



THE UNIVERSITY OF
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Certainty for Children, Fairness for Families?

Appendix 4:

In-depth Interviews with
Birth Parents, Carers, and Children

Sarah Wise, Ilan Katz and Megan Bedford

Contact details

For information about this report please contact:

Associate Professor Sarah Wise
Good Childhood Fellow
Department of Social Work
Melbourne School of Health Sciences
The University of Melbourne

Phone: 03 9035 5371

Email: sarah.wise@unimelb.edu.au

Introduction

This appendix focuses on the in-depth interviews component of the Permanency Amendments Longitudinal Study (PALS). Interviews are intended to provide in-depth information about parent, carer and child experiences of the child protection and Court decision-making processes and outcomes for children of Children's Court decisions.

The questions focused on several key areas including

- understanding and involvement in decision-making;
- process fairness;
- levels of support; and
- suggested changes to improve child protection and Court decision-making processes.

The two main research questions specific to the in-depth interviews are:

How do parents, children and carers experience child protection and legal decision-making processes?

- Are child protection and legal decision-making processes explained?
- Are parents, children and carers involved in decisions?
- Do parents, children and carers think child protection and legal decision-making processes are fair?
- What would make their experience better?

How have decisions of the Children's Court affected parents, children and carers?

- Do children feel settled?
- Do carers feel supported?
- Are parents, children, and carers happy with contact arrangements?

See Attachments A, B and C for the full interview schedules used in the in-depth interviews with parents, carers, and children.

Research Design and Methodology

This component of the PALS uses a qualitative interview design.

Sample Size

The aim of the in-depth interviews was to achieve the following sample:

- 20 children aged 12 years and older who are subject to finalised care or protection orders.
- 15-20 foster/kinship carers of children aged 0-18 years and subject to finalised care or protection orders.
- 15-20 parents of children 0-18 years subject to finalised care or protection orders.

Participants had to meet the following two criteria:

- All children had to have care or protection orders finalised to minimise the risk of harm for participants.
- Protection applications had to be issued after March 2017 to ensure that participants had experience of the decision-making process after the permanency amendments.

Table 1 below outlines how many interviews were conducted.

Table 1.

Description of the In-Depth Interview Sample

Participant Group	Planned	Conducted
Birth Parents	20	13
Carers	15-20	19
Children	15-20	7
Total	60	38

Recruitment

Most of the participants were recruited using a convenience sampling method, where participants are recruited because they are easy to contact or reach, in this case, through agencies and services that had agreed to support the research. In addition to convenience

sampling, snowballing was used to recruit parents given that it is widely acknowledged that this is a difficult group to access. This meant that parents referred other parents through their own networks.

The participants were recruited from three Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)¹ metropolitan areas and two DHHS regional areas. Agencies and services involved in delivering child protection services and placement and support services in these areas assisted with the recruitment of participants.

In-depth Interviews

All of the interviews were between 30 and 90 minutes in length and were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants. Interviews were a combination of face to face and phone interviews. Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber for analysis purposes. Written consent was obtained from parents, carers, and children prior to the commencement of all interviews. The data was coded and analysed using the qualitative data analysis program NVIVO.

¹ On 01 February 2021, the DHHS was separated into the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and the Department of Health (DoH). The DFFH includes the DHHS portfolio of Child Protection.

Key Findings

The following sections present the key findings from the in-depth interviews. It has been organised into three sections based on the participant groups

- parents;
- carers; and
- children.

Within each of these sections, the findings have been further organised by the research questions for the in-depth interviews (see above).

Parents

This section focuses on the key findings from the in-depth interviews with parents and their experiences of child protection and the Court process.

Description of Parent Sample

In total, 13 parents participated in an in-depth interview. The average age of the parents was 35 years with an age range of 26 to 41 years. None of the parents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, however, three parents had children in their care that identified as Aboriginal. English was the main language spoken by all of the parents.

The average number of children per parent was 3.5 children with a range of one to nine children. Of the 13 parents, seven had one or more children living in out-of-home care (OOHC).

The children were subject to a range of Court orders including

- family preservation order (FPO);
- family reunification order (FRO);
- care by Secretary order (CBSO);
- long-term care order (LTCO); and
- permanent care order (PCO).

The average length of time since the parents last attended Court was just under 12 months with a range of one month to three years.

Experience of Child Protection and Child Protection Proceedings in the Children's Court

This section focuses on parent's experiences of child protection and the Court process. In particular, parent's involvement in decision-making and their perceptions about the fairness of the processes.

Explanations of Processes

There was some limited discussion by parents about their feelings around the explanation of child protection processes. One parent did not understand why child protection had become involved in their family and felt that no one had clearly explained to them why they were being taken to Court to decide whether their children would stay in their care. This parent said:

"I wasn't clearly explained to why they were coming in and taking us to Court. No one told us. Even with [child's name] information, they weren't telling me exactly why I was getting dragged to Court for [my child]. I was saying, 'Well, what's going on? Tell me'. They wouldn't even tell me". (One child under a protection order and one child under a PCO)

Another parent said that they had arrived at Court and been handed "bits of paper". This parent felt that there was no explanation to go along with the papers:

"We had no idea. We weren't explained what was happening. We didn't – we were handed bits of paper and faced the judge ...". (Three children under protection orders)

Another parent said that no one had explained to them that they had the right to appeal or challenge the decisions being made about their children. It was not until this parent started working with another caseworker that they realised that they could challenge and appeal

decisions. This parent had assumed that they had to accept all decisions until their child left care:

“And, he [caseworker] also said at the end of the conversation, [birth parent’s name], you do know that you have the right – has anybody told you that you have the right to appeal? And, I said, ‘Well, I’ve been told no, I’ve pretty much got nothing to go with and I won’t see the – I won’t have the [children] back home until they’re 18 or whatever’. And, he said, ‘No. That’s not the case’. And, he went through it all with me”. (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

Involvement in Decision-Making

Three factors influenced how parents in this research felt about being involved in the decisions being made about their children.

Case Planning.

First, parents wanted to be included in case planning meetings and discussions. The involvement of parents was not only important for parents’ understanding of the processes but it also influenced whether parents felt included in the decisions being made about their children.

While about half of the parents felt involved in case planning, the other half felt that they were not included. This left many of the parents feeling excluded from the decisions being made about their children. One parent said:

“They made decisions without me. They had meetings without me. They didn’t notify me when my [child] was sick. They didn’t notify me when my [my child] ended up in hospital”. (One child under a protection order)

There were a couple of examples where parents felt that they were only invited to “select” meetings. One parent said that the meetings that they attended did not include all of the parties involved in the process:

“And the carers were involved in that one, so that was not fair. And, then when they did involve me and set up another case plan meeting, the carers weren’t involved in that and it feels like decisions or whatever they raised, they’d already spoken about and I didn’t get involved in the entire meeting”. (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

In this case, the parent felt confused about why they were only included in some of the decisions being made about their children and excluded from others. This parent wanted a more inclusive approach to case planning where all parties were involved in the process and present for decisions being made.

