

Practitioners' Perspectives: Partnering with Families in Out of Home Care – From On the Outer to Shared Caring

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Introducing the Presenters from MacKillop Family Services, Melbourne Australia

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- Lynda Manley – Principal Practitioner, Clinical Services
incorporating interviews with
- Ms. Esmail Manahan – General Manager Aboriginal and Torres Strait Service Development
- Ms. Molly Madigan – Therapeutic Specialist, Clinical Services

Acknowledgements

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Additional input and thanks to :

- **Dr Patricia McNamara Senior Fellow (Hon) Department of Social Work, The University of Melbourne.**

Acknowledgement of Country

MacKillop Family Services acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which this presentation is being recorded, and the traditional custodians of the various lands where we are linking in from today. We would also like to pay our respects to Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures, hopes and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Further, we acknowledge the grief and loss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have endured from the harm caused by colonisation resulting in historical, cultural and intergenerational trauma.

We also recognise, respect and celebrate the survival and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose ongoing efforts to protect and promote the world's oldest living culture will leave a lasting and proud legacy for their people.
We stand with you in solidarity now and always.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have never ceded this land





Definition of Family Partnering

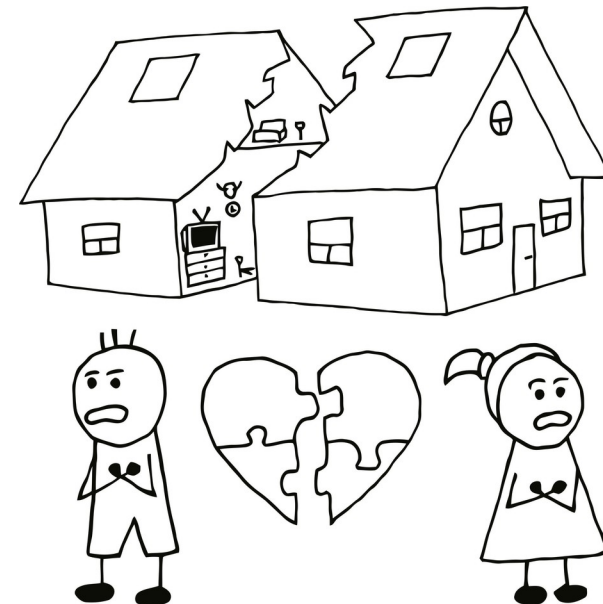
(drawn from work of McNamara, 2015)

Any work that is systemic and has a focus on the child within their family/network of relationships

In OOHC it is work that prioritises collaboration, outreach and any possible connection to family and kin and community members.

Other terms: *family engagement, family centred practice, family inclusion, family driven or family sensitive practice*

Why is Family Partnering Important?



Optimises possibilities for repair of relationships,
empowerment of family and models respect and collaboration
for families whose relational world has been disrupted and
fragmented by their experience of trauma – often complex and
transgenerational.

Best Interests of the Child...and their Family

Engaging with parents and kin is a key element of best practice across all jurisdictions in Australia

Ref: (DCCSDS, 2013; DHHS, 2012:2017; DFACS, 2012; NFPAC, 2009–2020).

Evidence is that young people are more likely to return to live with their families and overall have more positive outcomes when there is partnering with family and community

Ref: (Ainsworth, 2015; Anglin, 2015; Bath & Smith, 2015; McIlwaine & O'Sullivan, 2015; Figley & Kiser, 2013; Hillan, 2008).

Australian Context – Cultural Practices

Drawing from the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), we know the:

- Critical importance of partnering with ACCOs to connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to their family in community and with their culture

- Family Partnering
 - facilitates connection to culture for all children
 - assists the children and young people and their family members deal with the grief and loss allows the agency staff in all roles contribute to more constructive stories about what has happened for them
 - there is less blame and shame for families

Australian Context: Over-Representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in OOHC (2020)

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) children are 11 times more likely to be in OOHC than non-indigenous children
- Rates of ATSI children in OOHC and receiving child protection services continue to rise – and have risen significantly in the past 5 years
- Family and cultural connection is a significant protective factor for ATSI children and enables children to thrive

Ref: Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2020), The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle Indicators 2018-19 – Measuring Progress.

Challenges to Family Partnering

- Lack of opportunity in workers' roles to spend time with families – including pressure on workers to prioritise a procedural approach with less focus on relationships
- Complexity of the system and levels of communication that must be maintained – e.g. multiple reporting systems, confusion in the statutory system about contact between child & family
- Lack of clarity about whose responsibility it is to build relationships with family members – or to sort out problems when they inevitably arise

Challenges to Family Partnering (continued)

- A culture of pathologising parents , making it difficult for “news of difference” to be heard. The dominant story often focusses on the family’s deficits rather than its strengths & does not update & contextualise their difficulties
- Predominance of practice & treatment models that privilege an individual focus rather than a systemic focus
- Lack of worker skill & confidence to be with families where there are ongoing conflictual relationships, & challenging conversations are inevitable

