Recruitment & Training of Carers for children in Out-of-Home Care

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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.

Tree of Knowledge - pokerwork on kangaroo skin, Lynette Riley, 2010
Standards in training for out-of-home carers

Literature review: David Wilkinson & Amy Conley Wright

Focus groups: Betty Luu, Bonnie Blythe, David Wilkinson & Amy Conley Wright
Why is training important?

1. Quality care can lead to healing and recovery from trauma

2. Carers who feel supported recruit other carers
Overview

1. What are the current standards of training provided to carers of children in foster, kinship, adoptive or guardianship placements in NSW?

2. What are the best practice models and principles within models of foster, kinship, adoptive and guardianship training currently available? (In Australia and internationally)
Key findings, by training type

- **Pre-service training** – Most accessed by carers; however, no models used in Australia have been subject to evaluation, including NSW Shared Stories Shared Lives

- **Ongoing training** – Ongoing training is recommended but not required, and hence less accessed by carers. Evidence-based ongoing training in NSW includes PCIT, 1-2-3 Magic, Triple P and Circle of Security

- **Specialist training** – Most informed by evidence, but least accessed. Training programs with the best evidence for use with carers of children in out-of-home care include Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO), Keeping Foster and Kin Carers Supported and Trained (KEEP) and Together Facing The Challenge (TFTC)
Key findings, by carer type

- **Foster Carers**: Receive the most and comparatively best quality training of all types of carers.
- **Kinship Carers**: Training is frequently described as insubstantial, under-developed and not sufficiently targeted.
- **Adoptive Carers**: Though some training is available, more relevant training is needed in order to prepare for the unique challenges which adoption entails.
- **Guardianship Carers**: Training standards in Australia are unclear and almost non-existent.

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1. Mainly focus on skill-based learning and supplement this with procedural or topic-based information.

2. Address core carer concerns:
   - understanding trauma
   - aetiology of behaviours
   - managing challenging behaviours

3. Provide multi-method formats for engagement, including: group sessions; online components; home visits etc.

4. Involve carers in the design, development and/or delivery of content.

5. Facilitate in-home, in-vivo or real life practice of concepts.
Empirical research: Focus groups with carers regarding their training preferences

Sample: N = 30 carers
93% female
Average age = 52.4 years, $SD = 8.7$, ranging from 33 to 70
Two were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Region (based on the Australian Statistical Geographic Standard Remoteness Area, 2016)
67% reside in a metropolitan area
33% reside in a regional area

Types of care provided
73% long-term foster care
23% kinship care
13% short-term foster care
23% transitioning to adoption or guardianship
7% guardianship
3% adopted a child from foster care
Initial findings from focus groups with carers

Pre-service training

• Critical, but often not perceived to be adequate when preparing to care for a child
• Kinship carers typically do not receive any training prior to the child’s placement
• Different training is needed for different types of care
• Wanting adequate training and support from caseworker (coaching rather than didactic model)

“For us, [the first few months of placement] was challenging, but the training mentioned that... Now, there would be questions down the track, but we would have liked to have more training and be much more prepared to understand the needs of our child being placed. There’s a lot of things we needed to know.” – LTFC, moving towards adoption

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Initial findings from focus groups with carers

Current/ongoing training

- Training perceived as *best* by carers: understanding trauma and practical strategies for managing challenging behaviours, delivered by experts, opportunities to connect with other carers to discuss and receive feedback

- Self-driven approach to search for training opportunities (e.g., online, peer groups, caseworker/agency), but sometimes not sure where to look or what they need

- Limitations to attending training: distance (especially regional), timing/scheduling, child minding, cost, face-to-face vs. online.