Another parent felt that in the initial stages of case planning they were included in all of the case planning meetings, however, as time went by they were feeling less included and most recently not being invited to meetings at all:

“Other times I wasn’t even – especially currently, I don’t even get invited to meetings”. (One child in care – order unknown)

It was unclear to this parent as to why there had been a change in their level of involvement over time, however, it was impacting on this parent in terms of feeling involved in decision-making about their children and their sense of fairness about the process more generally.

Connected with the importance of feeling involved in case planning, parents said it was important that they had a “voice” in case planning to feel both understood and listened to. Two parents summed this up by saying:

“They get to say their piece, but I don’t really get a chance to say my own piece, and I really haven’t this whole way through”. (One child in care – order unknown)

“But, they can say what they want, at the end of the day I’m invited to case plan meetings – I feel that I’m invited to case plan meetings because legally they have to,

but they don't actually take on anything I say". (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

One of the parents above gave the example of sharing their concerns about the mental health of their children with their caseworker in a case planning meeting. However, this parent felt that their concerns were not being listened to as no action was taking place. This parent went on to say:

"I'd like to see that that information is given to the carers and that the foster care agency follows up with the carers, did you go to the doctor and talk to the doctor about this and what was the outcome". (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

Another parent felt that they were not being listened to regarding increasing contact with their children. In this example, the children were returning to the care of their parents in the coming months and the parent felt that increasing contact would be beneficial for their relationship with the children and also ensure a smooth transition from care. However, this parent said that they did not feel listened to and it was suggested by their legal representative that they take this "higher up the chain".

Generally, the parents in this research wanted an inclusive approach to case planning where all parties were involved in the process, including regular case planning meetings. Parents also wanted to have a "voice" and to feel listened to. Involvement in case planning was important for parents to feel included in the decision-making process.

Feeling Informed

Generally, when asked about feeling informed, parents associated this with the frequency and quality of contact with their caseworker from the DHHS. This contact was particularly important for parents who did not feel involved in case planning (see previous section) and for those periods outside of case planning meetings and Court appearances.

One issue that was consistently raised by the parents in this study was about the importance of being able to contact caseworkers when needed. This contact was important for parents to be able to ask about decisions and feel included in the process where they otherwise might not be. However, while this contact was considered important, more than half of the parents interviewed spoke about trying to contact their caseworker by phone or email and receiving a delayed response, often more than a day, or receiving no response at all. Some examples of comments made by parents include:

“There’s no communication from their side whatsoever. You can leave voice message after voice message after voice message and you never hear back”. (One child under a protection order)

“So, it’s always very difficult I find to get in touch with somebody at DHHS”. (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

“Multiple messages and phone calls to the caseworkers were ignored and not returned”. (One child in care – order unknown)

“[Our caseworker] hardly contacts us. It’s kind of annoying, really, because we’ve tried to contact [them], but [they] never answer [their] phone”. (Four children under protection orders)

“I’m not being included in anything. I’m reading it all second-hand. If I didn’t ring and find out what was going on, I wouldn’t have even known, which legally they should be contacting the mother, not anyone else first, in my books”. (One child under a protection order and one child under a PCO)

“I haven’t had no home visits. They haven’t inspected my house. They’re just going on stories They haven’t bothered to come out because they still think there’s family violence here”. (One child under a protection order)

Linked with being able to contact caseworkers was the impact of caseworker turnover. Many of the parents felt that the turnover of caseworkers was high, and this impacted on both how informed they felt and being able to make contact. One parent said:

“The main thing that I would like heard is the change of caseworkers, the constant change of caseworkers. That needs to stop. The system put in place for this needs to change. They need to have a caseworker and stick with that caseworker and definitely not be able to change caseworkers during a Court proceeding”. (One child in care – order unknown)

There were a couple of examples of parents feeling frustrated that they had to start their action plan from the beginning each time they got a new. One parent said:

“I’m slowly getting to a plan of action to protect my child, all of a sudden they're gone and a new worker is being put in place, I haven’t been told of it, and then I start from the start all over again in trying to get a plan of action put in place to protect my [child]. Just as we start getting somewhere, yet again, and again, and again a new caseworker gets ...”. (One child in care – order unknown)

Parents wanted a process that reduced turnover of caseworkers and encouraged consistency and longevity in their relationship with caseworkers. This same parent also spoke about the importance of being informed about any changes that are being made to the caseworker/s involved in their case. This parent said:

“Communication has been very, very poor. I haven’t even been aware when a caseworker has finished with my [child’s] case and a new caseworker has started”.
(One child in care – order unknown)

This same parent also felt that a change in caseworker should not impact on or delay their case moving forward or the decisions being made:

“Okay. That case worker’s dropped. We’ll start a new caseworker and then it goes back to Court and it’s, ‘Okay. Now there’s a new caseworker involved, so now the new caseworker needs to be informed on what they need to do, even though the last caseworker hasn’t done what they were required to do’. This is an ongoing thing”.

(One child in care – order unknown)

Many of the parents wanted a seamless transition to a new caseworker rather than feel like everything “started again” each time a new caseworker became involved. A couple of parents had periods of time without an allocated case worker. One parent spoke about their time without a caseworker and their experience of the ‘duty worker’, particularly around responsiveness:

“Because if you don’t have a case manager to ring up and ask for, the receptionist will ask you which children is involved, who are you calling about. They haven’t been allocated a case manager, so you need to speak to the duty worker. Well, a duty worker in any industry that you go to, everybody knows what a duty worker is. So, they’re never available there and then because they’d always be on a phone call so you need to leave a message and then they prioritise that during the day. So, they may or may not have time to get back to you”. (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

Parents said that periods without an allocated caseworker made them feel less informed about the decisions being made about their children and less involved in the process.

One parent had children case managed by different DHHS offices and one of the things that they suggested was that there be more co-ordination and communication between DHHS offices for parents with children in different locations. Their experience was that some offices were better at communicating than others:

“But, like I said, it’s just amazing though anyway the difference it makes as to the location, in all seriousness”. (Four children under protection orders and one child under a PCO)

The lack of co-ordination and communication between DHHS offices also had the potential to impact on sibling contact when siblings were being case managed at different DHHS offices.

A couple of the parents spoke about the importance of the caseworker relationship being based on non-judgement or a “clean slate”, despite information that workers may have received from others involved in the case. One birth parent summed this up by saying:

“I understand children need protecting and I get that, and we completely understand that, but don’t go into a case pre-judging based on what you’ve been told from services that have obviously got a grudge and you ...”. (Three children under protection orders)

There were a couple of examples of parents accessing support and advocacy outside of DHHS. For example, one parent said that they had no contact from DHHS or their caseworker and had accessed another worker through a therapeutic service to act as a conduit between them and the child protection system. It was through this worker that the parent was able to better understand the child protection process and the decisions being made about their children.

Challenge or Appeal Case Plan/Court Decisions.

