



## **FOSTERING LIFELONG CONNECTIONS FOR CHILDREN IN PERMANENT CARE**

The Fostering Lifelong Connections study will co-design, trial, and evaluate practices in the out-of-home-care sector to build relationships between birth families and permanent carers and promote a trauma-informed approach to contact. The Scholarship offers a suitable candidate the opportunity to contribute to this study by identifying an independent research project, consistent with overall study aims, and to receive support and guidance to undertake this project from a highly-skilled research team within the University and from international collaborators based in the United Kingdom and United States.

The study aims to improve casework practices used to support children to maintain positive connections to family and community when they are in permanent care. The research is undertaken in partnership with agencies from the out-of-home-care sector in four parts of NSW: Dubbo, Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle. The study will focus on how out-of-home-care agencies arrange face-to-face visits and other types of contact between children and families, and what kind of support they offer to carers and parents so that visits do not cause distress or harm to children or their family members. The study will create a community of practice based on critical reflection that is grounded in trauma awareness, cultural respect and safety. Recognition of Indigenous knowledges about family relationships and child rearing practices and learning from Aboriginal Kinship traditions and practices will underpin practices developed during the study.

The out-of-home care sector in Australia is undergoing transformation to ensure children who cannot be restored to birth families exit care to permanent families. New South Wales is leading the way on these reforms. The emerging Australian policy model, permanency with lifelong connection to birth families, is distinctly different from the policy models in similar Western nations. While the Australian policy goal is clear, practices for achieving this goal are under-developed. This action research project will engage the New South Wales out-of-home care sector to design and trial theoretically informed relationship-building practices that promote positive relationships between children and their birth families.

This project brings together a team of researchers with extensive applied research experience working with children, families, and communities. The Chief Investigators, co-located in the Sydney School of Education and Social Work at University of Sydney, are working with Partner Investigators from leading out-of-home care agencies and research institutes who bring international experience and local practice knowledge. Co-researchers who have personal experience with the out-of-home care system and cultural knowledge of Aboriginal Kinship will provide 'real-world' perspectives based on their lived experience.

Applicants with professional or personal experience in the out-of-home care sector are encouraged to apply.