Challenges to Family Partnering (continued)

- A culture where there is a lack of consumer involvement – can set up and perpetuate a cycle of distrust and lack of respect that undermines collaborative & strengths based family partnering
- A dominant focus on a limited risk paradigm that privileges avoidance of risk as opposed to managing or negotiating risk in relation to family partnering

Working from a Trauma-Informed Perspective – The Sanctuary Model at Mackillop Family Services

- Mackillop Family Services is a Sanctuary accredited organisation
- This whole organisation response to trauma privileges systemic and relational understandings of trauma and underpins our practice, mitigating against more behavioural perspectives that lead to more individualistic understandings and interventions
- This approach enables us to understand what has happened to a person who has experienced trauma, but also guides our work in relational and prosocial recovery and healing

Guidelines for Family Partnering at Mackillop

- Staff have been provided with family-focused training and guidelines for working with families when a child is in OOHC
- Guidelines highlight the short and long term benefits of partnering with families
- Provide checklists and tips for engaging with families
- Identify the common barriers to family partnering
- The training and guidelines highlight a trauma-informed approach and the value placed on this work



Introducing Esmail Manahan

**General Manager Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Service Development.
Office of the CEO**

“The importance of family partnering when
Aboriginal children are in OOHC”.

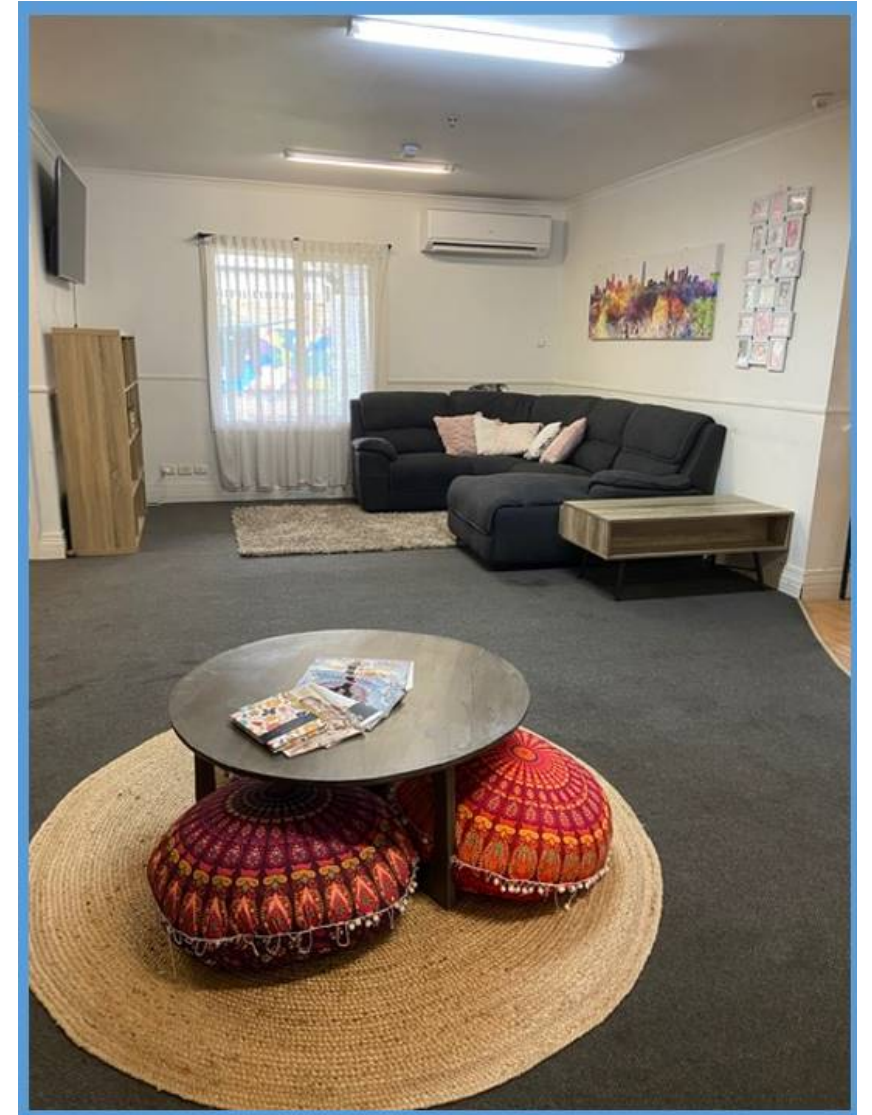
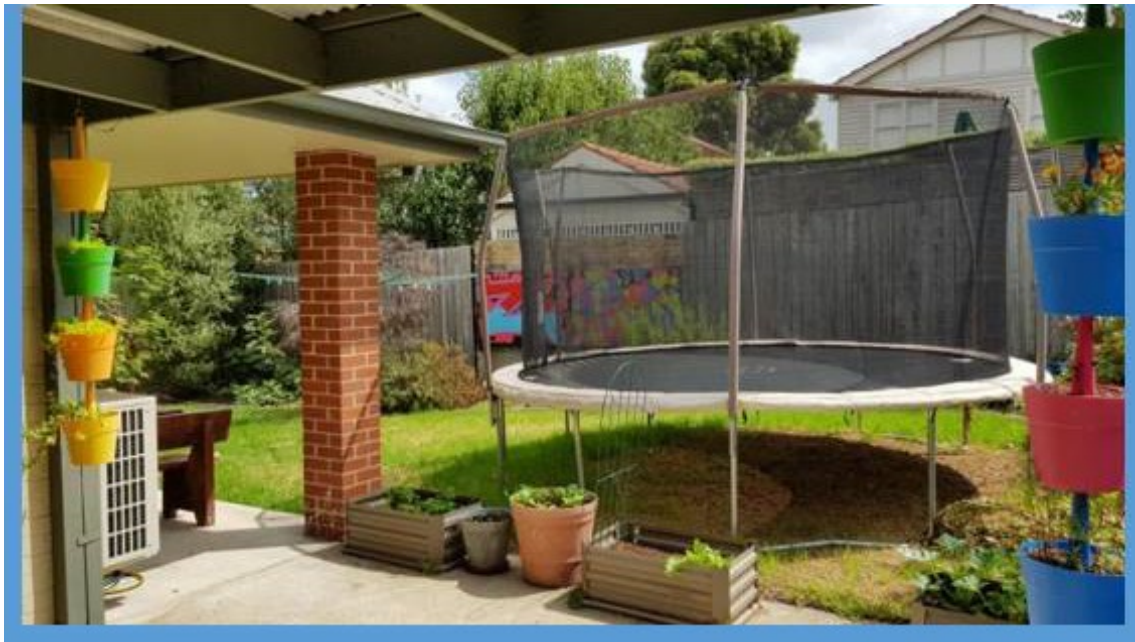
Practice and Organisational Initiatives