Another way for parents to feel involved in the decision-making process was to understand the process of challenging or appealing decisions and then making an informed decision about whether this is something that they should pursue. Involvement in this process was important for parents to have a say in the decisions being made about their children. However, there were not many examples in the interviews of parents challenging or appealing the decisions being made about their children. Below are some of the comments from parents who had challenged or appealed the decisions being made:

“I have at certain times, and they didn’t like it one bit. Yeah. They didn’t like it when I did it. So, I took it up with my lawyer and my lawyer had my say with them and some

of it went my way, like with contact. They were only wanting to give me two hours one day. And, I said, 'No. I want more time with him'. And, they said, 'Well, we can do two days for two hours'". (One child under a protection order and two children under a PCO)

"I won't really back down. I'll be, 'Well, no. That decision's not right and you haven't been doing this'. And, I'll get my supports to back me up on it". (One child under a protection order)

"Because, they wanted the order for – I think it was a year. They wanted it for so long, anyway. I'm just like, 'I don't want it for that long', because they weren't helping us do anything. I don't know what it's called. But, you know when you get the Court order and it says you have to do whatever it says at the back?" (One child in care – order unknown)

It was unclear as to the reason why not many of the parents had challenged or appealed decisions given that some of the parents gave examples of decisions that they were unhappy about. One possible explanation is that some of the parents did not understand the process of challenging or appealing decisions. For examples, one parent said:

"I didn't know how. Until I've just recently found out that I can do that. I've asked for a review of the whole case". (One child under a protection order)

Process Fairness

When the parents were asked about whether or not they felt that the processes were fair, responses were mixed. Some parents that felt that the process was fair and focused on the best interests of the children. For example, one parent said:

"I think it's been fair. At the end of the day, they've just been looking out for [my child's] welfare, making sure that [they were] in a safe environment, being looked after. So, I've got no complaints with how it's been handled". (One child under a protection order)

Others felt that the process had not been fair:

“Well, it was almost like the parents didn’t matter. It was just what they wanted; that’s it. Again, very downgrading. It was just they didn’t take into consideration the situations or the events that had happened”. (One child under protection order)

Feelings about the fairness of the processes was linked to several factors mentioned in the previous sections including involvement in case planning, feeling informed and frequency and contact with caseworkers.

Two parents also felt that the processes would have been fairer for them if the caseworkers and DHHS had been held to the same level of accountability as they were. These two parents said they had to be accountable for their actions but that their caseworkers did not. One parent said:

“I just don’t think it’s fair because of the reasons like I stated before, there are consequences if a parent doesn’t comply with what the Courts are asking them, but there are no consequences to the Department if they don’t comply with what’s being asked of them”. (One child in care – order unknown)

“If there would be some – not punishment, but some sort of consequences for not doing it, as there are for the parents. If the parents don’t keep up with what the Courts are asking them, there are consequences to that, but if the Department don’t keep up to what they’ve been asked to do, it doesn’t matter; there is no consequence to that. It’s just, ‘Okay’”. (One child in care – order unknown).

One parent suggested that to improve accountability, plain language detailed notes documenting the goals and actions to address protective concerns be taken throughout the process to share with all the parties involved.

Fairness was also associated with the “words” or language used and how parents are represented in written documents,. Parents wanted written documents to reflect what they had said rather than the caseworker’s “interpretation”. This was very important for parents feeling that the process was fair:

“It’s just the way that child protection services puts it in their own words, not exactly what was said by the parent or whoever else is saying anything. They put it in their own words, not exactly word for word of what the client is saying”. (One child under a protection order and one child under a PCO)

“They put sneaky stuff in the reports like just after the kids were taken, they said that there was something in the Court report that was done wrong at Court. I don’t know. It was just [the] documentation side of it. We didn’t have to be there. And, at the next Court case, our lawyers picked up on ... they’d actually changed it so that my partner couldn’t have contact at all. So, we weren’t there to be able to challenge it”. (Three children under protection orders)

“The decisions in the end were what I would be asking for, but the way that they’ve gone about it is wrong, and the wording used about myself and about my family is wrong, but the outcome is what I’m asking for, so I’ve just had to accept that my name has been ruined through the Courts, and that others can read these things, falsely, about myself. I’ve just had to accept that to be able to get what I’m asking for from the Courts”. (One child in care – order unknown)

The Impact of Children’s Court Decisions on Children

In terms of the impact of the Children’s Court decisions, there was some discussion about the level of support parents felt that they received and their satisfaction with contact arrangements.

Level of Support

Discussion on support focused on the support received through their caseworker. This was potentially an issue for parents who experienced many caseworker changes. There were a

couple of examples of parents seeking other supports outside of DHHS to keep them informed about what was happening with their children and advocate on their behalf. Parents also mentioned being supported by family members and legal representatives.

A couple of the parents mentioned that if they had more support prior to the Court process things might have turned out different. They suggested that:

“If they had have put me on some other programs so I could get help I would have been better off, but I had no support at all. No one else come in to help me out. Not until after all the Court cases started, that’s when they started bringing other things in. Why didn’t they bring them in in the first place? They could have helped me before Court. But, they didn’t arrange it until after the first Court case”. (One child under a protection order and one child under a PCO)

“I’ve had a lot of broken promises. I know what they are legally capable of putting in place to protect my daughter that I don’t have those legal rights as a parent that they do. I’ve pushed for them to instil these things to protect my daughter, and it’s a constant battle of actually getting them to do it”. (One child in care – order unknown)

Satisfaction with Contact Arrangements

More than half of parents did not feel satisfied with the contact they had with their children. There were a couple of reasons mentioned for this. First, many of the parents said that their level of contact was dependent on the Court order that their children were under. For example, parents with children on a permanent care order said that they had four contact visits with their children per year.

A couple of parents mentioned that they had a good relationship with the carer of their children and together they had organised additional contact by agreement. However, in one case, while the parent and carer had agreed to additional contact, the parent still needed to get the support of DHHS and this had taken a considerable length of time. This was also an

issue for parents who needed supervised visits because this required additional time and resources from DHHS.

Another parent spoke about difficulties co-ordinating contact with multiple children when their children were managed by different DHHS offices. This parent felt that they needed extra support to co-ordinate these visits and ensure that contact was happening regularly.

One parent also said that transport costs were a barrier to contact. In this case, the children were not living locally, and this parent did not have access to a car. This meant that they were not able to visit their children as much as they would have liked or as agreed to. In this instance, financial support to cover transport costs would have been beneficial and ensured their continued and regular contact with their children.

A couple of the parents had older children and these parents spoke about the difficulties contacting their children because they felt that it was often left to the older children to make contact with them.

Carers

This section focuses on the key findings from the in-depth interviews with carers and their experiences of child protection and Court proceedings.

Description of Carer Sample

In total, 19 carers participated in an interview. The average of age of the carers was 48 years with an age range of 31 to 66 years. One of the carers identified as Aboriginal and one carer was caring for children who identified as Aboriginal. English was the main language spoken by all carers.

The average age of children in their care was 10.5 years and the children's ages ranged from 3 to 18 years. The number of children in their care varied from one to three children. A couple of carers had other children in their care who were outside of the scope of this study. As discussed earlier, PAs were issued after March 2017, and one child had been in care for as little as four months. Only three of the carers were caring for children related to them

and four carers had no biological link or relationship prior to the children coming into their care. Close to half of the carers had children subject to PCO. Other carers had children under a FRO or a CBSO.