“Peer support at training is important; being a carer is really isolating; it becomes like tunnel vision; so it is nice to know you’re not alone and that others have similar struggles, reactions, emotions; being able to sit with a group of people struggling together can encourage you to keep going” – LTFC, moving to guardianship
Initial findings from focus groups with carers

Motivation and preferences for future training

• Relevance and tailoring of training topics to current or potential future circumstances is key
• Carers are motivated to attend training to learn how to best help the children in their care
• More training about caring for older children and adolescents
• Preferences: flexibility, learning outcomes and topics clearly provided, pre-emptive approach rather than reactive, strong peer support component, training delivered by knowledgeable person, post-training support available

“I really want to know that it’s going to be applicable. As much as I like the social contact too, I don’t want to waste a whole day listening to something that doesn’t apply, knowing that it’s applicable is the main thing…” – Kinship carer
Key Recommendations

- Greater investment in the evaluation of current and imported training models currently being used for carers
- Further development of training relevant to kinship and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers
- Increased attention to inclusion of guardians in training development and recruitment
- Development of post-permanency training and support for adoptive and guardian carers
- Include content on: understanding trauma; aetiology of behaviours; managing grief & loss; and caring for children with disability or from minority backgrounds
- Further evaluation of adapted parenting models with foster and kinship populations
Discussion questions

1. The sector is committed to providing training to carers. What do you look for to know that the training is having a positive impact on placements?

2. Training is only as useful as it is relevant to carers; what are some strategies that could assist carers to attend and access ongoing training when they need it?

3. What would be the three top skills/areas of knowledge that you believe carers for should have to support children’s cultural identity, in non-matched placements?

4. What steps need to be taken to address training needs for kinship carers?
Implications for OOHC Agencies

1. Encouraging to see a few agencies adopting and moving towards implementation of evidence-based training programs

2. Greater investment is needed in formal evaluation of training programs which are developed or implemented by OOHC agencies

3. Greater attention to and possible collaborative delivery of evidence-based training programs
Barriers and motivations to recruiting carers for children and young people aged 9+

Literature review: Hannah Wilkinson & Amy Conley Wright

Survey development & analysis: Betty Luu, Hannah Wilkinson, Amy Conley Wright & Prof Melanie Randle (UOW)
Overview

Focus of the literature review:

1. What are the barriers and motivations to recruiting carers for children and young people in care aged 9+? (Including for: single carers; gay and lesbian carers; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse carers)?

2. From the perspective of young people who have been in OOHC, what are the qualities of a good carer?

3. What messages (for media and social media) may be persuasive to recruit carers for older children?
**General Recruitment**

Targeted at the general public or specific groups and seek to motivate an audience who do not have a direct connection with the children

Assessment begins with carers and their suitability

Broad target audience with messages that highlight the general needs of foster children and applicability of a wide-range of carers

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**Recruitment for children aged 9+**

Targeted at adults who have a meaningful relationship to the child and are known to them (mentors, teachers, sports coaches, family networks)

Assessment begins with the child and the adults who are important to them

Targeted approach which highlights the stigma, needs and strengths of older children in care and highlights characteristics of this age group
Key Findings

• This study represents the first Australian investigation into recruitment of foster carers specifically for children middle childhood or adolescents.

• There are multi-faceted reasons, often connected to the carer type, for people to choose to become carers, however the two most common motivators are; altruistic reasons and child focussed motivations.

• Personal circumstances (such as concern for biological family, fear of emotional attachment and full-time work) are the most common barriers which prevent people from becoming a carer.

• Children in OOHC consistently identify that the characteristic most valued in carers is the degree to which they provide love, care and support.
Young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in need of foster carers

Young people want a family

Young people need love, support and stability

Challenging but rewarding

'provide love, care and support'; 'good listener and communicator'; 'have thick skin'; 'patient'; 'enjoy spending quality time with young people'

Key Messages for recruiting carers of children aged 9+
### Recommendations

1. **Cognitive Empathy**
   - Campaigns should be designed to elicit cognitive empathy

2. **Positive Framing**
   - Messages should predominantly be constructed under a positive-framing model

3. **Target populations**
   - Recruitment campaigns should target population groups who are most likely to consider caring

4. **Persuasion Theory**
   - Campaigns should be designed in consideration of the components of persuasion theory (appeals to logic, emotion and character)

