



LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY



NCSEHE
National Centre for Student
Equity in Higher Education



Curtin University

**International Foster
Care Research
Network,
University of Siegen,
GERMANY,
September, 2015**

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**Care leaver transition to university in Australia:
Applying local and international evidence to
improve participation and retention rates**

This presentation

1. Background to the research
2. International context
3. Australian context
4. Our study
5. Findings
6. Implications
7. Recent government inquiries
8. A recently funded project
9. STOP PRESS +



1. Background to the research

- La Trobe University project funded by **NCSEHE at Curtin University**
- **Mapped the higher education sector** in relation to care leavers
 - adults who have spent time in foster care, residential care and kinship care
- **Mixed methods:** literature review; examination of national data sets; online survey of universities; interviews with representatives from out-of-home care service providers
- **Partnership with MacKillop Family Services and Berry Street** and reference group of national and international experts.

Research report: Out of care, into university: Raising higher education access and achievement of care leavers (2015) Harvey, McNamara, Andrewartha and Luckman

1. Lessons from the national and international research
2. The need for a stronger evidence base
3. Policy and cultural reform: the higher education sector
4. Policy and cultural reform: the community service sector

[Access the report](https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/out-of-care-into-university-raising-higher-education-access-and-achievement-of-care-leavers/): <https://www.ncsehe.edu.au/publications/out-of-care-into-university-raising-higher-education-access-and-achievement-of-care-leavers/>

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Out-of-home care in Australia: A snapshot



More client-focused models of care

Charitable organisations and government operate a mix of orphanages and reformatory schools. Some early home-based care models emerge at different times, however large-scale institutional care dominates.

Early moves towards family group homes and foster care.

Large-scale residential care still dominates. Family group homes and foster care gather more momentum. 85 per cent of children in residential care.

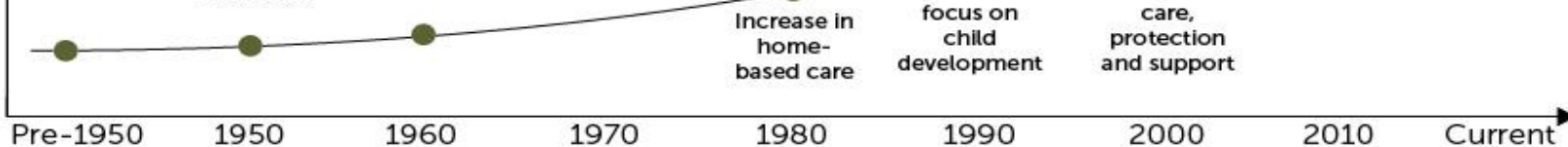
More than 50 per cent of children and young people still in some form of residential care – large and small-scale.

Last of the state-run residential care institutions closes. Home-based care and smaller residential care services expand. Kinship care emerges.

Increased focus on therapeutic care responses. Kinship care continues to grow. Home-based care now dominates

Kinship care the predominant care type. Therapeutic care responses expanding. Residential care less than 10 per cent of total system.