Experience of Child Protection and Child Protection Proceedings in the Children’s Court

This section focuses on carer’s experience of child protection and the Court process, in particular, carers involvement in decision-making.

Involvement in Decision-Making

There were two key factors that impacted on whether carers felt involved in the decisions being made about the children in their care – involvement in case planning and feeling informed.

Case Planning

Like parents, involvement in case planning was important for carers to feel included in decisions about children in their care. However, carers experiences of case planning were mixed. Some carers felt involved in case planning. For example, one carer said:

“We were asked our opinion and yes they listened to [us]. Originally it was just trying to settle [the child] and [the child] had some really acting out, challenging behaviours, and so [the child] was a bit of a challenge for a while, [weren’t they], but [the child] really just needed to know that [they were] loved and secure”. (One child under a CBSO)

Others felt that they were not included in case planning:

“No, in this case, there was not many case planning [meetings] at all. There was one – I think in the whole time there’s only ever been – in two years, there’s been two case plan meetings. And, which I found very odd. And, with the first case plan meeting that we had, which was, they had – there was no involvement with them for 11 months, there was no caseworker”. (One child under a CBSO)

“But no, I wasn’t involved in any of the case planning or anything like that”. (One child under a FRO)

“Well, there really wasn’t a lot. We had one meeting, I think. That’s all. Because they’d been with us so long, it was case planned, but not really because we’d been here so long”. (Two children under PCOs)

Like parents, carers also wanted to be listened to. There were a couple of examples of carers not feeling listened to. One carer said that they felt that they “just had to do as we were told” and went on to say:

“Even in case plan meetings and things like that, we just sat there and when they asked you questions or you were asked to give information, you were shot down very quickly by the other side. So, you were being attacked the whole time, which is the hardest thing because you sat there and thought ‘wow, I’m doing this for your children and we were thinking that they were going to go back’. So, we’re looking after them on a day-to-day basis for them to go back, but then when I saw the children regress so much, then I put my foot down and said no. I said ‘This is what’s going on. You need to look at something different now’”. (Two children under PCOs)

Interestingly, this same carer went on say that over time they felt that they were listened to more because as the carer got to know the children in their care, they got a better understanding of their needs and pushed to have their voice heard:

“So, they made all the decisions. We just had to do as we were told and that was probably the first couple of years. And, then I got up to the point where I’d had enough and thought, ‘Hang on a second. I’m living with these kids. I’m dealing with everything that’s going on’. And – yeah. I sort of started to speak and say, ‘This is actually what’s going on’”. (Two children under PCOs)

A couple of carers mentioned that they would like the opportunity to have a support person to attend meetings and advocate on their behalf. For one carer, this was particularly

important because their relationship with their caseworker had started to break down and the support person acted as bridge between the two:

“And, at the start, I didn't think I would need an advocate because I didn't really see why I would need an advocate, because I just didn't think we'd be butting heads so much”. (One child under a FRO)

For those carers who felt that it was important for them to have a support person, it was also important for them to feel that this was accepted and supported as part of the process:

“There was more resistance from the Department when I would ask for an advocate from the [service] to come with me, and the Department couldn't say no, but they would always try and hint towards it not being necessary”. (One child under a FRO)

It was also important for carers that they understood the case plan direction. For example, one carer was confused by the case plan because Court documents said that the child was on a care by Secretary order, although the permanency objective was family reunification². In this instance, the carer found it hard to be involved in decision-making because they were not clear about the long-term plan for the children in their care:

“So, what that meant in practice was that [the child] was on a care by Secretary order, but all of the plans were around trying to reunify [the child] with [their] family. Actually, I think that was probably a good thing. But it did leave grey areas as to what [their parents were] able to say yes and no to, and what we were able to say yes and no to; and because it was kind of grey, I think it was confusing for the case managers as well because I don't think they were quite sure what they were supposed to be doing with [the child] because the care plan, initially it was all about family

² In exceptional circumstances, the Department (or delegated Aboriginal agency) can work towards family reunification when a child is subject to a CBSO. It is also possible for a CBSO to be changed to a FPO by direction where reunification is achieved.

reunification, but that wasn't actually an option and it was not what [the child] wanted either". (One child under a CBSO)

Many of the carers mentioned the turnover of caseworkers and the impact that this had on case planning and the children in their care. One carer said:

"I'm not sure if it's turnover because we don't know what happens to the staff but certainly the changing of staff is definitely an issue, case management is definitely an issue. Because they've been living with us for three years and they're on worker number four". (Three children under PCOs)

"There was a lot of case – well, care team meetings but not much case planning because the staff levels, we were told, they did – we got changed from one worker to another and they didn't get to the meetings, so it was not much involvement in planning." (One child under a CBSO and one child under a PCO)

"We were meant to have a case plan at the end of last year, and the day of the case plan the case manager left – quit. So, we've been waiting a couple of months for his case to be reallocated and then we were back to square one, wondering, because the case plan hadn't been set, we had this whole period of, 'Okay. Well, the new case manager might look at the case and decide that's not the direction that they want to go in'". (Two children under PCOs)

Although there were quite a few carers who spoke about caseworker turnover, this was not the case for all carers. There were a couple of examples where carers had a good relationship with their case worker. For example:

"But the second and current one, they're much better. They're very different, but they're better. The one that we have now, [the caseworker's] ringing me with updates ... she then rings me and lets me know, which I know [the caseworker] probably doesn't have to do, but [the caseworker] knows how emotionally invested

we are and wants to keep us in the loop. [The caseworker has] been really good".
(One child under a CBSO)

"So, originally there was a worker there that was really good and was making these sorts of suggestions, but then [the caseworker] got moved up the food chain I think and we didn't have much to do with [them] anymore. But I still talk to [this caseworker] for advice. [This caseworker] seemed to be the only one that was giving the direct answers around the Centrelink and if you want to get passports and contact and all sorts of little bits and pieces". (Two children under permanent care orders)

"We had one really great case manager who came down here, who came and attended, this is a [suburb] placement so two hours away". (Child under CBSO)

Only one carer had children in their care that identified as Aboriginal. This carer was concerned about the lack of a Cultural Plan for the children in their care. In this case, the carer had had the children in their care for three years without a Cultural Plan:

"I've never seen a proper Cultural Plan done. It's more so what the kids need and what's good for them and working out where they came from and where their family is, and if they can do it with their cousins it's even better because they've had the same experiences". (Three children under PCOs)

Feeling Informed

A couple of the carers felt that they were not informed about the decisions being made about the children in their care:

"That was a big issue. I was very left out of the loop with everything. Very much left on my own". (One child under a FRO)

"But it was basically a blindside. 'That's not what I got told a couple of weeks ago, that they're just all going to settle, because they'd been in a couple of placements'.

It was to settle them, and then bring them back together. I was really quite emotional about it, because I'd had them together for so long, and they were just adorable. Then they were separated, which I really struggled with". (One child under a PCO)

In addition to being informed about child protection decisions, like parents, carers wanted transparency around the information that was being shared with others. However, one carer did acknowledge that caseworkers were in a difficult position. This carer felt that case workers had to act as an intermediary between DHHS, the Court, parents, families, and children and felt that this made it difficult for them to share information. Another carer also acknowledged that many of the caseworkers had large caseloads and felt that lack of availability, rather than lack of transparency, was the issue.

