



A newsletter for participants in the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

Message from the Secretary

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all the children and adults who have given their time to be in this important Study. Through this Study we can better understand your experiences so that we can improve the support we provide to you.



“I’d like to wish you all a safe and happy festive season - enjoy spending precious time with your families. My best wishes for 2019”

Michael Coutts-Trotter
Secretary, FACS.

My job as Secretary of the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is to lead a workforce that keeps children safe, improves lives and helps people realise their full potential. Research is critical for me to do my job well. This world class Study, the first of its kind in Australia, is collecting the views and first-hand experiences of over 1,000 children and their caregivers, teachers and caseworkers; and linking this information with administrative data. The longitudinal data will enable us to identify the risk factors that lead to poorer outcomes as well as the protective factors that mitigate these risks and result in improved outcomes for children and young people.

What’s on in 2019

In April 2019, the 5th round of interviews with children, young people and their caregivers will start.

The interviews will be the same as the last interview about 2 years ago. By repeating the questions we can track children and young people’s pathways. We know the interview is long and in appreciation of your time and contribution we give those who complete an interview a gift.

Why is the interview so long? It is important to collect a range of information as children grow up so policy makers, front-line workers and researchers have new information on child health, education and wellbeing to improve the way we work with families.

The 5th round of interviews will give us almost 10 years of in-depth data on children’s experiences as they grow up. We really hope you stay in the Study so we can make this one of the best Studies on child wellbeing.

“I really like this study! 😊 I think it’s awesome that you do this! I find it’s the true place where I can be completely honest about myself and for me usually that’s a hard thing to!” A young person in the Study

Update your contact details

If you are part of this Study, please let the researchers at FACS or I-view know if you change your address or phone number so we can keep in contact with you.

How is the study tracking?



Fun fact: The 4 rounds of interviews since 2011 involved 11,000 hours of in-depth interviewing, plus 6,500 hours travelling over 320,000kms all across NSW and just over the border.

32% of the children in the 4th interview were Aboriginal

Message from Andy Cubie who leads the I-view interviewing team



We are proud to have been part of this important Study since 2011. Eight interviewers toured the state for the 4th round of interviews, and enjoyed meeting so many children and the adults who look after them. We are all grateful to everyone who has participated for making time to take part.

During Wave 4, to measure language development we have asked children and young people to tell us the correct picture to represent a total of 63,000 words, and to measure problem solving we have asked them to point to the next pattern in a series 14,000 times.

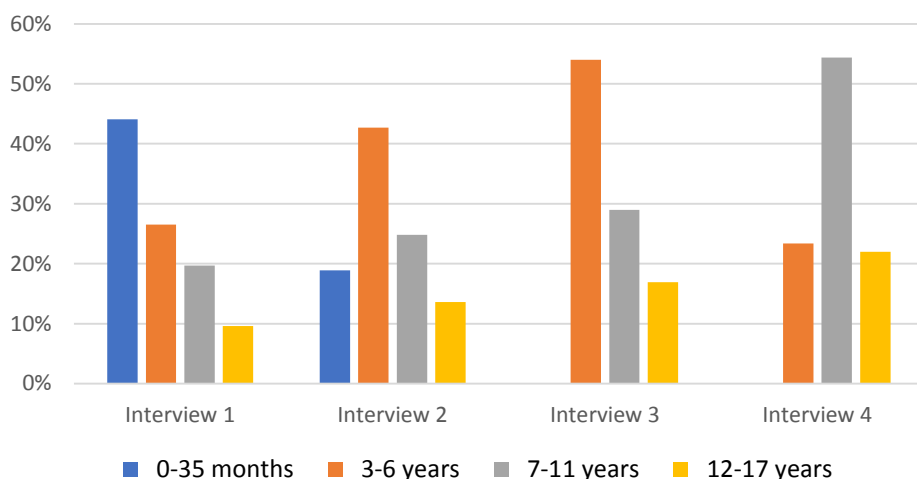
Many children and young people have also told us about their experiences in their own words as part of their interview.

Together with what caregivers have told us, this creates a very rich source of information about children's experiences to help make positive changes in the future.

The Study is carefully managed to protect what individuals tell us so that they cannot be identified in the survey reporting.

The figure below shows the age of the children and young people at the time of the interview. At the 5th interview all the children will be school age. We are looking forward to seeing you all again and how much you've grown.

Children's age at each interview



Where children were living at the 4th interview

- Foster & relative/kinship carers 89%
- Restored home 7%
- Adoptive parents 2%
- Residential care 2%
- Total children 961

Study findings over a five year period



Socio-emotional wellbeing

At the 1st interview 73% of children were developing normally in terms of behaviour and 27% of children needed intensive support to help them (Child Behaviour Checklist – CBCL).

After about 5 years, around 50% of the children who needed intensive support had improved and were developing normally; and 16% of the children who were developing normally had declined and needed intensive support to help them.



Language development

At the 1st interview 80% of children were developing normally in terms of language development and 20% of children needed intensive support to help them (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test – PPVT).

After about 5 years, around 40% of the children who needed intensive support had improved and were developing normally; and 13% of the children who were developing normally had declined and needed intensive support to help them.



Children's relationships with family and carers

Most children were having regular contact with at least one parent and their siblings – and also with maternal grandparents and aunts/uncles more than with paternal relatives. The frequency of contact was the best predictor of whether carers reported that they had a good relationship with family members. Contact with fathers and paternal relatives is less frequent, particularly for teenagers (Activity adapted from the Kvebaek Family Sculpture Technique).