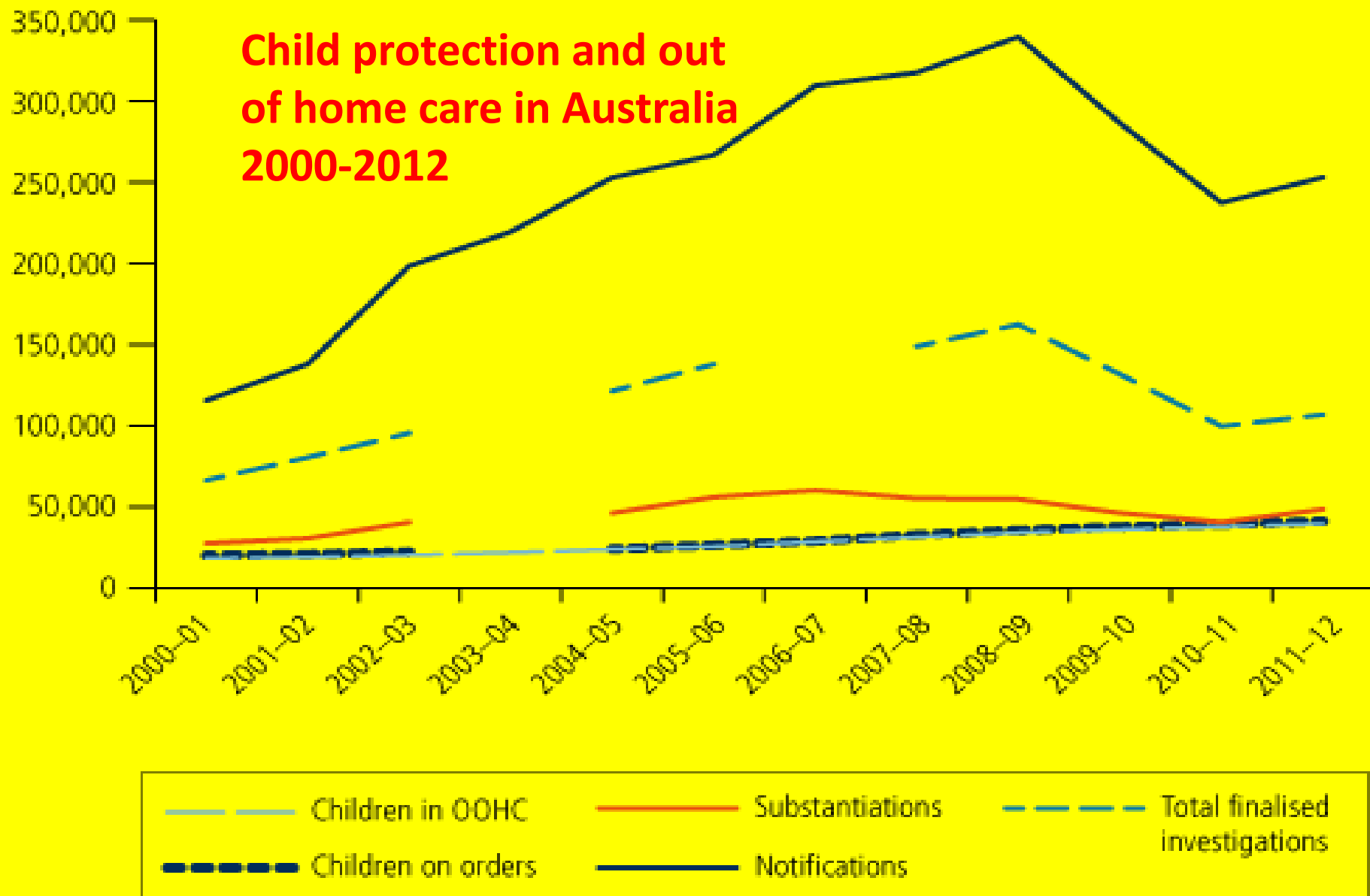
Future focus:
Continued support for kinship care. Foster care continues to play a key role. Therapeutic care responses expand. Stronger focus on outcomes and tailored care responses. Greater emphasis on timely stability planning. System reform to reduce demand and improve outcomes for all children.



Department of Human Services, Victoria :

www.dhs.vic.gov.au Five year OOHG Plan, 2014

Child protection and out of home care in Australia 2000-2012



- 43,000 (approx) Australian children require out-of-home care in Australia
- rising every year over the past decade (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare www.aihw.gov.au 2014).