Contact with DHHS and caseworkers was considered important by carers to help them feel informed and included in the process. As above, many carers did not feel included in case planning and decision-making processes.

A couple of carers felt that if they had more contact with DHHS and caseworkers, this would have helped them to feel more informed and involved in the process. For example:

"And, more contact from the Department. So obviously, even though we are through [service]. [The service] still doesn't hold the case. The Department held the case. So, [the service] haven't been able to get answers or make any decisions, still have to go to the Department, because the case was still Department managed". (One child under a CBSO)

"I suppose actually communication and support would have made it better. I think that really, with ourselves, we felt like doormats because the communication wasn't there". (Two children under PCOs).

In addition to more communication with DHHS and caseworkers about the decisions being made about the children in their care, there were a number of carers who would have liked

to have been more informed about what it means to transition to a permanent care order:

“They came out and asked us what we wanted, or we went there, actually. But again, I’ve not taken on any kids on permanent care before, so really, I should have thought about it a lot more, I think. Just the financial side of taking them on permanent care”.

(Two children under PCOs)

Impact of Children’s Court Decisions on Children

In terms of the impact of the Children’s Court decisions, most of the discussion was around the level of support carers received and their satisfaction with contact arrangements.

Feeling Settled

Carers were specifically asked about whether they felt that the children in their care were settled. Most of the carers felt that with time and support, the children in their care felt settled:

“They’ve really settled down. They’re amazing. Because they’ve had so much challenge and us breaking up obviously didn’t help”. (Two children under permanent care orders)

“She’s – so in settled I mean she’s got a good attachment, she’s secure”. (One child under a CBSO and one child under a PCO)

“There are always some difficulties, but they were good kids. They settled down well, which most of the kids that come here do, though. You learn over the years”. (Two children under PCOs)

“Yep. He was very shy at the start, and I’d have friends come over, and I’ve got friends with kids, and we’d have regular dinners with a lot of people. He’d just get all the attention in the world. He started off being very shy and then his confidence just all of a sudden skyrocketed. That was really beautiful to see”. (One child under a FRO)

One thing that was raised as a potential issue for how settled children felt was around the leaving care age. For the children who turned 18, this created a period of uncertainty about their future. While some of the carers said that they had been clear to the children in their care that they would always be welcome in their home, there were carers who had decided that when the children turned 18, they would be moving out and on with their life. For these children, there was much uncertainty around housing, employment, study and family relationships. One carer suggested that the age of leaving care should be increased to 21 to give children more time to settle.

Level of Support

There was a lot of discussion by carers about the level of support that they received. One issue that was consistently raised was around the transition to a PCO. Some of the carers felt that the level of support and access to services had reduced as a result. They felt that they would have liked more information from DHHS and caseworkers prior to making the decision to pursue permanent care. Carers felt that despite the change in order, the needs of the children had not changed and continuity in support and access to services after transition was critical for the wellbeing of the children in their care.

Below are some examples of comments made by carers:

“I would say to anyone doing permanent care as in a conversion as opposed to actually just doing straight permanent care, but as a conversion, I would say think long and think hard about it because you lose all the support that you may well need. You don’t get that back up, you don’t get the expertise behind you So you are definitely left out in the wilderness once you do a permanent care conversion”.

(Three children under PCOs)

“Probably the biggest thing that we haven't talked about that's probably had the biggest impact on [the child in my care] and I is, when [the child] transitioned from foster care to permanent care, all of the services go away. It's just you and them.

That is horrendous”. (One child under a PCO)

“Just different things like formals, and debts, and schoolbooks. They’re very expensive each year. I’m not complaining, but it’s just hard when you’re both on pensions. I should have thought about that a lot more, I think, or been told it or something”.

(Two children under PCOs)

There were a couple of examples where the transition to a permanent care order had happened quickly and while this was okay for some, this was a challenge for other carers where the support and access to services dropped off suddenly. A couple of carers said that they would have like more time to think about the decision and the implications for their life:

“I don’t know. I think at the time I loved it because I was, ‘Let’s just go’. I’m impatient by nature. Let’s get in there and get this stuff happening. But looking back now I don’t feel like we had enough time to process the fact of what was happening in our lives. It was a huge, huge, huge adjustment and we were completely in shock. We had no idea what we were doing. I mean we knew what we were getting in to and we knew what we were doing as parents, but we were shell-shocked I suppose, is a way of saying it. We’re going, ‘What we do now?’” (Two children under permanent care orders)

“In regard to everything we’ve said, honestly, I would say I just really think when it comes down to going into permanent care and things, things shouldn’t be rushed”.

(Two children under PCOs)

Financial support was also a concern for some carers and this may be linked to the transition to permanent care where some of the carers felt more responsible for the cost of services and support. One carer suggested that one of the financial supports that all carers should have, regardless of care order, was funding to cover the costs associated with education:

“Schools are so much more expensive. Their books are hundreds and hundreds of dollars every year. I think that’s an important thing for taking kids, permanent care. That’s a must, that they pay for their schooling and for any other big expenses that

come out. That's why I thought it would be good if we could access something". (Two children under PCOs)

Several carers said that access to child therapeutic services and supports was an unmet need. This was particularly an issue for carers with children who transitioned to permanent care:

"I think that the state government needs to actually be more realistic about what supports traumatised children need. They don't just need to be rescued from this bad situation and placed with good families. They actually need a lot of resources". (One child under a CBSO)

"It always comes down to trauma, not only attachment. They try to make it look like it's just attachment, it's actually way more than attachment. There is lots of trauma. As soon as kids are in permanent care, they react very differently, they either completely shut down and it looks like everything is completely fine for years and years until they are adolescents or in our case, for example, everything comes out and I don't think anyone currently, nearly in the world, is equipped to deal with trauma, only a very, very few individuals". (One child under a PCO)

It is difficult to say anything about the supports needed by carers of children that identify as Aboriginal given that the small numbers in this research. However, a Cultural Plan seemed to be important for ensuring access to appropriate support and services. As already mentioned, a couple of carers had concerns about what happens to children in terms of their access to support and services when they reach the age of leaving care (18 years).

Finally, a lot of the discussion by carers focused on the supports and services needed for the children in their care. However, there were a couple of carers who mentioned that it was also important for carers to be able to access their own supports if this was something that they would benefit from.

