

Research Update from the Institute of Child Protection Studies

March 2016

This quarterly update provides an overview of research projects currently being carried out by the [Institute of Child Protection Studies](#) (ICPS), Australian Catholic University. ICPS aims to enhance the well-being of children, young people and families through quality research, evaluation, training and community education. Current research projects at ICPS include:

- Managing Ethical Studies on Sensitive Issues (MESSI): Involving children in social research;
- kContact: Keeping contact between parents and children in care;
- Developing an understanding of how children understand and experience safety in institutions;
- Safe and Sound: The safety of young people in residential care;
- Child Protection Practitioner Study;
- ‘Growing our spirit’: Improving the evidence base for community-developed assessments of kinship carers of Aboriginal children;
- Evaluation of the Youth Hope Program; and,
- Building Capacity in Family Support Services: Provision of evaluative support services to FaC service providers.

See also *New Publications* at the end of the Update. For more information about ICPS Research Updates, contact erin.barry@acu.edu.au.

Managing Ethical Studies on Sensitive Issues (MESSI): Involving children and young people in social research

This project aims to better understand and address the tensions between the protection of children and young people and their participation in social research about sensitive issues. It will do this by exploring how ethics committees, parents, other gatekeepers and children themselves manage and navigate these tensions, and will be conducted between 2015 - 2017. The project will explore the perspectives of various stakeholders – including parents, researchers, ethics committees, principals, government departments and non-government organisations that commission, conduct or approve research, and children themselves. The first phase of the project is now complete, with all qualitative interviews with representatives from the

key stakeholder groups now conducted. Data collected during this phase will be used to develop online surveys of Australian ethics committees, which will include hypothetical scenarios to test decision-making about children's participation.

This research has been funded through an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant, and is being conducted by Prof Morag McArthur, Dr Tim Moore and Assoc Prof Stephanie Taplin from ICPS; in partnership with colleagues from Southern Cross University, the University of Melbourne and the University of New South Wales. For more information, contact morag.mcarthur@acu.edu.au.

kContact: Keeping contact between parents and children in care

This research is trialling an enhanced model of delivering contact between children in care and their birth parents. Follow up interviews with carers, parents, children and workers have commenced in the ACT and will commence shortly in Victoria. The intervention is continuing in the ACT and Victoria at all of the intervention sites. The Intervention Coordinator is providing ongoing support to the caseworkers and agencies to deliver the intervention. A protocol paper which provides in-depth detail about the methodology of the study has been published, and is freely available on the ICPS website (see 'New Publications'). A number of abstracts have been submitted to child welfare conferences to be held in 2016.

This project has been funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, with significant partner contributions, and is being carried out by Prof Morag McArthur and Assoc Prof Stephanie Taplin, ICPS; and Prof Cathy Humphreys, University of Melbourne. They are supported by Dr Tracey Bullen, Project Manager; Rhys Thorpe, ICPS PhD Candidate; and Dr Margaret Kertesz (University of Melbourne). For more information, contact tracey.bullen@acu.edu.au.

Developing an understanding of how children understand and experience safety in institutions

This project aims to better understand how children conceptualise, experience and respond to safety issues in institutional contexts. The first stage included workshops with three children and young people's reference groups and an adults' advisory group, and 10 focus groups with 121 participants aged 4-18 in QLD, NSW, VIC and the ACT. This stage helped us better understand what children and young people need to be safe and to feel safe, and to get a sense as to how they believed adults and institutions were responding to their safety concerns. The report from this stage of the study was released in August and is available online.

Stage 2 was recently completed, which included the implementation of a national online survey of 1480 children and young people aged 10 – 18 years in Australia, about their views and perceptions of safety in institutions. A report on the survey findings has been completed and will be released in coming months.

The study is being conducted by Dr Tim Moore and Prof Morag McArthur, in partnership with colleagues from ACU, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University. We are pleased to also support the Centre for Children and Young People (SCU), which is conducting a nested study focusing on children and young people with disability that draws on our approach and findings. For more information, contact tim.moore@acu.edu.au.