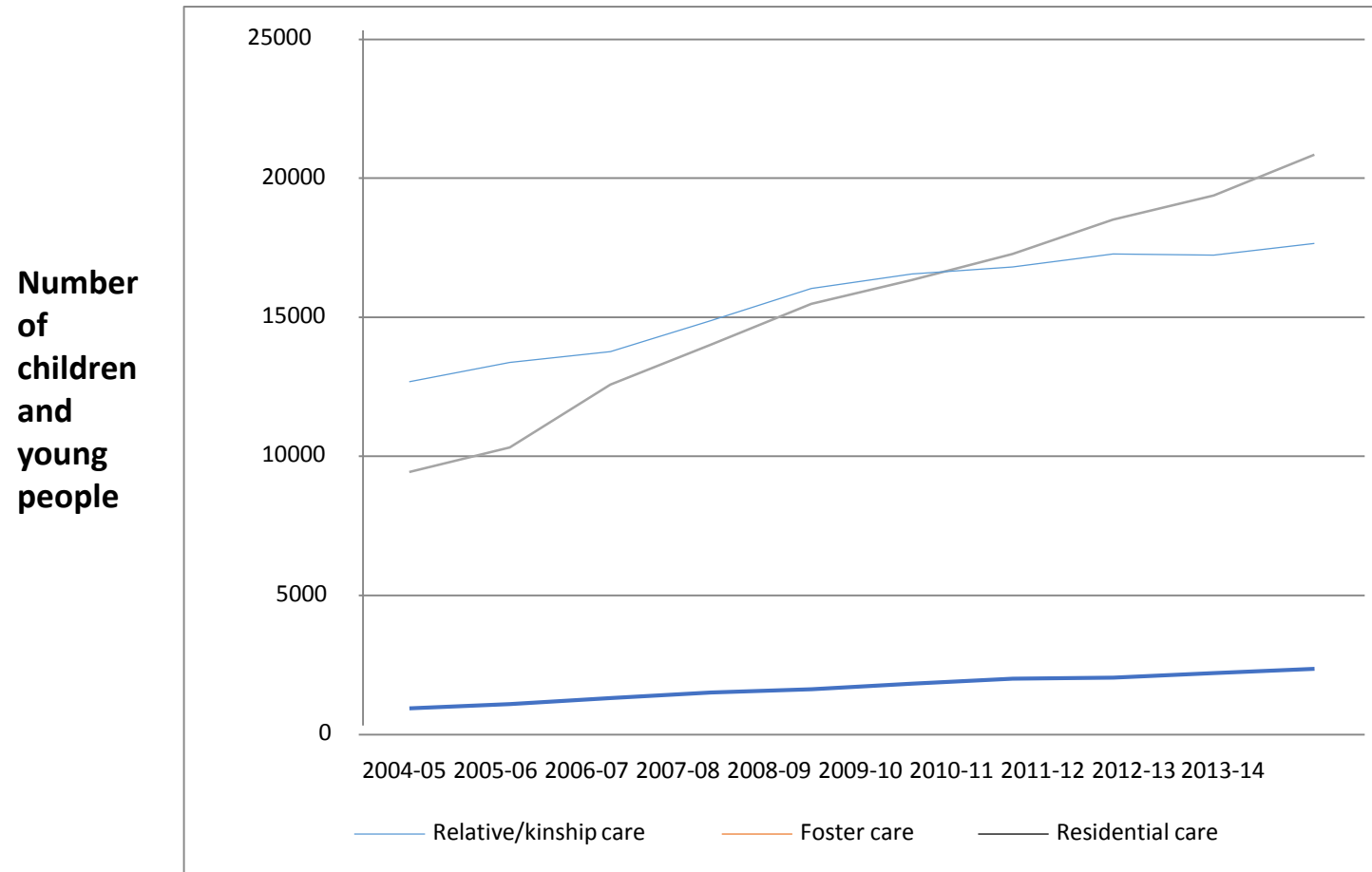


Profile of Australian out-of-home care?

- out-of-home care is care of children and young people up to 18 years who are unable to live with their families (often due to child abuse and neglect).
- placement of a child or young person with alternate caregivers on a short- or long-term basis (Victorian Department of Human Services, 2007).
- out-of-home care can be formal or informal.
- informal care refers to arrangements made without intervention by statutory authorities or courts
- formal care occurs following a child protection intervention (either by voluntary agreement or a care and protection court order).
- care types most often involve kinship care, foster care or residential care