Satisfaction with Contact Arrangements

Generally, carers were supportive of contact with parents if it was a positive experience for the children in their care. One carer said:

“If the contact was regular and it was positive, I have no problems with it at all. I don’t mind them seeing [their parents] four to five times a year and I provide that four/five times a year”. (Two children under PCOs)

Many of the carers spoke about wanting to build a relationship with the parents of the children in their care and recognised the importance of contact for the children. Some examples of comments from carers include:

“But I think maybe when they’re older, even if it is when they’re adults, I’d be really keen for them to try and have a relationship with their parents, if they’re still around. Because I do see the importance in that”. (Two children under PCOs)

“If they want to, if Mum rang and said she wanted to see them, I would just ask them. I don’t think they would go because they don’t know them ... but that’s up to them. I always encourage access”. (Two children under PCOs)

“I wish that [their parents] would come to the four times a year so that [they] could build a relationship with [them], but I understand why [they] can’t sometimes”. (One child under a CBSO)

“[The child] has phone contact basically at any time. He has video chats with [their parent] just about any time but we have had to restrict that to [their] room, just so that [the child] has some privacy. [The child’s] parents were trying to arrange a contact on the weekend, and [my husband] and I actually supported that by taking [the child], because [their] worker wasn’t available”. (One child under a CBSO)

Unpredictability of Contact

While most of the carers were supportive of contact with parents, many of the carers felt that there was a lot of unpredictability around contact, as parents did not always keep appointments. While a couple of carers acknowledged that many of the parents had complicated lives, generally, carers felt that inconsistent parents caused children much anxiety and stress as they were unsure about when and if contact was going to happen. Some comments about the unpredictability of contact with parents are below:

“It’s [the child’s] birthday tomorrow so [they are] a bit eager to find out whether they’ve remembered [the child’s] birthday or whether they’re going to ring [them]”.
(One child under a PCO)

“Even we had to go and turn up to access and wait there and [the parent] didn’t show up so then you’d have to bring the children back home again, and that happened all the time”. (Two children under PCOs)

“Lack of communication in those things has been awful. [The child will] go, thinking that [they] – or we’ve been here on a Monday and they just don’t show up. [The child] – on a Monday morning [the child] sort of says now – we play the game of ‘is the worker gonna come?’ so [that the child] doesn’t get excited about going to access because [the child] just doesn’t know if they’re gonna show up. There’s been some inconsistencies. I think I said it once in a conversation with – might’ve been my mum on the phone and this kid hears everything”. (One child under a FRO)

“And we wrote back to [the parent] and we said, ‘This is our post box’. And, DHHS knew the post box. And [the parent] just didn’t write back again. So, that was really tough for the kids too. That they had this letter from [their parent] and these presents and then we wrote back and then [the parent] didn’t engage again”. (Two children under PCOs)

“Access is four times a year. For example, last year it was twice that [the child] saw [their] biological mum and the year before that, [the child] didn’t see her at all”. (One child under a CBSO)

“My [child] is supposed to have four times a year contact with [their] birth parents. Since [the child] moved with us, [they have] had zero. [They] didn’t have contact at least six months before [they] met us. It’s sad. It’s been nearly two and a half years and [they haven’t had] contact with them. I don’t know ... its an awful situation”. (One child under a PCO)

Changes to Improve Parent and Child Contact

Carers made a couple of suggestions as to how contact arrangements could be improved. As mentioned previously, most of the carers were generally supportive of contact with parents however, some of the carers felt that they would like more support to build a relationship with the parents. For example, one carer suggested a “partnership” approach where carers and parents were both supported to build a relationship:

“I came into foster care with a really strong sense of wanting to build a relationship with the child’s family and wanting to have a partnership approach, and I think there’s not enough support around that But I think there’s not enough support for how do you build a positive relationship”. (One child under a CBSO)

Carers also wanted their privacy to be taken into consideration when organising contact between the children and their parents. For example, one carer said that they had Court assigned visits at their home and at the home of one of the children’s parents. However, the carer had never met the parent before having them in their home. This, and the fact that the carer now knew where they lived with the children in their care, made them extremely uncomfortable. This carer also felt uncomfortable going into the home of someone they had never met before to supervise the visits. This carer said:

“I had concerns because from February, the magistrate had increased the contact and I was to go into [parent’s] house and do the access and [they were] supposed to

come here. [They] came here as well, so [the magistrate] made those decisions that we had to follow through until the next Court hearing, which then violated a lot of my privacy and everything like that. [The parent] knows my phone number, my address and all that sort of thing and I had to physically be present at [their] place as well There was a lot of things that [the magistrate] put into place that really was support for [the child] and [their dad's] relationship, but it wasn't conducive to our lives and the implications that it had for me to be in, in my profession, to be in a position that's not ideal and really, not ethical". (One child under a PCO)

Similarly, another carer said that they also felt uncomfortable because they had not met the parent and had requested that they have the opportunity to meet them before moving forward with any contact between themselves or the children:

"So, they wanted visits to restart and I said, 'I just don't feel comfortable with that until we have met [the parent]. Can we have the opportunity to meet [them]?' (Two children under PCOs)

Another carer was also concerned that the parent could potentially make contact outside of arranged times:

"Just in terms of the fact that it's not that far from where [the parent] was living to where we're living and [the parent] had an intent and [they] knew exactly what our house looked like. Knew where we were and it was more not just the, [the parent is] going to come and murder us, but it was also the coming and taking the kids. If [the parent] was that bitter and resentful what would stop [them] from coming and deciding to take them back?" (Two children under PCOs)

A couple of the carers felt that there should be more communication about contact, when and where it was happening. There were a couple of situations where the children were informed that contact was happening and then a miscommunication between DHHS and the parents meant that this contact did not go ahead. These situations were stressful, particularly for the children:

“Well, it was horrible, because there were instances where there was miscommunication between [the children’s] parents and the Department, when [the child’s] parents would be unavailable for a contact and the Department would pick [them] up from day care, telling [the child they were] going to see [their] mum or his dad, and would take [them] to the office, and [their] mum or dad wouldn't appear because they had made prior arrangements and informed the Department that they wouldn't be there”. (One child under FRO)

One carer also spoke about the importance of the system taking into consideration carer’s personal circumstances when organising contact between parents and children. One carer was very open to contact but pointed out that there were a lot of practical considerations given that the parents lived interstate, the school holidays did not line up between states and the children had their own activities and school commitments as well as the carer’s work commitments:

“The logistics of getting them when they’re six hours away, they’re four hours away, you’ve got people who at various times are talking – not talking to each other, and us driving from [city] with a young child, we said that, “We can’t see that it’s going to work. [Another state] holidays don’t line up with [their] holidays Once you then have sporting commitments, school commitments, it’s a lot. Happy to see them, we just don’t want written into the order that they have to be at every one, because we think we will fail and we will get dragged back to Court”. (One child under a PCO)

Children

This section focuses on the findings from the in-depth interviews with children and their experiences of child protection and the Court process.

Description of Child Sample

In total, seven children participated in an interview. The average age of the children was 15 years with an age range of 12 to 18 years. None of the children identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

None of the children was biologically related to their carer, however, all of the children had a previous relationship with their current carer before coming into care. The average length of the children's placement was 31 months with a range of 4 months to 72 months. Half of the children were on a PCO while the others were a mix of CBSOs and LTCOs.

Experience of Child Protection and Child Protection Proceedings in the Children's Court

This section focuses on the children's experience of child protection and the Court process.

Explanations of Processes

There was limited discussion about whether young people felt like the processes were explained to them. One thing that young people did mention was that they would have liked more discussion and explanation around the length of time that they would be in care, and in some cases, what would happen when they leave care.

