

# Standards in training for out-of-home carers



Institute of Open Adoption Studies

## Literature Review Summary



### Purpose of the study

The Institute of Open Adoption Studies was commissioned by My Forever Family NSW\* (MFF) to examine the standards of training for out-of-home carers in NSW. The literature review provides an outline of the current practices in NSW, an overview of international models of training and recommendations regarding best practice principles in training for foster carers, kinship carers, guardians, and adoptive families. The review highlights some promising practices in training however, several gaps have been identified including: insufficient evaluation of training, inadequate or limited training for some carers and significant inconsistency with regard to quality, content and delivery. The literature review is the first phase of the study followed by a report which will outline the findings from focus groups conducted with carers from urban, regional and rural NSW.

### Key Findings

- The majority of training programs, which are currently provided to carers of all types, have received either no or minimal evaluation
- Training programs with the best evidence for use with carers of children in out-of-home care (OOHC) included Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO), Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Keeping Foster and Kin Carers Supported and Trained (KEEP) and Together Facing The Challenge (TFTC)
- Kinship carers receive substantially less training than foster carers
- Several OOHC agencies in NSW are using evidence-based ongoing training including PCIT, 1-2-3 Magic, Triple P and Circle of Security
- Most agencies using evidence-based training implement models designed for non-foster parents which have not been adequately evaluated for use with foster carers
- Guardians and adoptive parents have access to the least amount of training of all carer types

\* MFF NSW is a program operated by Adopt Change and funded by the NSW Government

### Snapshot of carer training

#### Foster care

- 39% of children in OOHC are in Foster Care across Australia\*
- No pre-service training models have been subject to evaluation in Australia, including the NSW Shared Lives training
- Seven Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander training programs were identified, (two in NSW)

#### Kinship care

- 51% of children in OOHC in Australia are in Kinship Care\*
- Only two kinship-specific training models were identified across Australia

#### Guardianship

- 35,800 children in guardianship placement in Australia\*
- No established training is provided to adults providing guardianship care

#### Adoption

- In Australia, of the 330 total adoptions in 2017-18, 45% (147) were from OOHC\*
- Only one post-placement training could be identified for adoptive parents (in SA)

\*As of June 2018 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019)

September 2019

## FOSTER CARE TRAINING

### Pre-service

Pre-service training is the most commonly provided and accessed training by foster and kinship carers, adoptive parents and guardians alike (Richmond & McArthur, 2017). The limited research available in Australia suggests that pre-service training is characterised by jurisdictional variability and piecemeal developments, resulting in standards and models which vary significantly across states (Benton, Piggot, Price, Shepherdson, & Winkworth, 2017). A recent national study found that of those who received training, most foster and kinship carers (64%) felt either very well or well prepared for their caring role, however, only 35% of kinship carers had participated in any form of training (Qu, Lahausse, & Carson, 2018).

### Ongoing

The necessity of effective and accessible ongoing training is recurrently highlighted as a critical need for carers (McHugh & Pell, 2013; Rork & McNeil, 2011). There is a broad array of ongoing training initiatives, which are currently available primarily to foster carers, with fewer to kinship carers; however, there is inconsistency in agency provision of evidence-based training. Though concerted efforts are being made to implement evidence-based models including TFCO, 1-2-3 Magic, Triple P and COS-P, very little evaluation has been conducted of the efficacy of these models with foster carers in Australia.

### Specialist

Internationally, Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) has been comprehensively evaluated and has demonstrated links to enhanced rates of retention (Macdonald & Turner, 2005), carer resilience (Chamberlain, Price, Reid, & Landsverk, 2008), placement stability (Sheras, 2011), and positive contact with birth family (Jivangee, 1999) in comparison to general foster care. In Australia, specialist training for TFC is primarily offered to foster carers and very little is known about kinship carers who may receive specialist training (ACWA, 2016). Furthermore, though outcomes have been established internationally, only some of the TFC models used in Australia have been evaluated and results pertaining to efficacy remain largely undocumented (Frederico, Long, Mcnamara, McPherson, & Rose, 2017).



