

Research to Practice Forum 2019 –  
*Family Relationships for Life*



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

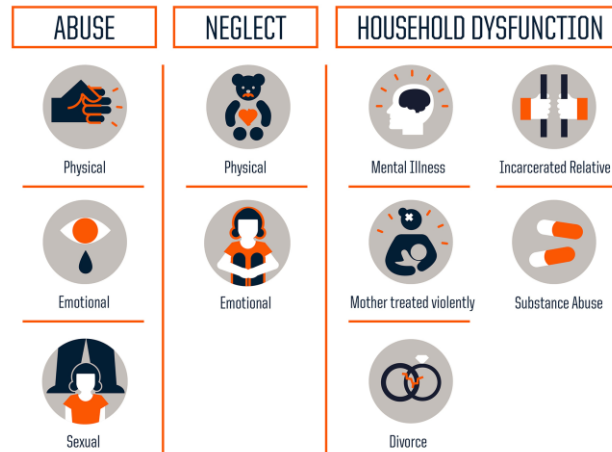
#### ➤ Permanency Practice Framework

- 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



## Childhood trauma exposure & consequences

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



[https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine\\_burke\\_harris\\_how\\_childhood\\_trauma\\_affects\\_health\\_across\\_a\\_lifetime?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime?language=en)

## Keeping in mind the child IN the family

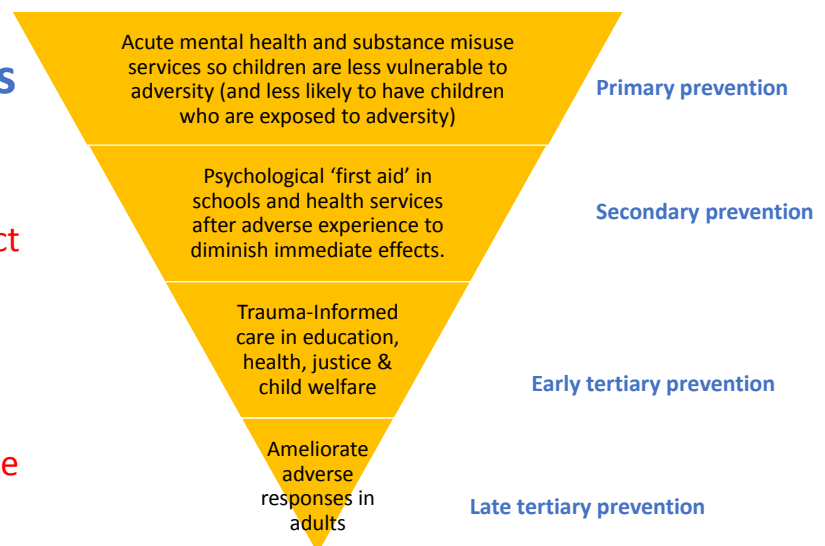
- Offers a way to examine interplay of social & individual-level determinants
- intergenerational transmission of childhood adversity
- ACE scale includes items for parental difficulties; family circumstances
- How to develop services aligned to needs of children **and** parents with high ACE scores?

Bunting L Webb MA Shannon R 2017 (2017) 'Looking again at troubled families: Parents' perspectives on multiple adversities' *Child & Family Social Work* 22 pp. 31 40

## 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



Spratt, T, Devaney, J, Frederick, J. (2019) Adverse Childhood Experiences: Beyond Signs of Safety; Reimagining the Organisation and Practice of Social Work with Children and Families, *The British Journal of Social Work*

# The Tasmanian Redesign of Child Safety:

framing a trauma and poverty-informed response

Lindsey Fidler

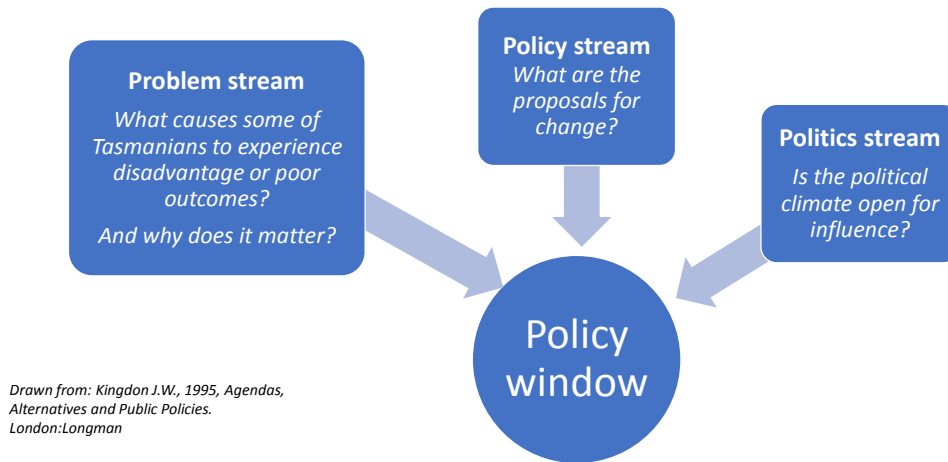
Acting Manager, Social Action and Research Centre, Anglicare Tasmania

