



Exploring the intersection of disability and out-of-home care: summary from World Café discussions

Developing research collaborations

The Research Centre for Children and Families is exploring the intersection of disability and out-of-home care to develop new research aiming to improve policy and practice. This project is a collaboration with the Centre for Disability Research and Policy, Centre for Disability Studies and the Association of Child Welfare Agencies (ACWA).

A workforce forum was held in December 2022 to reflect on current evidence and practices for working with children and young people with disability who live in out-of-home care in New South Wales. In total, 65 practitioners, researchers and policymakers took part. Forty people joined small world café discussions about good and promising practices, workforce challenges and service improvements. Key feedback and insights into practice innovation are summarised here.

Messages from the World Café discussions

Human rights

A common goal across both sectors is to uphold the human rights and dignity of all children and young people and ensure they feel safe, loved, and accepted. This was seen as only being possible when children and young people were known by workers and genuinely placed at the centre of organisational and sector-wide planning and service delivery.

Cultural safety

Yarning is critical for First Nations children and young people to experience culturally-safe services and to ensure a space for their voices to be heard.

There is a need for First Nations led service delivery and inclusion of Indigenous practices that offer safe ways for First Nations families to engage with workers. There also needs to be openness to learning from First Nations people about traditional healing techniques to address social and emotional wellbeing needs and blend traditional and western practices.

Centring the child's voice

Younger children and children and young people with communication support needs can only have real voice and agency if materials and language are accessible and age-appropriate.

Snapshot on good practice

Strategies to improve support children and young people with disability in out-of-home care include:

- Showing respect for the child's voice and celebrating their strengths by making time for storytelling.
- Identifying first and foremost as a human rights organisation rather than a disability or out-of-home care provider.
- Learning from First Nations people about traditional healing practices.
- Utilising technology to promote social inclusion but not to replace other important social connections.
- Using Life Story work to get to know how a child or young person views their world and help them express hopes and dreams.
- Increasing the visibility of people with lived experience of disability in sector-based decision-making and positive employment strategies.
- Taking a disability-positive approach that emphasises abilities and strengthens resources.
- Collaborating with the child or young person's support network, including services and informal supports.
- Rectifying issues with data quality and information sharing between organisations to enhance cross-sector collaboration.

Data collection and information sharing

Currently, limited information about whether a child has a disability is routinely or consistently made available to service providers supporting the child. Different terminology and definitions of disability are used by out-of-home care, education and other systems. Mandatory reporting and reportable incidents involving service users also differ by sector which makes it difficult to identify risk and safety concerns about children and young people with disability using common assessment and safety assessment protocols. This can prevent an integrated approach by different sectors working with the same family. Ideas for addressing these barriers include investing in a universal database that captures, stores and retrieves minimum agreed data about individual children and young people.

Service delivery and leadership

Service improvements include increasing worker skills to apply disability-positive practice approaches. This includes proactively seeking to collaborate with others within the child or young person's support network. Governments, non-government organisations as well as tertiary institutions and accredited providers need to work together to ensure practitioners are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and regular opportunities for ongoing learning.

Improving how organisations work with children and young people with disability and their caregivers will take cross-sector leadership and commitment to improve outcomes during their time in care and beyond. Governments, as well as the non-government and university sectors, need to develop strategies and invest in training and workforce opportunities for people with disability.

Next steps

Qualitative study exploring young people's perspectives

We want to hear from young people with disability about their experiences of support and service systems. We will use an arts-based method called body mapping to provide an inclusive opportunity for young people to express their views on what needs to be done to improve how services work together to support them. We are recruiting young people aged 16-29 with a disability and current or prior experience of out-of-home care (including voluntary) placement. Participants will create two body maps during a one-day session which will be co-facilitated by the research team and a qualified art therapist, Dr Emma Gentle. Body maps are life size body outlines which participants populate with images, symbols and words during a 1:1 interview. Two sessions with up to 20 participants in total will be held in Sydney and the Hunter. Young people will receive a \$75 gift voucher for their time and can bring a support person with them. Data collection is scheduled for Feb-April 2023.

Please assist us with recruitment. Contact Dr Susan Collings 0448294307 or susan.collings@sydney.edu.au

Development of a collaborative Australian Research Council Linkage proposal

Building from the sector forum and qualitative research with young people, we are seeking to conduct further research in partnership with disability and out-of-home care organisations. This research will focus on young people with disability and their voice and agency in decisions that affect them when they are involved in out-of-home care and disability services.

Australian Research Council Linkage grants require in-kind and/or cash contribution from Partner Organisations (non-government organisations can be exempted from cash contributions). The primary in-kind contribution would be staff time. Partner Organisations provide a support letter outlining their contributions and participation in the project.

Benefits to collaborating on the project include the following:

- Participation in decision making and governance of the project
- Co-developing research approaches, questions and data collection
- Participating in sense-making of emerging research findings and implications for practice
- Contributing to research with significant potential for improving outcomes for children & young people
- Involvement in research translation and dissemination activities tailored to your organisation.

Contact Professor Amy Conley Wright to indicate potential interest at amy.conleywright@sydney.edu.au

For more information

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