Safe and Sound: The Safety of Young People in Residential Care

This study builds on the Children’s Safety study (see above), and explores the experiences of young people and their safety in residential care. It aims to understand what young people believe institutions are doing to identify, prevent and respond to child sexual abuse and peer sexual violence among young people. The study includes interviews with young people and a workshop with young people and key stakeholders, to develop a youth-centred response to sexual abuse, which will be conducted in 2016. A draft literature review has been completed and data collection will soon commence in NSW and QLD.

This study has been funded by the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse*, and is being conducted by Dr Tim Moore, Prof Morag McArthur, in partnership with Dr Jodi Death (QUT) and Prof Clare Tilbury (Griffith University). For more information, contact tim.moore@acu.edu.au.

Child Protection Practitioner Study

This project aims to inform the further development of child-centred practice that will assist children to participate in child protection practices, in appropriate and meaningful ways. The research findings will inform the development of policy and practice strategies that will increase children’s meaningful participation in child protection decision-making. The first stage of the research is to survey statutory child protection agency workers across all Australian state and territories. The second stage is to interview statutory child protection workers. Ethics approval has been granted by the Australian Catholic University Human Research Committee. Data from the online survey has been collected from three jurisdictions and stage 2 has commenced with 7 interviews completed so far with child protection practitioners.

This study has been funded internally, and is being conducted by Steven Roche. For more information, contact morag.mcarthur@acu.edu.au.

‘Growing our spirit’: Improving the evidence base for community developed assessments of kinship carers of Aboriginal children

This research is a partnership between Winangay Resources Inc, the Australian Centre for Child Protection at the University of South Australia, and ICPS. It aims to examine the effectiveness and implementation of kinship carer assessment tools developed by an Aboriginal community organisation. ICPS is supporting the implementation of the research in the Eastern states of Australia. Interviews with carers and child safety service centre managers have been completed.

This study is funded by the Sidney Myer Fund, and the ICPS component is being conducted by Vicky Saunders. For more information, contact vicky.saunders@acu.edu.au.

Evaluation of the Youth Hope Program

The Youth Hope Program (YHP) aims to maximise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and their families, who are involved in, or at risk of becoming involved with, statutory child protection services. This process and outcome evaluation, and economic assessment, will examine the extent to which the YHP has been implemented as planned, the overall effectiveness of the program, and the cost-effectiveness of the YHP. The Australian Institute of Criminology is the lead organisation in this project, and has commissioned ICPS to input on the development of the project, conduct evaluation interviews and site visits, and assist with developing and reviewing evaluation reports.

The project team has conducted the site visits to all of the Youth Hope sites across NSW. Interviews were conducted with Youth Hope caseworkers, managers, external stakeholders and clients (parents, carers, children and young people). These interviews primarily inform the process evaluation. The process evaluation has been completed and a draft report submitted to NSW Families and Community Services.

This study is funded by Family and Community Services (NSW Government), and the ICPS component is being implemented by Dr Justin Barker. For more information, contact Justin.barker@acu.edu.au.

Building Capacity in Family Support Services: Provision of evaluative support services to FaC service providers

As a member of the Department of Social Services’ Expert Panel, ICPS and other research agencies have been commissioned to assist and support service providers as part of the Outcomes Measurement Project. This project aims to provide assistance to Families and Children (FaC) service providers to strengthen their capacity to develop and deliver outcomes measurements and reporting. Selected services may receive a range of supports depending on their specific needs, including identifying suitable performance indicators

and service level outcomes, identifying appropriate measurement tools, developing suitable evaluation methods and data collection tools.

Site visits have been conducted across NSW. The visits involved delivering (a) training and capacity building regarding outcome measure and assessment, and (b) consultation with the relevant stakeholders to identify potential outcome measures suitable for the FaC Activities. Following on from the site visits, agencies are identifying and trialling outcome indicators.

This study is funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS), and the ICPS component is being implemented by Dr Justin Barker. For more information, contact justin.barker@acu.edu.au.

New Publications

McArthur, M., & Winkworth, G. (2016). [What do we know about the social networks of single parents who do not use supportive services?](#) *Child and Family Social Work*.

Moore, T., Noble-Carr, D., & McArthur, M. (2016). [Changing things for the better: The use of children and young people's reference groups in social research](#). *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19(2), 241-256.