### Barriers to effective training

Training that does not embed knowledge and skills about **cultural sensitivity**<sup>1</sup>

Absence of a manualised program or **program logic** increases susceptibility to variations in delivery and outcomes<sup>2</sup>

Training that is not provided in an **accessible location or medium** is diminished in its utility to carers<sup>3</sup>



### Incentives to attend training

Relevant and applicable **content**, especially related to **managing difficult behaviours** and trauma-responses

**Nationally accredited training** which is linked to formally recognised qualifications<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Integration of training into **carer development plans** and certification process

### Best practice in carer training



<sup>1</sup> Higgins & Butler, 2007

<sup>2</sup> Piescher, Schmidt, & LaLiberte, 2008

<sup>3</sup> Murray, Tarren-Sweeney, & France, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Kaasbool, Lassemo, Paulsen, Melby, & Osborg, 2019

<sup>5</sup> Chamberlain, Price, Reid, & Landsverk, 2008

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, McArthur, & Watt, 2016

<sup>7</sup> McHugh & Pell, 2013

## KINSHIP CARE TRAINING

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### Summary of findings

Over the past 15 years, there has been a gradual decrease in the percentage of foster placements and a corresponding increase in the percentage of kinship placements (Productivity Commission, 2019). Despite this, research has consistently identified a concerning lack of assessment, support and training provided to kinship carers in Australia (Benton, Piggot, Price, Shepherdson, & Winkworth, 2017). The current landscape of training specifically for kinship carers is fragmented and under-developed. There are very few established training programs specifically targeted at kinship carers, with only one recently developed in NSW and rolled out in early 2019. There are different findings in relation to the benefits and challenges of integrating kinship carers with foster carers in the same training; however, it is generally agreed that kinship carers require a targeted approach to delivery and content in order for training to be most effective (Thompson, McArthur, & Watt, 2016).

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### Grandparent carers

Grandparent carers comprise at least 50% of all kinship carers and are generally reported to have higher levels of social isolation, health problems, financial disadvantage and lower service use than other parent and carer households (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2019; Brennan, et al., 2013; Coleman & Wu, 2016). Given these unique challenges, it has been noted that adequate training and support can be especially beneficial for this population of carers who are frequently unsupported. Some studies have noted positive responses from grandparents who desire to 'update' their parenting knowledge and skills (Brennan, et al., 2013). However, hesitancy to engage or seek assistance from child protection agencies or departments is frequently mentioned in the literature, due to fear of child removal and negative experiences with social workers and child protection workers (Coleman & Wu, 2016; Wellard, 2010).

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### Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander carers

Indigenous carers are highly represented in kinship care arrangements, due to the disproportionate number of Aboriginal children in care and strong value of family and kin which is characteristic of this population (Libesman, 2011). A majority of Indigenous carers experience the same low standards and access to training, which is also typical for other kinship carers (Thompson, McArthur, & Watt, 2016). There are no records to indicate exactly how many Indigenous carers have undergone training. What is known is that there are few programs which have been specifically developed as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training models. Given the significant proportion of Aboriginal children in care, there are still too few targeted training programs and more work is needed to integrate cultural sensitivity modules into general foster care training (Libesman, 2011)

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### What do carers want from training?

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#### Foster carers

- Training that is co-delivered by experienced carers

- Training that facilitates real-life scenarios and provides practice of concepts with children or in the home
  - Programs which utilise multiple methods of engagement including online components, groups, one-on-one and guided play
  - Nationally accredited training with links to formal qualifications
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#### Kinship carers

- Targeted content for kinship carers (accessing services, managing family relationships and contact)
- Terminology around 'training' to be sensitive to the prior experience of carers
- Address issues related to grandparent care (loss of work, social isolation, health related impacts)

# GUARDIANSHIP & ADOPTION TRAINING



## What are the standards of training for adoptive parents?

In 2017-2018, 330 adoptions were finalised in Australia, with the largest segment finalised in NSW by carers of children in OOH (142 of 147 known adoptions) (AIHW, 2018). Training for adoptive parents primarily consists of attending a mandatory pre-adoption seminar which provides basic information regarding the policies, benefits and implications of adoption. However, many adoptive parents have been or are also foster carers and have therefore received the foster carer training.