A couple of the children said they would have liked someone to sit down with them and explain what was happening. For example, one child said:

“Being kept in the loop would have helped. And – or someone even just sit down and explain what was going on and what was going to happen and that kind of stuff. Just to know would have made it a lot better”. (18-year old formerly under a CBSO)

Involvement in Decision-Making

The children in this research had mixed feelings about their involvement in decision-making. A couple of the children felt that they were consulted about the decisions being made about their future. For example, one child said:

“I had it lucky that I did ask questions to get things explained and get a better understanding of what was happening but that also comes with my age. I'm more interested in what's actually happening because I'll be able to understand it. Generally, it was pretty good, if anything it just seemed to take a lot longer than

what people would expect. I was understanding that I knew that it was already going to take a long time but that's one thing that would not seem to be as difficult as it is". (16-year old under a PCO)

Others felt that they were not consulted:

"They went to Court. I didn't go to Court, I didn't know anything, I didn't know what was going on. All I knew was that randomly later on that night I was being put in a car and taken to the place I was meant to be living". (18-year old under a CBSO)

"So, the way I was told – I believe that they could have done it in a better way. But I came home one night and they were sitting at the table with my caseworker, [case workers name]. And, they had been planning this for weeks, but they just didn't tell me". (14-year old under a PCO)

Like parents and carers, the children in this research wanted to have their "voice" heard. Children wanted to be involved in discussions about their future and then see their wishes being taken into account. One child said:

"Just giving children more say. I believe – I was given more say, but I believe I could have had more choice and more input. I was given a say, but it wasn't really acted on". (18-year old under a CBSO)

Also, like parents and carers, a couple of children mentioned caseworker turnover:

"It would pretty much happen all in one meeting. I'd meet with the person, they'd be like 'hey, you're getting a new worker, we're going to meet with them at this time so you can meet them'. And, I was like 'cool'. And, then I'd meet them, and they'd be like 'okay, now bye'". (18-year old under a CBSO)

"I think I had a few caseworkers. And, then I had [case orker]. And, then [the caseworker] just left, [they] never said goodbye, which I thought was rude, but I'm sure [they] had [their] reasoning". (14-year old under a PCO)

Impact of Children’s Court Decisions on Children

In terms of the impact of the Children’s Court decisions, most of the discussion was around feeling settled and satisfaction with care arrangements.

Feeling Settled

As mentioned above, most of the carers felt that the children in their care felt settled.

Generally, most of the children also felt settled in their current care arrangement:

“Very, very happy. I’m very grateful. It’s been a very good placement. As for fostering other kids, I could not imagine being in their position anymore. We’ve been so lucky to get [carer names] and have a happy household that’s permanent that we know we’ll be growing up here”. (16-year old under a PCO)

“At the beginning I was pretty somewhat upset but then I had to keep going and then as I was introduced to [carers names] it was scary at first because of how loud they are but then as I started living here for a few weeks now, I was settling quite well”. (15-year old under a CBSO)

“Well obviously, I wouldn't be the person I am today without them for very obvious reasons. I was very shapeable as a person from being here at such a young age. I couldn't really do anything It's just very good to be here. Yeah, so [carers names] are very kind people and it's a lot nicer than other stories you could hear ...”. (14-year old under a PCO)

“The outcome was positive because I did end up in care, I ended up out of a situation that wasn’t ideal that I shouldn’t have been in the first place. So, it was what I needed. It just wasn’t the greatest experience to get to the outcome we needed, I guess”. (18-year old under a CBSO)

“Living with [carers names] and finding them, I think, was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. I was headed down a really bad path. So, I had gone into

a few not so great foster carers. I had spent three months in one that really wasn't ideal and suitable for me. And, finding [carers names] really saved my life in a way. Got me away from the people who were doing drugs and all that kind of stuff, because that's the path I was leaning towards, you know, and they got me back on track with my mental health and giving me a stable environment, and all the things you'd find in a normal family is what I was able to get from them. They made me feel loved and safe and comfortable, and [carers names] were really, really good to me". (18-year old under a CBSO)

Satisfaction with Contact Arrangements

Most of the children in this research had minimal or no contact with their parents. Some of the comments are included below:

"I dropped out of contact with her [mother] about a year ago also". (18-year old girl under a CBSO)

"Well, I'd like to get in touch with her [mother] more, however, it's just hard sometimes with our busy schedule and it's like I have to put in a lot of work, [my parent] doesn't really directly contact me, which is a bit frustrating because she's the adult in the situation". (14-year old under a PCO)

"So growing up I only remember bits and pieces when I was younger but I do know that we first initially had pretty frequent contact but it obviously it got less and less, and then as we got older, I didn't really think too much of it because especially me and [my sibling] didn't feel the need to see them as much So it was frequent and then it stopped and it hasn't really affected us". (16-year old under a PCO)

"Because we haven't done that for roughly two years. Yeah, but I'm fine with that because it's like strangers at this point. I've grown up here. This has always been my family". (14-year old under a PCO)

Only one child was in regular contact with their parents:

“I call my mum weekly. The way I get to speak to my brothers is through my mum’s phone”. (14-year old under a PCO)

Conclusion

Overall there was significant overlap between the three groups of interviewees in relation to their main concerns relating to child protection and legal decision-making processes. Children, carers and birth parents all expressed a wish to be heard in decision making processes, to have more contact and better communication with caseworkers and for there to be less turnover of caseworkers. Of these, caseworker turnover appeared to be the most important issue for all three groups.

Attachment A: Parent interview schedule

Introduction

Greeting and thank the participant for taking part in this study

Explain the research and use the research team map to explain the three aspects of the study and where this interview fits

Introduction: This is interview is about your current or most recent child protection matter

Reiterate confidentiality and the Participant's right to pause or stop the interview process at any point. Allow for questions.

Ensure that a signed Consent has been received.

I would like to begin by getting to know you and your family by mapping your family membership (see Attachment-eco map). Begin with the mother – her post code and whether or not she identifies as an Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander

- Can you tell me how many children you have? (place these on the genogram). How old are they?
- Do any of your children identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?
- Do these children have active Children's Court Orders (place this information on the genogram)
- Do you know the name of the Court order that they are under? (place this on the genogram).
- When was the last time you went to court? (place this on the genogram).
- Where do these children live now?

Experience of child protection and legal decision-making

Introduction: Thinking about the most recent child protection matter, I want to ask you some questions about your experience of the decision-making process, or the way it was decided where your child/ren would live. I'm not going to ask about the allegations/incident that led to child protection involvement, just the process.

To start, can you talk me through the process of how it was decided that [child/children] would live in care [refer protection/care order]? [clarify who they were involved with –

caseworkers etc. and, what they were known as and their role] (place the response on the extended genogram/eco map)

To make it easier, I'd like to ask you about each stage in the process separately.