## 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

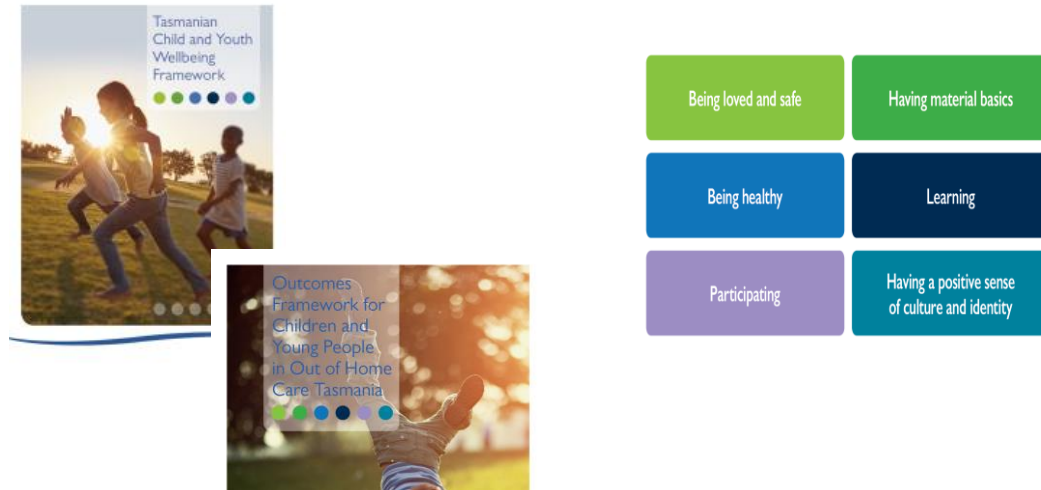


## Tasmanian Child Safety Reforms

*Safety*  
*Security*  
*Sense of Belonging*



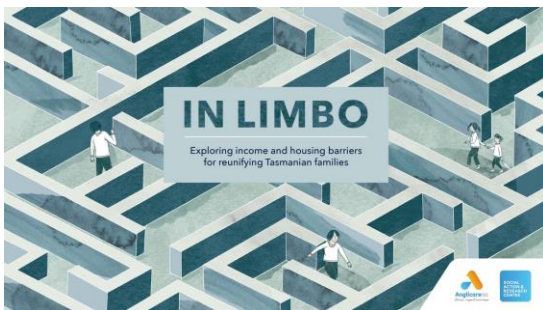
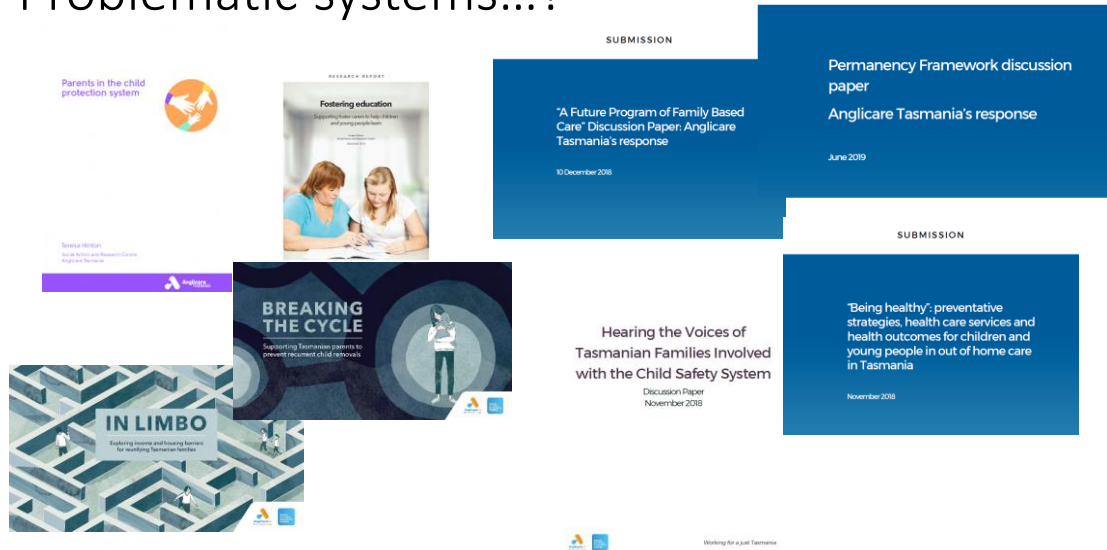
## Problematic families...?



