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.
Introduction and overview
IOAS Research to strengthen family relationships in OOHC

➢ Background on ACE evidence

Susan Collings, Institute of Open Adoption Studies, University of Sydney

• Promoting continuity of care for children and young people in OOHC in Tasmania and addressing systemic & personal challenges for their families

  Lindsay Fidler, Social Action Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

• Lessons from trauma-responsive group with parents and group reflection on sources of support during childhood adversity

  Angharad Candlin, Catholic Care Sydney, Parent education & staff training

Research to strengthen family relationships

➢ Trauma-informed contact practice guidelines
  ➢ Scope international evidence on trauma-informed practice (health, mental health)
  ➢ Stakeholder feedback on Australian practices related to contact
  ➢ Develop practical guide to plan & review contact arrangements using trauma-awareness

➢ Permanency Practice Framework
  ➢ co-design; partnership with PRC
  ➢ Scope evidence on practices that support permanency (build family skills, resources)
  ➢ Test in selected agencies
  ➢ Develop set of processes and tools

➢ Fostering Connections in Permanent Care
  ➢ Action research over 3 years
  ➢ 8 sector partners, people with experience of the system
  ➢ Develop, test, implement relationship-building strategies with families
Adverse Childhood Experiences

**ABUSE**
- Physical
- Emotional
- Sexual

**NEGLECT**
- Physical
- Emotional
- Mother treated violently

**HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION**
- Mental Illness
- Incarcerated Relative
- Substance Abuse
- Divorce

Childhood trauma exposure & consequences

- Homework: Watch Ted Talk by Dr Nadine Bourke-Harris

Keeping in mind the child IN the family

➢ Offers a way to examine interplay of social & individual-level determinants
➢ Intergenerational transmission of childhood adversity
➢ ACE scale includes items for parental difficulties; family circumstances
➢ How to develop services aligned to needs of children and parents with high ACE scores?


Socioecological model for ACE responsive systems

Orient services to an understanding of the impact of exposure to multiple adversities

Prevention of adverse response in adults to reduce exposure in children

The Tasmanian Redesign of Child Safety:
framing a trauma and poverty-informed response

Lindsey Fidler
Acting Manager, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

Anglicare’s goals

Achieving a just Tasmania, with a focus on:
• Addressing the needs of vulnerable children, young people and families
• Achieving affordable housing solutions and addressing homelessness
• Addressing cost of living challenges for vulnerable households
What we influence

Problem stream
What causes some of Tasmanians to experience disadvantage or poor outcomes? And why does it matter?

Policy stream
What are the proposals for change?

Politics stream
Is the political climate open for influence?

Tasmanian Child Safety Reforms

Safety
Security
Sense of Belonging

Problematic families...?

Tasmania’s challenges

- Intergenerational involvement in CSS
  - 1 in 5 mothers having more than one children removed
  - Many mothers involved with CSS were themselves in OOHC

- Churn through family support services

- Increased and prolonged involvement with CSS
  - Increase in substantiations – mainly in neglect
  - Usual period on RC&C plan – 3-5 years
Problematic systems...?

Challenging concepts
Shifting focus: problematic families or systems?
The need to tackle system-induced trauma and poverty
Mary

They take your children and it snowballs into all other areas of your life and stuffs you up. You cannot escape your past history. They judge you. It’s just never ending. Depression is the big thing. It intensifies my depression and my anxiety and it impacts on the way I look at myself now. I am my harshest critic. Nobody else out there can judge me harder than I judge myself. Basically I’m being told that I am not fit to raise my children, you’re not good enough to be a mother. I worked my bum off to make sure the apple fell far from the tree and they are just treating me like I’m no different to my mum and that’s not fair. I have never hurt my children like she did us. I used to get whipped with hoses and jug horns and belts and punched and hit round the head with hair brushes, all of that. I’m 30 years old. What have I got to show for my 30 years, nothing but child protection. I’m fed up with being scrutinized all the time. I’m fed up with being compared and judged and being treated as if I’m scum... Is it really that hard to believe I am one of those people that made it out the other end?
System-induced poverty
Impacts of families’ income and housing challenges