In the words of the children

“What are two or three things that adults could do to help children who are not able to live with their birth parents?”

“Ease the child into the new carers home not just drop them there”

“It was what it was and nothing in that difficult situation would have made things easier”

“Help them feel at home. To let them stay in contact with their birth parents”

“Arrange for more holidays with parents. For them to come and visit us”

“Support, like help them through their tough times. Maybe remind them who their birth parents are and help them keep in contact with their birth family”

“Let them have face time with their parents, teach the children how to read and write, make the child feel loved”

“Take them in and love them. Treat them the same as other kids”

“Let them live with their brothers and sisters if they have them”

“Be kind and more understanding to the child. Be open with information. Give the child choices”

“Allow the child to take some personal items for a memory”

“Make them feel welcome, happy and wanted”

Study findings over a five year period

Children's placement stability

By June 2016, 75% of children in the Study had 3 or less distinct placements since entering care, i.e. number of carers. By the 3rd interview 75% of the children still in care had stable placements lasting for 3 years or longer.

This excludes respite care and placements less than 7 days.



Children's contact with caseworkers

Children 7 years and older in foster care were more likely to report having contact with their caseworker compared to those in kinship/relative care. In the first 2 interviews about 70% of children aged 7 years and older said they had contact with a caseworker and by the 3rd interview this had increased to 87%.



Caseworker's views of children's wellbeing

Since first meeting the child, caseworkers thought about 65% of the children's wellbeing had improved, 30% was unchanged, and 5% report the child's wellbeing had deteriorated.



How children fare when starting school

The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) is collected for every student in Kindergarten in Australia. It collects data on physical health, wellbeing, emotional maturity and social competence. Our Study shows that children who have entered care are at an increased risk of having developmental vulnerabilities at the start of schooling. Boys are at a significantly higher risk than girls of being developmentally vulnerable at the first year of school.



Aboriginal children's wellbeing

Aboriginal children generally had similar developmental progress as non-Aboriginal children in relation to socio-emotional wellbeing, cognitive learning ability and physical development. However non-Aboriginal children who needed intensive support tended to improve over time while Aboriginal children did not improve.

Carers and case-workers said that most Aboriginal children were being kept in contact with their culture, and that placements are generally considered to be very good, although fewer than 50% of Aboriginal children are placed with Aboriginal families.

A potential policy issue raised by case-workers is the difficulty associated with finding suitable placements for Aboriginal children when placements change or break down. It is often difficult to find culturally suitable placements and in areas where children can remain in contact with their family and cultural community. More work is need in finding family and cultural maintenance.

Children's access to services

Overall, the children in the Study appear to have had access to services matched to their needs. Few carers reported that their child was unable to access services and satisfaction with services was generally high.

Children in kinship care generally had lower levels of need than those in foster or residential care. Children in kinship care had similar levels of access to services.

Many young people entering care as teenagers show higher levels of need.

Researchers will examine the factors that influence children's development and wellbeing so that the right services, programs and support are offered to children, carers and families.

How we turn research into action

Consultations The Study team has met with many stakeholders and FACS leaders during the Study to learn what the policy problems are that this Study can shine a light on and provide new information to make positive change.

Advisory Group The Study Advisory Group provides high level advice, direction and support to the Study. One of their roles is to ensure the findings are used by policy makers to make positive change. Members represent government and non-government organisations and advocacy groups.

Reports and dashboards Many papers are underway by leading academics in Australia and overseas. Many more papers will start in 2019 now that we have longitudinal data to track children's outcomes and the factors that may influence them. As well as reports, we will produce interactive dashboards so the results are accessible.

Conferences & podcasts The Study team presented at 5 conferences in 2018 including our first overseas conference in England. A Study researcher was on the panel at 'Sydney Ideas' on the benefits of longitudinal research – you can listen to the Podcast: <https://sydney.edu.au/news-opinion/sydney-ideas/2018/taking-the-long-view.html>

Your privacy & ethics All information collected for the Study is de-identified and remains confidential. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can withdraw from the Study at any time. UNSW Human Research Ethics Committee Approval No. HC16542.

Contact us

FACS Insights, Analysis and Research:

- email Pathways@facs.nsw.gov.au
- phone 1800 997 960.

I-view, who are conducting the interviews:

- webpage www.iview.com.au
- phone 1800 105 088.

Visit the Study webpage

www.community.nsw.gov.au/pathways

All the Study documentation and results are available on the Study webpage.



Meet some of the research team at FACS



"Data is critical for service development. Sharing your stories will help us have the best evidence available to make sound decisions".

Merran Butler,
Study Chief Investigator



"I'm responsible for the data quality assurance and that no-one can be identified in any reporting. I am looking forward to conducting more analysis and report writing".

Albert Zhou, Study Data Manager



"This is a landmark study we are all involved in to improve children's wellbeing, thank you for being a part of it!".

Marina Paxman,
Study Project Manager



"I have been analysing the Study data for conferences and policy areas working on reforms. The data is so unique and allows us to get an in-depth understanding of your experiences".

Jo Hopkins, Study Principal Analyst



"I have been involved in the study since it started. My current focus is making sure the findings are used by policy makers to make a positive change".

Sharon Burke,
Study Senior Researcher



"I've spoken to most of you at some stage during the study to tell you about the Study and invite you to join in an interview– thank you 😊".

Toula Kypreos, Study Researcher