## 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



# BREAKING THE CYCLE

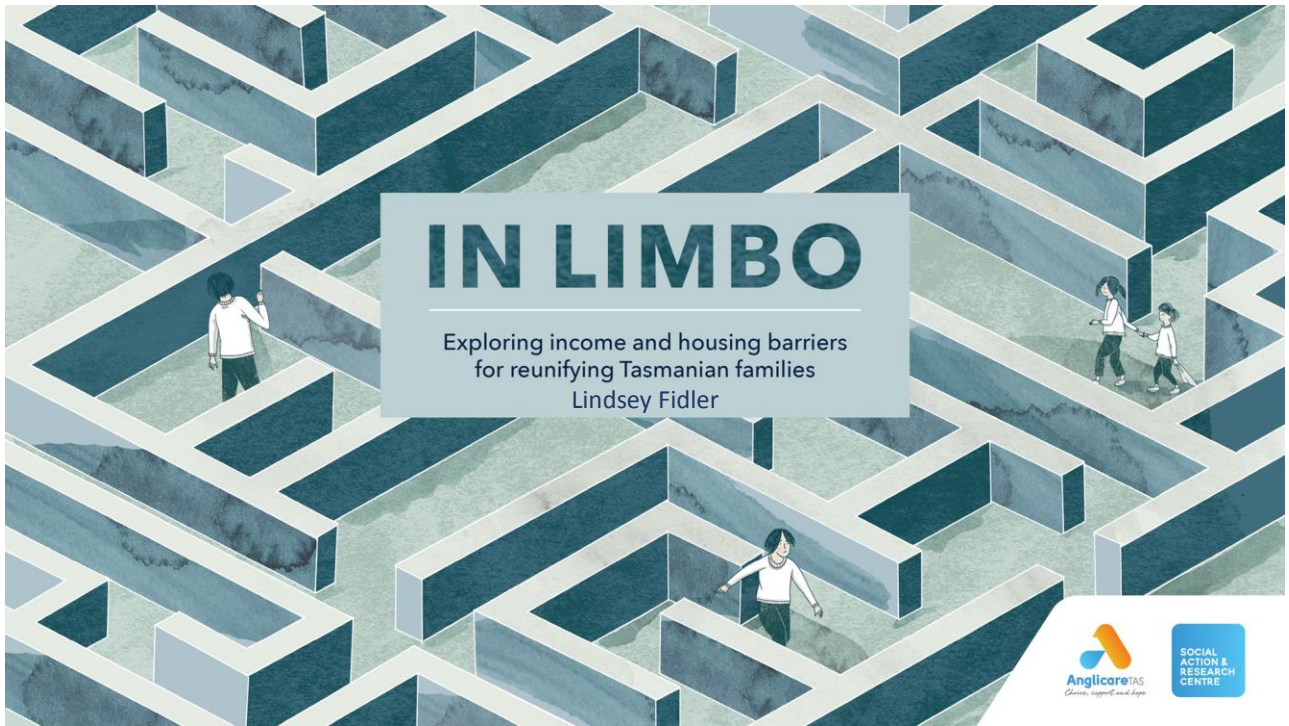
Supporting Tasmanian parents to prevent recurrent child removals