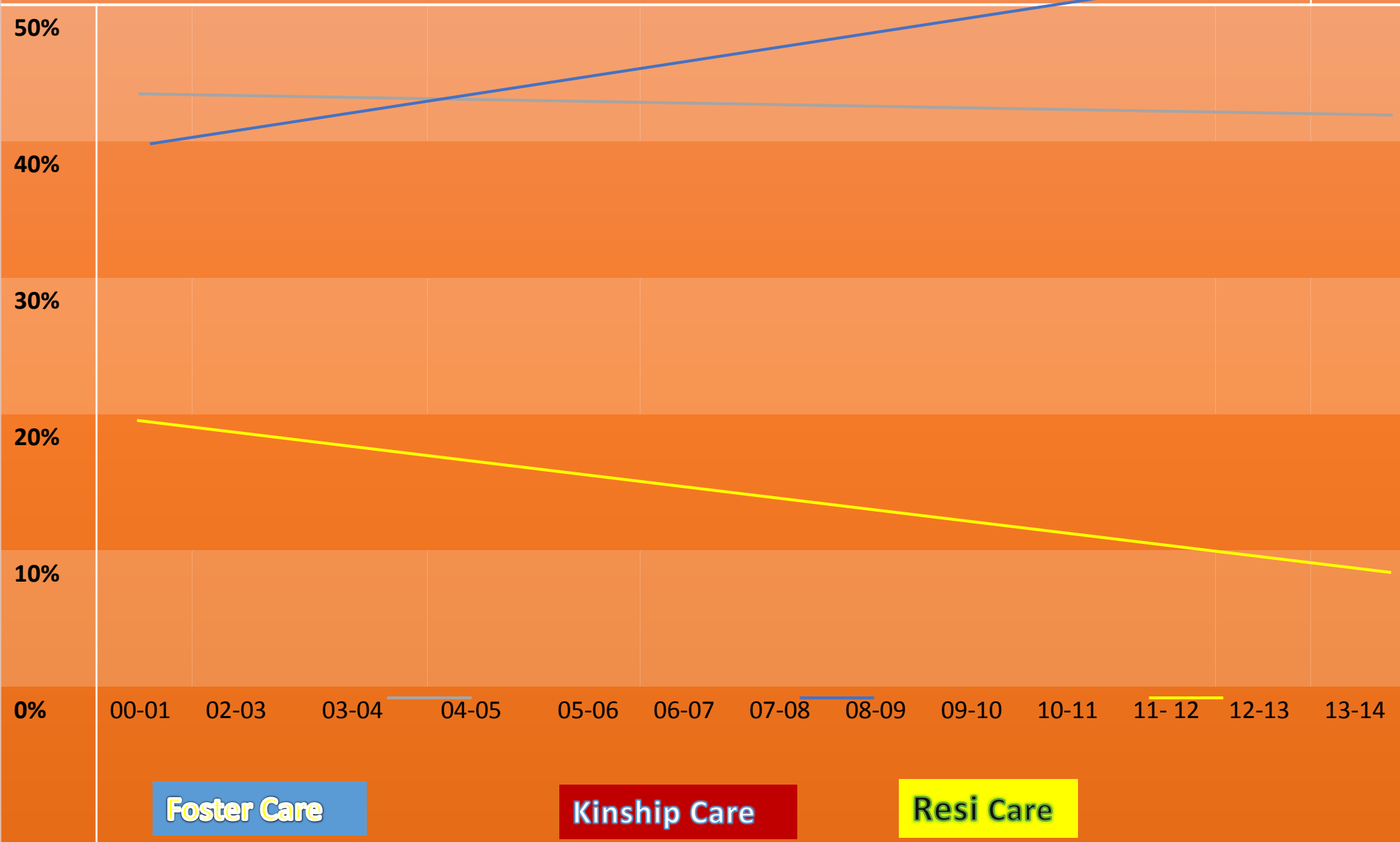
Adapted from AIFS definition www.aifs.gov.au

Number of children in out-of-home care by placement type, 2004–05 to 2013–14



Source: Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2015, Table 15A.19; AIHW, answer to question on notice, 16 April 2015 (received 20 May 2015)..

