

Keeping the Ball Rolling

OUT-OF-HOME CARE RESEARCH :

Where do we go from here?

RESEARCH AGENDA

LAST WORKSHOP

WHAT WORKS?

- Foster care recruitment, retention, training and support (50)
- Permanency planning (13)
- Preventing pre-entry to care (27)
- Re-unification and restoration, involving parents (19)
- Residential care

RESEARCH AGENDA

LAST WORKSHOP

OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Educational outcomes in care (15)
- Participation of chn and young people (14)
- Contact with parents and siblings etc (12)
- Indigenous children (12)
- Children with disabilities (11)
- Long-term outcomes for chn and young people after leaving care

RESEARCH AGENDA

LAST WORKSHOP

SERVICE DELIVERY ISSUES

- Indicators/standards/accreditation (24)
- Funding and costing models and caseloads for foster care, kinship

care and residential care (15)

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

- What infrastructure for collaborative research and policy development is workable in Australia?
- How do we activate the interest of social work and psychology academics in out-of-home care research?
- How do we build child welfare practitioners interest in research?
- Can we follow Queensland's Department of Families sponsorship of PhD scholarships?
- What else can we do to 'keep the ball rolling?'

INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- What infrastructure is needed in Australia?
- US and UK
 - Specialist university and agency research centres
 - Chapin Hall University of Chicago
 - Dartington
 - Annie E Casey
 - Child Welfare League in America
 - No similar developments in Australia
 - Two new university chairs
 - University of Melbourne
 - University of South Australia

THE WAY FORWARD

- Further refine and prioritise the out-of-home care research agenda
- Development of national data-house, with data linkage (ARACY?)
- Lobby the federal government for direct funding for parallel longitudinal study of children in care
- Scoping project re appropriate infrastructure for national research, research to practice, development

WHAT RESEARCH IS NEEDED?

- Rigorous evaluation of outcomes for different forms of care across states in Australia
 - esp kinship care, therapeutic care, indigenous children
- Repeated rather than single small sample studies

- Quasi- experimental “natural experiments”
- Large-scale empirical studies - linked
- Consistent range of outcome measures for **children**, not just placement **stability**
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WHAT DATA ARE NEEDED?

- Reliable data re entry into care and time in care
- Unit data to track over time and across services
- Data matching across departments
 - eg education and health and community services
 - Capacity to test trends
- Importance of qualitative and quantitative data – both have purpose
- Cost effectiveness data and analysis

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Because:

- It is important to understand causal relationships and mechanisms
 - esp: Why do some children do well and others not
- Necessary to follow children’s pathways and understand complex inter-relationships

CAUSAL LINKS

It is essential that we move beyond descriptive studies to research that can tackle questions on causal mechanisms (but recognizing multiple factors and indirect chain effects are likely to be the rule rather than the exception). In that connection, much greater use needs to be made of the multiple opportunities of natural experiments that are available. (Rutter, 2000, p. 698)

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

- To be useful for policy, analyses that distinguish the different types of effects over time are valuable.
 - ❖ **Single direct effects:** cumulative or waning over time.
 - ❖ **Multiple direct effects:** additive or one may mask the another.
 - ❖ **Indirect effects,** which may be mediated through other

factors.

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

- ❖ **Interactive effects**, where two factors simultaneously cause an effect different from each on its own.
- ❖ **Persistent effects**, where a factor is intractable but leads to consistently expected outcomes.
- ❖ **Nested effects**, where the influence of a factor (such as low birth-weight) may be important for a particular outcome, which in turn affects other outcomes later in time

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Crucial opportunity to parallel LSAC

- ❖ National representative baseline
- ❖ Consistent measures
- ❖ State collaboration – federal funding

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Canadian example - using population measures and norms to identify resilient outcomes in young people in care

- Flynn et al. (2004) *Child and Family Social Work*
- 132 5-9 year-olds of 11858 nationally
- 340 10-15 year-olds of 5539 nationally

- Tertile measures: top third, middle third, bottom third

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Canadian example

Children in care were below average on:

- ❖ EDUCATION : 80% below pop average
- ❖ FRIENDSHIP GROUPS
- ❖ ANXIETY and EMOTIONAL DISTRESS

Limitation of study – not random selection

LONGITUDINAL STUDY TRAJECTORY APPROACH

- ❖ Series of developmental stages and transitions
 - ❖ Conditional factors and multiple probabilities
 - ❖ Critical timing or sequence of interventions
 - ❖ Protective or harmful nature of each influence alone and in combination with others.
 - ❖ How are breakthroughs and turning points achieved?
- A dynamic view of a complex process

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

- ❖ What factors influence development at each stage thr' pathway?
- ❖ What is the likelihood of delays in one stage of development being overcome by the child? What factors aid catching up?
- ❖ What policy supports can be provided to key agents (parents, schools) for development?
- ❖ What are the early signs of spiralling up or spiralling down in a child's performance?

KEY ISSUES

- Stability and security via different pathways in permanency planning
- Role of contact in care
- Recruiting, training, supporting carers esp kinship carers

KEY ISSUES

- Indigenous children and young people
- Education and health of children in care
- Reviews and monitoring – approach and effectiveness
- Evaluation of services for difficult to care for children and young

people

CLUSTERS OF STUDIES

Because:

- A series of related studies “pack more punch” than single stand-alone studies
- Provide different perspectives/approaches to related issues

CLUSTERS OF STUDIES

- **STABILITY AND SECURITY:**
 - What is the relationship?
 - How do you turn stability into security?
 - What is the pathway? Rocky or many different tracks
 - What support is effective in supporting reunification? Under what circumstances?
- **THE FUNCTION OF CONTACT IN CARE**
 - Perceived benefits, problems, issues
 - Long-term outcomes?

CLUSTERS OF STUDIES

- **EFFECTIVENESS** of different regimes of recruiting, training, supporting carers esp kinship carers
- **EVALUATION OF SERVICES** for difficult to care for children and young people
- **EVALUATION OF MODELS OF CARE** for indigenous children and young people
- **EVALUATION OF INTERVENTIONS RE EDUCATION**

3 CLUSTERS FOR PRIORITY

3 Questions like answers to:

- 1?
- 2?
- 3?

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development is workable in Australia?

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