers undertake. Specifically, POCLS findings have been used to:

- highlight the links between carer support and outcomes for children in OOHC
- advice about educational planning for children in OOHC and key events that should trigger a review and additional support.



Practice Advice

The Office of the Senior Practitioner within DCJ has the function of leading, supporting, reviewing and improving caseworker's practice with children and families. The POCLS findings have been used by the Office of the Senior Practitioner in various practice advice, including:

- **Family Time Practice Advice Topic** using evidence on factors promoting child socio-emotional wellbeing
- **Safety-in-care e-learning module**, using evidence on how to build relationships and foster family time in OOHC.
- **Restoration Practice advice**, using evidence on the importance of family time to support relationship building and skill development

Indigenous data sovereignty and governance

The POCLS is working with Ngaramanala, AbSec and the POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel to address recommendations from the **Family is Culture Review** and to work towards embedding principles of Indigenous data sovereignty and governance, and shared decision-making into the POCLS.

"The findings of the POCLS project have been extremely significant in informing and supporting DCJ casework practice with children and young people in care, their families and carers."

DCJ District Casework Team

Conference Presentations and Seminars

In September 2023, the POCLS team held a symposium at the Australian Social Policy Conference presenting on different aspects of children's wellbeing and experiences since entering OOHC.

DCJ Director Merran Butler presented key learnings from this decade-long research for policy and practice, and POCLS Senior Researcher Dr Nafisa Asif shared findings on placement stability and children's developmental outcomes. Other POCLS-affiliated researchers presented evidence on carer experience, resources, support needs; children's mental health; children's contact with mothers and developmental trajectories; outcomes of children with a disability; and children's pre-care characteristics and wellbeing trajectories.

Presentations are available on the Study Webpage:

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/pathways-of-care/pocls-publication/pocls-presentations

Information about future and past research seminars hosted by DCJ:

www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/research-seminars

Subscribe to receive information about future FACSIAR Lunch & Learn webinars www.facs.nsw.gov.au/resources/research/research-seminars/upcoming.

Research, publications and new analysis

Special Issue Child Abuse & Neglect

In 2019, DCJ commissioned external researchers to conduct analysis using the POCLS data through a competitive expression of interest (EOI) process. These papers have now been published in a Special Issue of the *International Journal Child Abuse & Neglect*.

Pathways of Care: A longitudinal study of children in care in Australia Judy Cashmore, Fred Wulczyn and POCLS Team (2023) [forthcoming]

Developmental trajectories of socio-emotional outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care – Insights from data of Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS), Nan Hu, Yalemzewod Assefa Gelaw, Ilan Katz, Elizabeth Fernandez, Kathleen Falster, Mark Hanly, B.J. Newton, Jennifer Stephensen, Paul Hotton, Karen Zwi, Raghu Lingam (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106196 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106196>

Trajectories for children and young people who experience out of home care: Examining the influences of pre-care characteristics on later wellbeing and placement stability, Catherine Wade (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106398 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106398>

Influence of placement stability on developmental outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care, Nafisa Asif, Courtney Breen, Robert Wells (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106145 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106145>

Restoration from out-of-home care for Aboriginal children: Evidence from the pathways of care longitudinal study and experiences of parents and children, B.J. Newton, Ilan Katz, Paul Gray, Solange Frost, Yalemzewod Gelaw, Nan Hu, Raghu Lingam, Jennifer Stephensen (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106058 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106058>

Infant's entering out-of-home care: health, developmental needs and service provision, Fernando Lima, Stephanie Taplin, Miram Maclean, Melissa O'Donnell (2023) [forthcoming]

Outcomes for children with disability in out-of-home care: Evidence from the pathways of care longitudinal study in Australia, Zhiming Cheng, Massimiliano Tani, Ilan Katz (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106246 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106246>

Positive reading achievement outcomes in children who experience out-of-home care: Characteristics and predictors, Miriam J. Maclean, Fernando Lima, Melissa O'Donnell (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106282 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106282>

Contact with mothers for children in out-of-home-care: Group-based trajectory modelling from the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS), Aino Suomi, Nina Lucas, Dave Pasalich, Morag McArthur (2023) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 106199 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106199>

Exploring the impact of child and placement characteristics, carer resources, perceptions and life stressors on caregiving and well-being Tayhla Ryder, Yvonne Zurynski, Rebecca Mitchell (2022) *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 105586 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105586>

Aboriginal-led and partnered research analysis projects

We are excited about the commencement of ten research projects that will use the POCLS data to address policy priority questions focussed on improving the lives of Aboriginal children in OOH. These Aboriginal led or partnered research projects were selected by a Steering Group chaired by the Deputy Secretary Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes and will be underway throughout 2024.