Out of Home Care in Victoria



Source: DHS Quarterly Reporting Residential care and foster care figures are sourced from the CRIS system while Kinship Care and Permanent Care are sourced from ORACLE (caregiver reimbursement system) Adapted from http://www.cfecfw.asn.au/sites/www.cfecfw.asn.au/files/CFE1724_Foster_Carers_Report_FA5a_web.pdf

State and territory data comparing rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care compared to non-Indigenous children on 30 June 2013

State/territory	Indigenous (per 1,000 children)	Non-Indigenous (per 1,000 children)	All children (per 1,000 children) ^a	Rate ratio Indigenous/non-Indigenous ^b
NSW	85.5	7.2	10.4	11.8
Victoria	69.5	4.4	5.2	15.7
Queensland	43.6	4.7	7.3	9.4
WA	53.3	3.3	5.9	16.1
SA	60.7	5.3	7.4	11.5
Tasmania	28.5	7.3	9.3	3.9
ACT	70.5	5.1	6.6	14.0
NT	22.2	3.4	11.7	6.6
Total population	57.1	5.4	7.8	10.6

Notes: ^a "All children" includes children whose Indigenous status is not known. ^b The "rate ratio" is the number of times more likely an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child is to be in care compared to a non-Indigenous child.

Source: AIHW, 2014, Table 5.4, p. 52.



2. Lessons from international research

International evidence of low levels of higher education participation for care leavers has led to legislative and program responses

- United Kingdom – *By Degrees* research
- Continental Europe - *Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to Education in Europe (YIPPEE)*
- United States - evidence for extending the legislative age limit of state responsibilities.

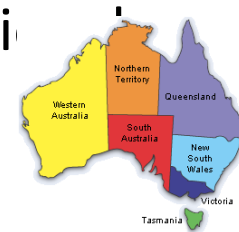




3. Australian context

Australia has moved more slowly in terms of research and legislative and program responses

- Poorer school achievement levels (primary and secondary) are well documented (e.g. AIHW, 2007, 2011).
- Research at higher education level is limited but suggests **very low rates of higher education participation (perhaps 1%)** (e.g. Cashmore et al., 2007)
- Most states and territories have introduced legislation or policy to assist care leavers beyond 18 years of age but types of support and upper age limits differ
- No national-level data collection or reporting of the educational outcomes of care leavers.



4. Our study

Rationale

- OOHC care cohort is **large and growing**.
- broad access to higher education is a social justice imperative.
- higher education is linked to **lifetime advantages**, such as improved employment opportunities and earning potential ([Lomax-Smith, Watson, & Webster, 2011](#); [Norton, 2012](#)).
- important to examine factors that might increase **aspirations, access and success** at university.
- international evidence and equivalent national school-level data suggest that the **out-of-home care cohort is likely to be seriously under-represented within Australian universities**.

YIPPEE (Young People from an (institutional or) Public Care Background: Pathways to education in Europe) EU-European Commission

- **‘reliable statistical information** is an essential basis for improving the educational opportunities of young people who have been in care’
- and
- **young people ‘should be encouraged to aim as high as possible, regardless of their care status’** (Jackson & Cameron 2012).



Collaboration

- First identified major cross sectoral collaboration
- The project was a **partnership** between La Trobe University;
- a major national service provider, **Mackillop Family Services**;
- Berry Street the largest independent child and family welfare organisation in Victoria.
- **Three senior researchers** from the YiPPEE project (Hojer, Cameron, and Monserrat) were members of the Reference Group



Study purpose

- **To commence a mapping of the Australian out-of-home care cohort in higher education**, drawing closely on the work undertaken in the UK through the Buttle Foundation's research, and through subsequent European research in the YIPPEE project (Young People from a public care background Pathways to Education in Europe)
- **To explore whether more targeted policies and strategies are required to support the university aspirations, access and success of people from a background of out-of-home care**

5. Findings

Today we will look at data from...

- Survey
- Interviews



Policy and cultural reform: the higher education sector

Online survey sent to senior equity representatives at 37 Australian public universities

Focus

- What types of policies, support structures, and procedures are in place that specifically target care leavers?
- How can universities increase higher education access and support for care leavers?