Pre-Court process

- Introduction: My first questions are about your experience before the protection application was heard in Court.
- Were you kept informed? (if so, who explained what was happening?)
- Were you involved in the process/decisions (did you attend meetings/have discussions with your caseworker about what should happen? Were you able to tell your side of things and say what you thought should happen?)
- Was the child protection caseworker upfront with you about what s/he thought should happen?
- Did you receive support (if so from whom, e.g. family members, Elders, representative from an Aboriginal service such as Lakidjeka, other parents, the internet?)- (place the response on the extended genogram/eco map)
- If LTCO/PCO: Did you get any support or help from your caseworker to prepare you for your [child/children] being in care permanently?
- Was the case planning process fair?
- Did you disagree or challenge the child protection caseworker's decision (for example, did you request a review of the case plan?)
- Is there anything that would have made your experience of the process better?

Court process

Introduction: My next questions are about the Children's Court process.

- Did you contest the application in Court (if so, how was the matter settled - was there a conciliation conference or a contest/final hearing?)
- Were you kept informed during the Court process? (if so, who explained what was happening?)
- Did you receive support (did you get help from a lawyer?)
- Did you feel included in the Court process?

- Did the Court process take a long time? (what were the reasons for the delay?)
- Was the Court process fair?
- Did you appeal the Court decision?
- Is there anything that would have made your experience of the Court process better?

Impact of Children's Court decision

Introduction: My next questions are about your feelings and responses since the Court decision.

- What are your views on the outcome – what impact has it had on you? (do you feel sad/angry/relieved?)
- Do you have any concerns about the [protection/care order]? (for example, are you worried about how it will affect your relationship with you child/ren?)
- If FRO: Is the time limit on the FRO a concern? (If so, can you tell me why/why not?)
- Are you happy with how much contact you have with your child/ren? (What would you want to change about contact?)
- If Aboriginal: Do you think your child/ren will be able to stay connected to their culture where they are living?

Conclusion

Thanks for taking time to share your experiences with me.

- Is there anything more you want to say?
- Do you want to ask me any questions?

Parent demographics

These last questions are about you:

- How old are you?
- Do you speak a language other than English at home?
- What is your postcode?

Ask if parent would like to be contacted when summary report is published and record mobile phone number/email address.

If child on FRO aged 12+ years, seek parent consent for child participation in the project.

Attachment B: Carer Interview Schedule

Introduction

Welcome and thank you for taking part in this study.

Introduction: This interview is about [child on a protection/care order]. Ensure that Plain Language Statement has been received.

Reiterate confidentiality and the Participant's right to pause or stop the interview process at any point. Allow for questions.

Ensure that a signed Consent has been received

Check that the participant is aware of the audio recording and that the recorder is turned on.

Can you tell me who lives in your family/household now? (a genogram can be used to record this information). Do you or your partner identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

I would like to start by just confirming some details about [the child -name]

- How old is [child]
- How long has [child] been living in your family?
- Is [child] a biological member of your family, or did s/he know anyone in your family before s/he came to live with you?
- Does [child] identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?
- Do you know how long it is planned for [child] to be living with you?
- Do you know what will happen when [child] leaves your family?
- Do you know the name of the Children's Court order that is active for [child]?
- If CBSO/LTCO/PCO: Was child living with you before the CBSO/LTCO/PCO? Did s/he transition from one order to another while s/he was in your care?

(If carer transitioned from one order to another) Experience of child protection decision-making

- If PCO/LTCO: How was it arranged that you would be [child's] permanent/long-term carer?
- Did you feel any pressure from the agency caseworker or child protection caseworker?

- Were you involved in case planning?
- Were you kept informed of decisions?
- If PCO: What support were you offered to transition from foster/kinship care to permanent care?
- Has changing from one order to another changed the amount of support you receive in a positive or negative way? (What about allowance payments, time with agency caseworker?)
- Do you have an opinion on how long it took to convert to a CBO/LTCO/PCO? (what were the reasons for the delay?)
- Thinking about how was it arranged that you would be [child's] permanent/long-term carer, is there anything that would have made your experience better?

(If child on FRO) Support of permanency objective

- Have you been able to support [child's] parents with reunification?
- Do you think the reunification plan will be implemented? (Can you say why/why not?)
- What do you think will happen if reunification can't be achieved?
- Has anyone asked your opinion?

Child

- Do you know if [child] had a say in where s/he lived?
- Do you know if anyone asked his/her opinion?
- Was s/he involved in case plan meetings or other discussions?
- Do you think [child] knows how long s/he will be living with you?
- If FRO/CBSO: Do you think [child] knows what will happen when s/he leaves your care?
- Do you think [child] feels settled in your family?
- If Aboriginal: Do you think [child] will be able to stay connected to his/her culture in this family? (Can you say why/why not?)

Support

- What has it been like for you, caring for [child]?
- How satisfied are you with the support you receive to look after [child]? (Are there services that you really need that you haven't received?)

- Are you worried you won't be able to care for [child] for as long as it has been planned?

Contact

- Are you happy with how much contact [child] has with family members? (What would you want to change about contact?)

Conclusion

Thanks for taking time to share your experiences with me.

- Is there anything more you want to say?
- Do you want to ask me any questions?

Carer demographics

These last questions are about you:

- How old are you?
- Do you speak a language other than English at home?
- What is your postcode?

Ask if carer would like to be contacted when summary report is published and record mobile phone number/email address.

If foster/kinship child aged 12+ years, seek carer consent for child participation in the project.

Attachment C: Child Interview Schedule

Welcome and thank the participant for taking part in this study.

Introduction

This interview is about you and the family you live in now and whether you had a say about living here.

Reiterate confidentiality and the Participant's right to pause or stop the interview process at any point. Allow for questions.

Ensure that a signed Consent has been received.

"I'd like to begin by finding out about the family you live in now. We will use a genogram/eco map to map family membership" (explain how this works) (see Attachment).

(Add onto the Genogram)

- Child/ young person's age
- Whether they identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Who is part of this family/household? (place on the genogram)
- Are you related to anyone in this family, or did you know anyone in this family before you came to live here?
- Do you know how long you will be living in this family?
- Do you know the name of the Children's Court order that is active for you?

Experience of child protection decision-making

Introduction: I want to ask you some questions about the decision for you to live in this family.

- Can you tell me about how (was) the decision made about where you should live?
- Did you get to have a say? (How were you consulted?)
- Thinking about how the decision was made, is there anything that would have made your experience better?

How the decision of the Children's Court has affected child

- What are your views on the outcome (what do you think about the outcome?)– what impact/effect has it had on you?
- How do you feel about the family you live with now?
 - Do you feel close to them?
 - Do you think things are going well?
 - If Aboriginal: Do you think they you will be able to stay connected to your culture in this family? (Can you say why/why not?)
- Do you feel settled in this family?
- Are you happy with how much contact you have with the family you don't live with?
 - What would you want to change about contact with family?
- Do you know what will happen when you leave this family? (if the child is having trouble verbalising their feelings, feelings cards could be used to assist)

Conclusion

- Thanks for taking time to share your experiences with me.
- Is there anything more you want to say?
- Do you want to ask me any questions?

Ask if child would like to be contacted when summary report is published and record mobile phone number/email address.





T: 03 9035 5371

E: sarah.wise@unimelb.edu.au