5. **Indigenous focus**
   - Recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD carers should be prioritised
Empirical research: Survey and pilot testing media campaign with random sample of NSW public
Message
Next steps: Analysing & reporting on survey and pilot testing media campaign with random sample of NSW public

$N = 1038$

- 53% female, 47% male
- 68% metropolitan (city/suburbs); 32.4% regional/rural
- 10% 18-24 years old
- 25% 25-34 years old*
- 25% 35-44 years old*
- 18% 45-54 years old
- 22% 55+ years old

*oversampling on these age groups
Initial findings – consider becoming a foster carer

- Incidence rate = 44%
- 1032 respondents were excluded as they indicated they would never consider becoming a foster carer
- Some reasons included:
  - Too old
  - Not interested in children
  - Health conditions
  - Too much responsibility
  - Not enough space in home

Have you ever considered, or would you ever consider, becoming a foster carer?
Select one

- Yes, I have previously considered becoming a foster carer
- Yes, I would consider becoming a foster carer now or in the future
- No, I have no interest and/or would never consider becoming a foster carer

Please specify why you would never consider becoming a foster carer
How likely are you to consider fostering a child aged 9 years or above now or in the future?

- **Certain not to**: 4%
- **Fairly unlikely**: 26%
- **Fairly likely**: 47%
- **Very likely**: 18%
- **Certain to**: 5%
Initial findings – reasons to care for an older child

- All children deserve to be a part of a family: 88%
- I want to help prevent intergenerational patterns of child maltreatment: 73%
- There is a greater need for carers for children aged 9 or above than for younger children: 69%
- I enjoy the energy that young people bring into my life: 69%
- I have experience with children and young people: 69%
- I feel that I am called to care for children in need of a family: 57%
- Children aged 9 or above are more self-sufficient: 34%
- I have a personal relationship with a child in need of care: 29%
- I want to start a family: 23%
- Caring for children is a source of income when I am not in paid employment: 23%
- Other (please specify): 1%

What are the reasons you would consider caring for a child aged 9 or above? (% who responded with “Yes, this reason applies to me”)
Initial findings – reasons not to care for an older child

What are the reasons you would not consider caring for a child aged 9 or above?

(% who responded with ‘Agree’ or ‘Strongly Agree’)

- **Older children have difficult behaviours that are outside my experience**
  - 35%

- **I do not have adequate financial resources to care for an older child**
  - 33%

- **Caring for a child aged 9 or above is more difficult than caring for a younger child**
  - 32%

- **I am concerned about how an older child would fit into our family**
  - 30%

- **I am concerned about the impact it would have on my children**
  - 30%

- **I am concerned about the impact it would have on my relationship with my partner**
  - 28%

- **I would prefer to care for a younger child**
  - 25%

- **I am not experienced with older children**
  - 23%

- **I do not have the time to provide adequate care for an older child**
  - 20%

- **I have young children and do not want to disrupt the birth order**
  - 16%

- **Other (please specify)**
  - 3%
Initial Findings - Overall, how did you feel about the ad?

We can't show the children who need a home to live in
We can't show kids in foster care moving from home to home
We can't show the kids who just need a caring home
We can't show the children who need a safe and stable home

Message in the video

- I disliked it very much
- I disliked it
- I neither liked it nor disliked it
- I liked it
- I liked it very much
Discussion questions

1. In the ideal world what supports would you provide to a placement of a child over 9 so that the carers would recommend it to other people?

2. It is critical to increase the diversity as well as number of available carers. How can we improve recruitment of culturally diverse carers?

3. Young people who have been in care identify providing love, care and support as the chief qualities of a good carer. How can recruitment efforts screen for qualities that enable carers to sustain a placement and remain dedicated and available to the children in their care despite challenges such as difficult behaviours?

4. Faith is identified in the research literature as one of the primary motivations to care for older children. How can we engage with communities based on altruistic ideologies with the view to recruiting carers?
Implications for OOHC Agencies

1. Increase amount of recruitment of carers for children aged 9+

2. Consider evaluating any current or future recruitment strategies

3. Incorporate recommendations into current recruitment strategies or to inform development of targeted recruitment of children aged 9+
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