Survey responses

- 28 universities responded; 76% response rate.



Most universities do not have any policy, support structure, or procedure specifically targeted to care leavers

Does your university have any of the following policies, support structures, or procedures specifically targeted to care leavers?

	Yes	No	Unsure
Recruitment policies or guidelines	2	22	3
Admission policies	5	19	2
Outreach programs	4	19	3
Scholarships	1	18	7
Accommodation options	0	24	1
Other policies or support programs	0	17	9
Data collection procedures	1	22	4
Progress tracking procedures	1	23	3
Relationships with out-of-home care service providers	5	8	14

•Note: The total number of responses differs for each item as responses were not mandatory (i.e. respondents were able to skip items).

Opportunities to expand accommodation, financial, academic, and broader support for care leavers

How can universities increase access for care leavers? (n = 23)	No. of respondents
Targeted scholarships and financial support	9
Partnerships with out-of-home care service providers	9
Work with secondary schools to support students in out-of-home care	5

How can universities better support care leavers? (n = 21)	No. of respondents
Scholarships and financial support	10
Accommodation support	7
Link care leavers to student support services	6
Create institutional awareness and recognition of the group in equity policies and initiatives	5



Policy and cultural reform: the community service sector

Eleven interviews with senior representatives from major out-of-home care services providers across Australia

Limited educational data tracking

'What's missing is a centralised data system to record the educational outcomes for children and young people in our services.'

Often unready to transition to tertiary education at 18

'there are certain processes and pathways that kids have to pass through before they're ready to take that on'

Barriers and facilitators to higher education

Barriers:

e.g. accelerated transition to independence; mental health issues; intergenerational trauma; low expectations.

'moving kids on at 18, and the pressure that that puts on kids to actually start to join the adult world, is horrendous'

'We have a high percentage of carers that have low education (achievement) and they've had low aspirations themselves.'

Facilitators:

e.g. continuity of care-placements and schooling; committed mentors; financial and housing support.

'provide them with living support, emotional support, mentoring and good people around them that are motivated to help them keep going'

Barriers and facilitators for Indigenous higher education

Barriers:

e.g. Trans-generational trauma (Stolen Generation experience); behavioural and learning issues; racism; suspensions; un-readiness for HE; family and community responsibilities

'They get very caught up with the intergenerational trauma of their family; even if they're okay it's very difficult to separate from families of origin'

'They have to go back to country to maintain responsibilities...lore and culture...they've always got this stuff going on in their head and they do get homesick.'

Facilitators:

e.g. Educated families and carers; mentors and role modelling; advocacy

'If they've got family that have already gone through, they have a support base (who've) done it; they've come from the country, endured the hardships and completed their studies'



6. Implications

Overarching need for cultural change

A 'soft bigotry of low expectations' is omnipresent for care leavers. Harvey, 2015

There is such stigma attached to foster kids and to kids who are in care or who have had a care experience. We are automatically seen as people who come from a low socioeconomic status and that we are always going to be in that status; we are not going to get out of it, we are not going to achieve anything. So when we do, there is such surprise – and it is offensive. I never had any doubt that I would go to university, and it is just horrifying that everyone else does (doubt it). India Spicer

Ms India Spicer, St Luke's Anglicare, Committee of Inquiry – Out of Home Care Hansard, Melbourne, 20 March 2015, p. 27.

Nationally consistent data on HE access and outcomes

Policy reform within the higher education sector

- greater recognition of this student group
- national student equity framework.

Policy reform within the community service sector

- continued support beyond the age of 18
- community service organisations need access to greater individualised data, and increased capacity to provide education and training to carers and the related workforce.

7. Recent government inquiries

Senate Committee Inquiry: Out of Home Care 2015

Recommendation 19

10.56 The committee recommends that AIHW work with states and territories to **develop a data set** on outcomes for young people transitioning from care up to **21 years** of age, including the following indicators:

- connection to family and/or carers;
- education and employment;
- housing; and
- health (including mental health).