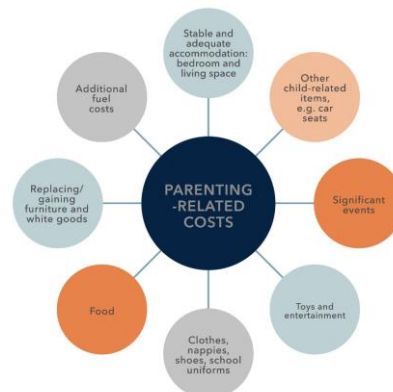
## Mary

*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?*

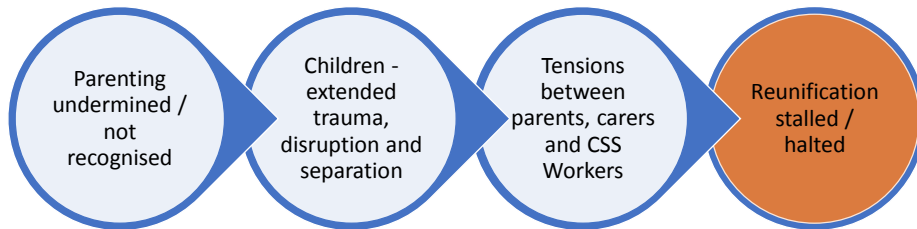




## System-induced poverty



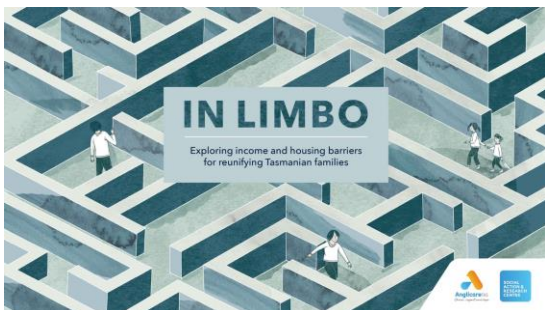
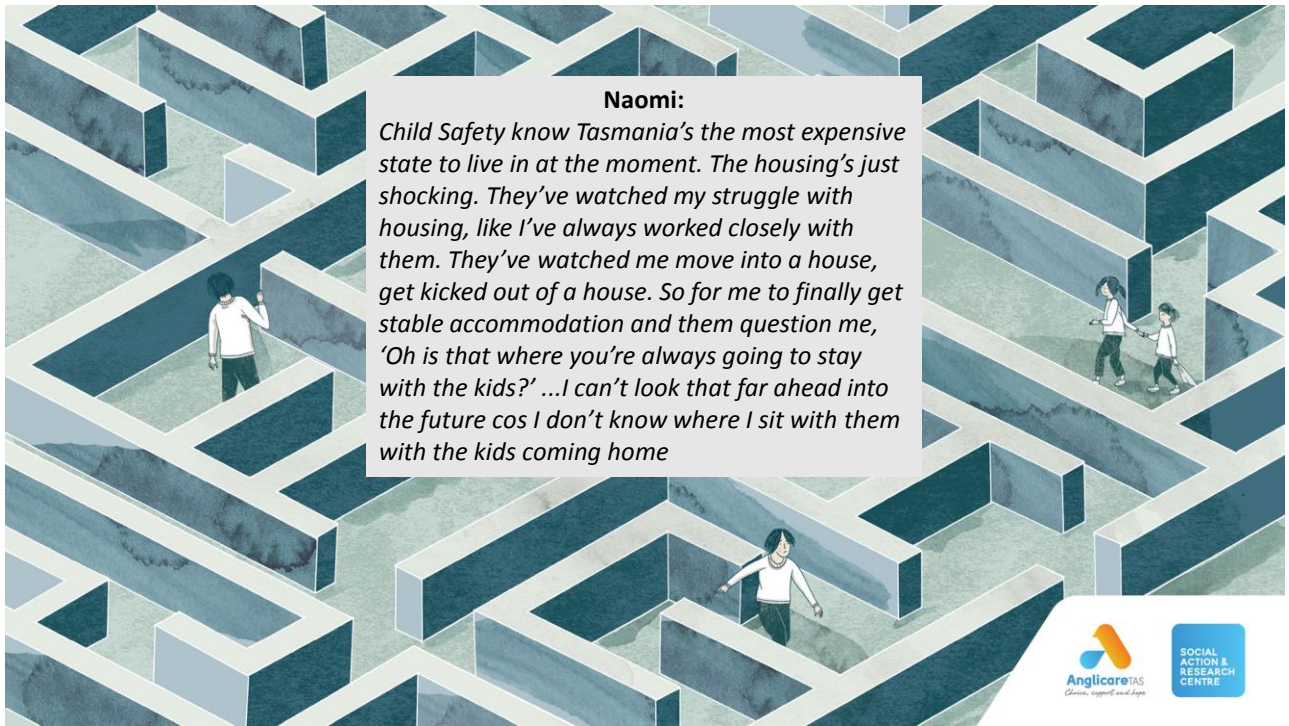
## Impacts of families' income and housing challenges