Poverty: normalised backdrop of practice
Naomi:
Child Safety know Tasmania’s the most expensive state to live in at the moment. The housing’s just shocking. They’ve watched my struggle with housing, like I’ve always worked closely with them. They’ve watched me move into a house, get kicked out of a house. So for me to finally get stable accommodation and them question me, ‘Oh is that where you’re always going to stay with the kids?’ ...I can’t look that far ahead into the future cos I don’t know where I sit with them with the kids coming home

Challenging concepts
The best interests of the child includes the welfare of parents
If a community values its children, it must cherish the parents.

John Bowlby, 1951

Supporting future parenting

• Majority of birth parents continue to see themselves as parents when their children are removed
• There are obstacles to sustaining good parent/child relationships when children enter out-of-home care
• Over half of those in out-of-home care return to birth families during adolescence
• Strong case for supporting parents to improve their parenting capacity whether or not they are reunified with their children.
Poverty is not inevitable

The economy we have today was designed—and it can be redesigned to work for everyone.

Recommendations

**Legislation / policy:**
- Exclude poverty being treated as child maltreatment

**Practice:**
- Trauma and poverty-informed frameworks
- More effective family court support
- Good practice in removal

**Programs:**
- Programs available when families need it
- Therapeutic and material support
  - Relationship-based and delivered by a skilled professional
  - Trauma-informed
  - Tailored to needs of individual families
  - Arms length from Child Safety Services
- Supported housing responses
Advocacy roles

The systems are problematic
Child removal exacerbates trauma and poverty
Families’ needs are not supported

Families’ welfare critical to serving best interests of the child
Need for poverty-informed practice
Need for parent-led advocacy group

Invest in:
Continuous therapeutic and practical family support
Income and housing support

Evidence-based
Interest / value-based
Cooperative / inside track
Confrontational / outside track

SARC’s website:

Email: lindseyf@anglicare-tas.org.au
Parents whose children have been removed report not doing well in traditional parenting courses

No services are available for these parents unless restoration is actively being pursued

Basic social skills are missing

Complex histories of trauma, abuse and domestic violence

Histories of being dismissed, misunderstood and judged by ‘helping’ professionals

Parents with multiple children removed

Almost all think that restoration is on the agenda
• Uses metaphor as a process for therapeutic change
• Non-judgemental and welcoming
• Parents with similar stories learn and grow together
• Celebration of small changes which are actually giant leaps
• Skilled, trained facilitators ‘hold’ the emotional dynamics in the room

Want to learn as much as I can to be a better parent because I've never had any parenting - in and out of foster care so raised myself and have picked things up along the way.
I am different since completing MKM. My child returned and I am being straight, dealing with my own feelings, I was taught to be kind to myself. Learnt about paths so my decisions are clearer; I can choose to change direction and know what’s going to happen.

I have learnt to take time to reflect and appreciate all the good/positive goals you have achieved during the time your baby’s been in care, also I’ve learnt more communication skills, how to deal with sad emotions before turning angry and erupting and also emotions, especially with young kids/babies.
Lessons Learnt

- Group work with brave facilitators and brave participants can be transformative
- Understanding that parents have been damaged creates an opportunity to care
- Metaphors allow unspeakably painful experiences to be given a language thus opening up the possibility of healing
- If we do not work with parents whose children have been removed, the cycle of abuse, neglect and removal will continue
“Every person you will ever meet has infinite worth”

Frank Kimper

Personal reflection

‘Sources of resilience can include, but are not limited to, cultural engagement, community support, opportunity to control one’s personal circumstances and access to a trusted individual throughout childhood who provide a sanctuary from the chronic stress of ACEs’ (Bellis et al. 2018, p. 2).
Prompts for reflection

Who did you reach out to for help?
What did that support look like?

Share something about this with the person next to you and/or
Write on post it note, add to the wall
Discussion

• What can we do to strengthen support networks for isolated families?

• How can we help rebuild fragile family relationships?

• What practical ways can you bring trauma awareness to your practice?