1. Configuring an Indigenous data ecosystem: Aboriginal children in out-of-home care in NSW. Professor Marcia Langton, University of Melbourne
2. Exploring the cultural health and care gap among Aboriginal children and young people in the out-of-home care system. Elder Ted Fields, UNSW.
3. Understanding the potential impact of carers on the experiences and care outcomes of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care using the POCLS. Dr BJ Newton, UNSW.
4. Exploring how parental and family characteristics influences child protection reporting and removal, and out-of-home care experiences for Aboriginal children under two years of age. Dr BJ Newton, UNSW.
5. Supporting the mental health of Aboriginal children in care and leaving care. Professor Sandra Eades, University of Melbourne

6. Cultural continuity and stability for Aboriginal children and young people. Dr Wendy Hermeston, University of Melbourne
7. Developing profiles to support the restoration of Aboriginal children to their families. Dr Natalie Strobel, Edith Cowan University
8. Describing primary health care utilisation and medication uptake amongst Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care. Dr Natalie Strobel, Edith Cowan University
9. Exploring the experiences of Aboriginal girls that go missing from out-of-home care then have contact with the criminal justice system. Dr Phillipa Evans, UNSW
10. Improve understandings of the factors influencing the neurodevelopmental trajectory and poor outcomes of Aboriginal children who have entered out-of-home care to inform the type and timing of clinical support programs likely to improve neurodevelopmental outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. Dr Emily Hindman, Bimiirr Darrundaygu Psychology and Research Centre

Spotlight: Dr BJ Newton – The importance of Restoration of Aboriginal Children

Dr BJ Newton is a proud Wiradjuri woman and Senior Research Fellow based at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales

I lead several projects focused on restoring Aboriginal children from OOHC, three that are funded by the POCLS. My research has investigated the rate of restoration for Aboriginal children, the factors that influence restoration, and explored the experiences of parents whose Aboriginal children had been restored, and the experiences of these children.



This research indicated the following important findings for policy and practitioners.

- Once on final orders, restoration of Aboriginal children to their parents is highly unlikely. Of the 1,018 Aboriginal children in the POCLS final orders cohort, 155 children (15.2%) were restored to their parents by wave 4, around 5 years after they were placed in OOHC. The average time in OOHC for all Aboriginal children restored was nearly 2.5 years.
- Aboriginal children who entered care under 2 years were much more likely to remain in OOHC, and be placed on a guardianship order, than to be restored to their parents.
- A high proportion of Aboriginal children entering OOHC, regardless of their care outcome, had a very small number of substantiated Risk of Significant Harm (ROSH) reports prior to removal, with 40% entering OOHC following just one (or none) substantiated ROSH report.
- Parents whose Aboriginal children had been restored indicated that they would have liked more engagement and support from child protection agencies prior to their children being removed, so they were aware that their children were at risk of being removed. The research also found that parents wanted more support in the transition to restoration and in the early stages of restoration, so they could be better practically and psychologically equipped for their children to return home, however only half of parents received casework support post-restoration. This is a key area where DCJ and other service providers can provide additional support and service provision.

I have presented these findings at various conferences and seminars to government and non-government agencies and these findings have been published in the international journal Child Abuse and Neglect.