## Poverty: normalised backdrop of practice

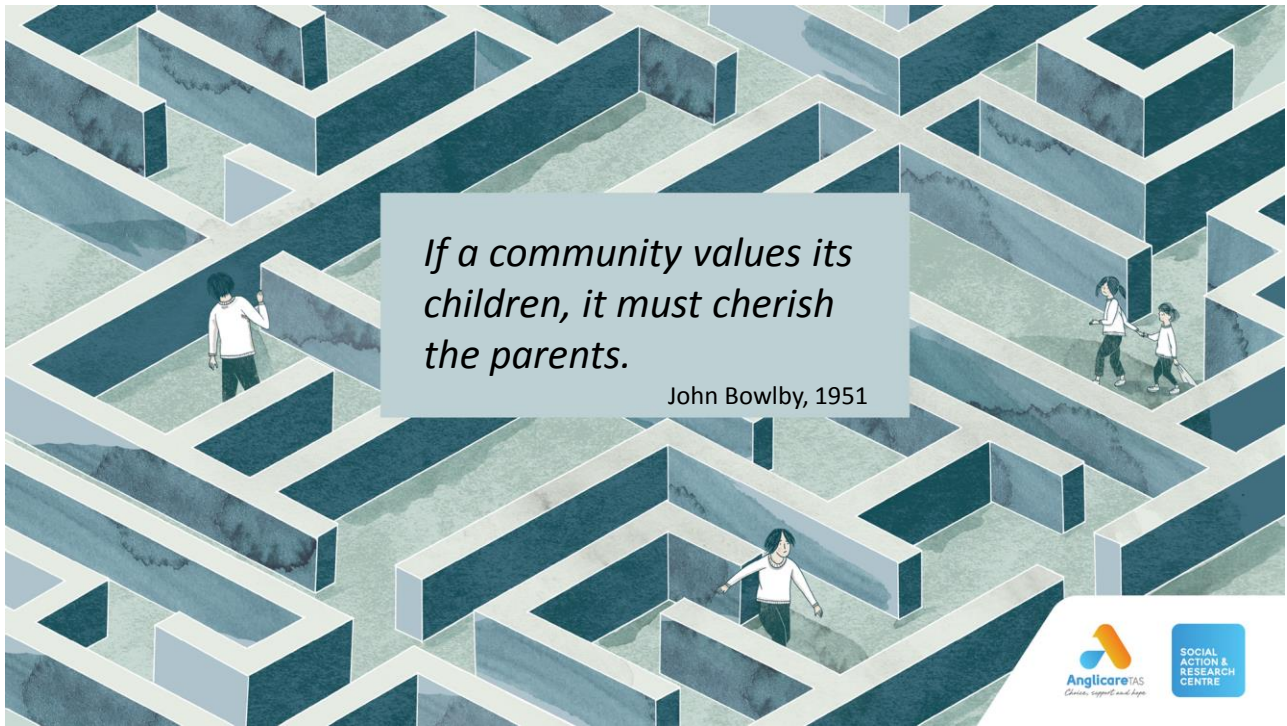






# Challenging concepts

The best interests of the child includes the welfare of parents



## 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.

©Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2014.  
SARC would like to thank Paul Brook, Copywriter at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation UK for permission to use this image.

## Recommendations

### Legislation / policy:

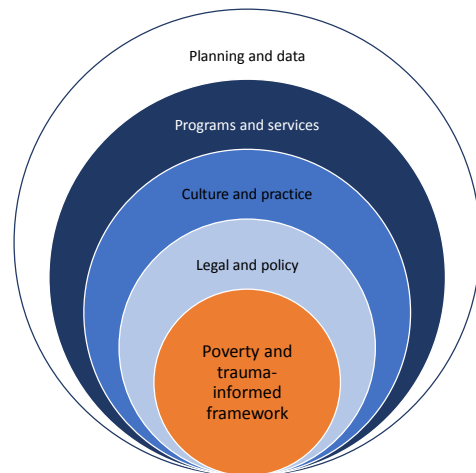
- Exclude poverty being treated as child maltreatment