- Single session family approach
- Therapeutic Life Story Work (Richard Rose, 2012) – OOHC workers trained to work with young people wanting to understand their story in a coherent way and share with families and carers
- Introduction to Family Engagement (James & MacKinnon, 2012) – case managers being trained to work more systemically keeping family in mind
- Seasons for Growth in OOHC settings (Newell & Moss, 2011) – clinical & operational staff are adapting the model to include partnerships with families and young people in OOHC settings

Practice and Organisational Initiatives (continued)

- Information packs provided to family: Supporting family members to manage their own issues
- Coaching or co-parenting with parents of young residents
- Engaging the family members on psycho and social educational programs and therapy & supporting transport to these programs
- Privileging cultural connections such as Aboriginal smoking ceremonies and Elders from communities attending house events
- Involvement & support of the residential House Supervisor with families seen as critical to the OOHC staff feeling empowered and supported to involve family members on the everyday life of the houses and the care of the young people

OUR THERAPEUTIC HOME



/
Welcome to
Georgia
Therapeutic Home



We figured you probably have a stack of questions about Georgia so wanted to introduce ourselves and hopefully answer some of your questions.

Georgia is a big four bedroom house in Werribee and we call ourselves a therapeutic home.



We usually like to get out of the house doing different activities but at the moment any activities have to be kept at home.

We are lucky to have a big back yard with a basketball ring, giant noughts and crosses and plenty of room for other activities.



There's plenty of time for you to ask any other questions, but until then let us show you the house...

THE WELCOME PACK

Who will look after me?

Carers you'll find at Georgia most of the time



*Meet Melanie
(House Supervisor)*

- *The beach is my happy place*
- *I love to sing to loud music*
- *I love to laugh...especially at myself*

Practice and Organisational Initiatives (continued)

- Supporting family members to attend care team meetings and be involved in decision-making around the child's future
- Regular contact with families and updates on a daily basis
- The provision of financial assistance
- Engaging wrap-around services
- Initiating advocacy
- Facilitating repair/ relationship work between family members & the young person

A Major Challenge

Staff continue to report that issues of confidentiality and privacy in OOHC houses are complex and require careful management when family members are included



**Introducing Molly Madigan
Therapeutic Specialist
Clinical Services Team
MacKillop Family Services
Melbourne, VICTORIA**

“Family partnering – some case examples with positive outcomes”

Family Partnering - Making a Start

- Incumbent on practitioners to be bold in this space
- ...to advocate for family partnership at all levels of systemic involvement
- Family partnering in OOHC does not need to be highly sophisticated family therapy – simple actions sensitive to the needs of the family members and which support them to stabilise are key to meeting the needs of the young people in care
- When family contact is difficult and fraught, more complex therapeutic interventions may be required

Family Partnering

“Family partnering in the OOHC sector is a cultural shift that requires continual evaluation and monitoring to embed practices that range from simple to complex interventions. Making room for the voices of families, when developing services and programs, will assist with meeting the core attachment and relational needs of the child and therefore lead to better outcomes overall”.

Journal article details

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For follow up questions and comments:

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