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Senate Committee Inquiry: Out of Home Care 2015

Recommendation 20

10.57 The committee recommends that COAG include in the third action plan (2015-2018) of the National Framework (for protection of Australia's children) a project to develop and implement **a nationally consistent framework for transitioning from care**, with a focus on improving:

- health outcomes;
- **access to higher education;**
- employment options; and
- access and support for securing suitable housing.

'Protecting children is everyone's business'

Third Action Plan for the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020

Developing the Third Action Plan (2015-2018) *Driving change: engaging the community* A discussion paper

Department of Social Services

<http://familiesaustralia.org.au/publications/pubs/coalition/NFPAC%20Driving%20Change%20Engaging%20the%20Community%20Discussion%20Paper.pdf>

Senate Committee Inquiry: Out of Home Care 2015

Recommendation 21

10.58 The committee recommends that the Australian Government **increase the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)** for young people transitioning from care. The committee further recommends that the Department of Social Services review existing **post-care support programs** to identify opportunities to assist young people transitioning from care.

Recommendation 22

10.59 The committee recommends that states and territories raise the age to which young people continue to **receive ongoing post-care support to 21 years of age**.

Commissioner for children and young people report on residential care in Victoria

“..as a good parent would..”

<http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au/downloads/inquiry/final-report-as-a-good-parent-would.pdf>

8. Newly funded project

- *“Improving educational outcomes for young people leaving care”*
- The Sidney Myer Foundation – major philanthropic
- 3 year grant of AUD724 (2015-2018)
- Programmatic development and evaluation
- Consortium of 2 universities La Trobe University and Federation University Australia and 2 major child welfare organisations Anglicare Victoria and Mackillop Family Services led by the NGO peak body – the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Commitment by universities to extend proposed Myer Foundation funding of campus based Care Coordinator positions by developing infrastructure to support a range of outreach and in-reach activities including the Tertiary Education Transition Program – scholarships, housing, mentoring, tutoring, recreation etc.
- Commitment by NGOs to source and support the young people
- Further funding contributions being sought

<http://www.cfecfw.asn.au/sites/default/files/Media%20Release%20-%20Improving%20Educational%20Outcomes%20August%202015.pdf>

Aims of the project

- Train carers, caseworkers and teachers to better understand and support a range of OOHC pathways to tertiary education
- Provide resource access and information exchange around further education for care leavers and those supporting them
- Shift low academic aspirations for/of young people in OOHC
- Develop OOHC-to-university transition program
- Begin to redress poor evidence-base by evaluating each project element
- Achieve sustainability of these initiatives as appropriate

Project design

- Develop accredited Certificate IV training package for carers, teachers and caseworkers to be delivered by the CFECFW* as RTO#
- Build education Website and Helpline based at CFECFW
- Appoint Care Coordinators to support transition pathways utilising TAFE, university and community service sector partnerships
- Initiate Tertiary Education Transition Program for young people: fee relief, accommodation, counselling, mentoring, tutoring , peer support, learning resources and recreational activities
- Independent (tendered) evaluation of all project components
- Achieve sustainability of all project components based on evaluation findings

*CFECFW – Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

#RTO- Registered Training Organisation

TAFE-Technical and Further Education

*

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- ‘August 14th 2015 – Victorian State Government announces remediation centres and related funding to support education needs of children in out of home care’.
- ‘\$13.2 million over four years and \$4.8 million ongoing to establish and operate LOOKOUT Education Support Centres for the more than 6,000 school-aged children in out-of-home-care’
- “The new funding includes almost \$150 million per annum additional equity funding in student loadings, to improve outcomes based on the needs of individual students.”
- “Minister for Education James Merlino today announced \$747 million in extra funds over four years to deliver great schools for every community and great teachers in every classroom”.

<http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/education-state-largest-ever-funding-boost-to-schools-for-kids-who-need-extra-help>

<http://www.cfecfw.asn.au/sites/default/files/Media%20Release%20-%20Improving%20Educational%20Outcomes%20August%202015.pdf>

Voices of care leavers in Western Australia



- <http://www.wanslea.asn.au/foster-care/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGm2hbxkvU>



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