### Practice:

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

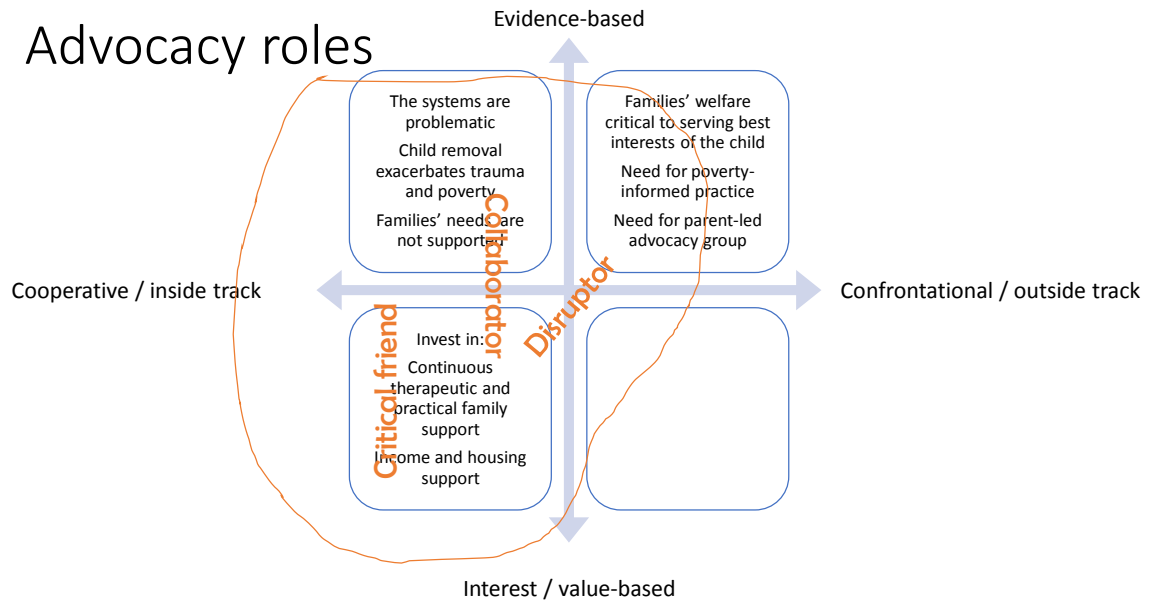
### Programs:

- 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



**SARC's website:**  
<https://www.anglicare-tas.org.au/social-action-research-centre/>

**Email:** lindseyf@anglicare-tas.org.au

**Anglicare TAS**  
 Give, support and hope

**SOCIAL ACTION & RESEARCH CENTRE**



**CatholicCare Sydney**

# My Kids and Me

Angharad Candlin  
Manager Parent Education Program  
Senior Manager Family Spirit Adoption Services

- 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

It wasn't confusing and the people were nice

## 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

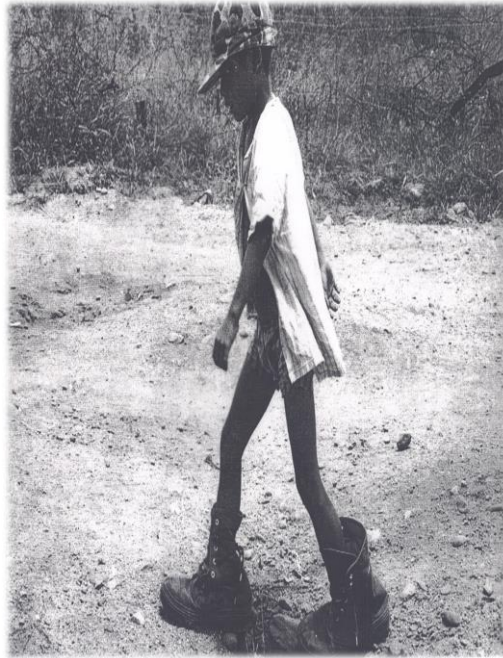
CatholicCare Sydney



## 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).





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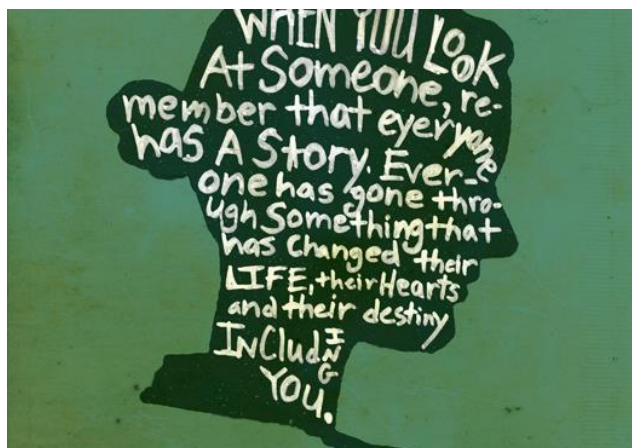
## Prompts for reflection

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?