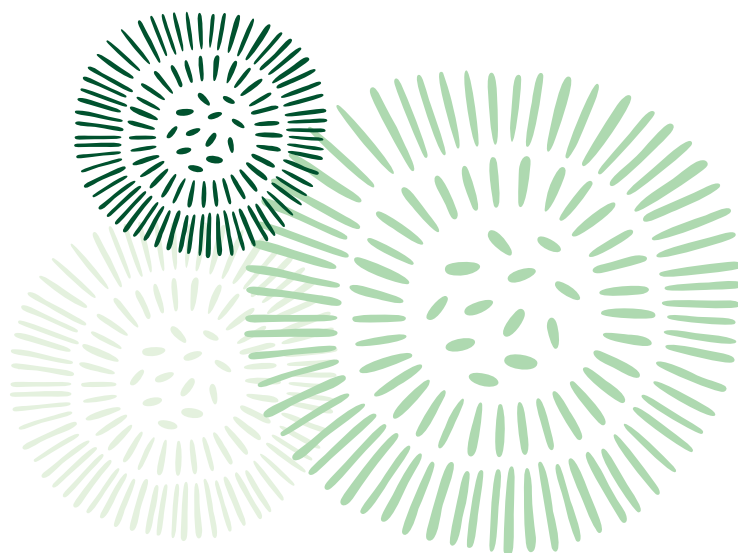
This research has informed a project proposal on an Aboriginal-led restoration initiative which would focus effort and resources towards the identification of Aboriginal children in long-term OOHC who may be supported to return home safely. Minister Kate Washington and DCJ leadership have committed to working with Aboriginal communities and organisations on this initiative.

I am currently working on two further papers using the POCLS data, 'Exploring how parental and family characteristics influences child protection reporting and removal, and out-of-home care experiences for Aboriginal children under two years of age' and 'Understanding the potential impact of carers on the experiences and care outcomes of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care using the POCLS'.

I am committed to continuing my work in advocating for changes in the NSW child protection system for Aboriginal families, through generating evidence and working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and DCJ.

Ethics approvals for the Study

- University of NSW (HC210985)
- Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW (766/10)
- NSW Population and Health Services Research Ethics Committee (HREC/14/CIPHS/74 Cancer Institute NSW: 2014/12/570)
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (EO2019-1-406).



Meet our POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel

The POCLS team are very pleased to welcome the new POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel to the project. The POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel was established in March 2023, and is made up of an amazing group of experts and practitioners who provide unique and specialised insights, advice and guidance to strengthen the research for Aboriginal children and their families.

The POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel works closely with the POCLS team and other working groups, and has representation on the Study Working Group, Advisory Group and Evidence to Action Working Group. AbSec chair and provide secretariat support for the Panel. This year, the POCLS Aboriginal Governance Panel and Study Working Group co-designed the new Aftercare Survey for those young people in the Study cohort aged 18-25 years old and have provided advice to the Aboriginal-led and partnered research analysis projects that were commissioned in 2023.



John Leha, CEO, AbSec

John is a proud Birra Gubba, Wakka Wakka and Tongan man born and raised on Gadigal land (Sydney). He has worked extensively in Indigenous education and employment programs in government and community and is well-known as a health ambassador and founder of Sydney Deadly Runners.



Merv Taylor, Co-Founder and Director of Ngadhi Family Services

Merv is a proud Wiradjuri man and is a First Nation Child Protection Specialist. His goal is to have a positive impact on the Aboriginal families, children and young people who are involved in the child protection system and started his own First Nation OOH service 10 years ago.



Lisa Wellington, Executive Management, Waminda Aboriginal Corporation

Lisa is a proud Jerrinja/Cullunghutti/Wandi Wandandian Women from the South Coast of NSW. She oversees Yanaga Dhuga – our Family, Community and Client Services programs and is passionate about working with and for mob, walking alongside families in a culturally safe, strengths-based way.



Dr Paul Gray, Associate Professor, UTS Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research

Dr Paul Gray is a Wiradjuri man from NSW. He has a long involvement in the child protection sector and is committed to reimagining child protection systems and practice to end their disproportionate impact on Aboriginal children, families and communities and promote healing.



Ian Brown, Principal Implementation Officer, Department of Communities & Justice

Ian is a proud Gomeroi man with strong kinship and cultural connections to his community in Moree, NSW. He is an Uncle, a community organiser and Aboriginal political commentator, and is passionate about advocating for the rights of Aboriginal People across NSW.



Matthew Kenny, Manager, Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Corporation

Matthew is a proud Bundjalung man from Galabal country in Northern NSW. He is a respected elder within his community, with his family residing in the area for over 100 years. He has worked at Ngunya Jarjum for many years in various roles and is a well-respected staff member and casework manager.

Mandy Weigold, Foster Carer

Mandy is a foster carer and an important member of the Aboriginal Governance Panel, providing insights and wisdom from first-hand experience of caring for children in out of home care.