Only one post-placement training was identified in Australia for adoptive parents which indicates a gap in training provision. In NSW, select OOH agencies are able to run the 3-day pre-service training which is called 'Preparation for OOH Adoption Seminar' however it is primarily delivered by the Department of Communities and Justice. Some agencies which provide dual authorisation of carers run the seminar in combination with the regular Shared Lives training, though there does not appear to be consistency across agencies. The exact delivery, content and duration varies between states and territories and to date there have been no evaluations of the training provided to adoptive parents.

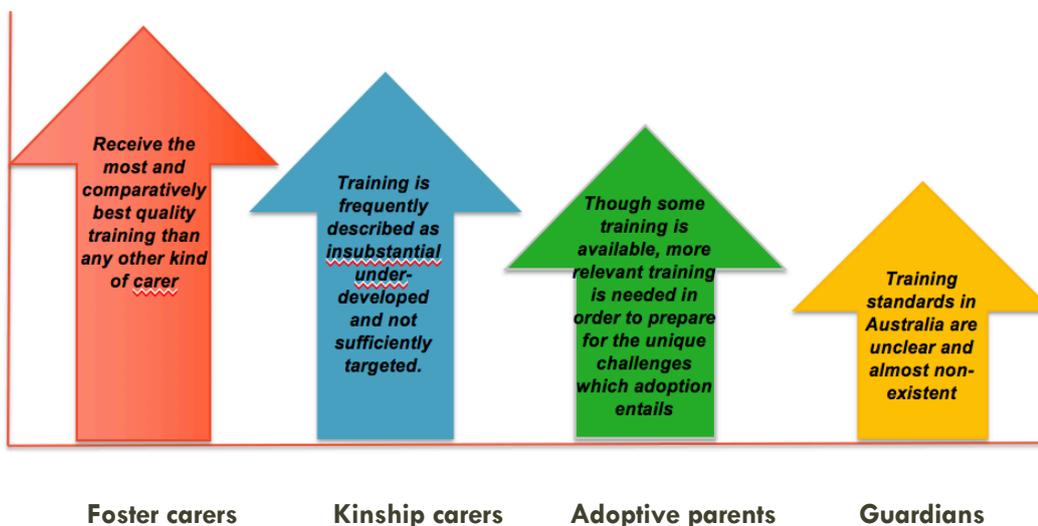
- Facilitation of social engagement with other adoptive carers or guardians
- Need for more training post-adoption or guardianship order
- Trained facilitators who have experience of adoption or guardianship
- Separation of assessors from trainers
- Address adoptive carer specific issues (long waiting period, lack of role models)

\* Note: MFF training for foster carers is also available to adoptive parents.

## What training do guardians receive?

As of June 2018, there were approximately 2,849 children in guardianship placements in NSW (FACS Quarterly Statistical Report). Despite the significant proportion of children in this type of care, there is currently no established training provided to guardianship carers. Research pertaining to the training of guardianship carers is scarce and little is documented both in Australia and internationally about the training which guardians need or receive. A major report about guardianship in the UK released in 2019 stated that "there is no regulatory requirement to ensure preparation and/or training" and described it as "almost non-existent" and "ad-hoc". The findings of this literature review indicate that the situation in Australia is alarmingly similar.

## Training received by different types of carers



### For more information

Institute of Open Adoption Studies

e [esw.ioas@sydney.edu.au](mailto:esw.ioas@sydney.edu.au)

w [sydney.edu.au/education\\_social\\_work/ioas](http://sydney.edu.au/education_social_work/ioas)

w <https://www.myforeverfamily.org.au/>



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Full references included in the literature review