

Enabling Young People's Participation in Therapeutic Residential Care Decision Making

The literature on how young people participate in decision-making in residential care identifies three main aspects of participation: being able to access information to take part in decisions that matter; having opportunities and capabilities to express their views freely; and having an impact on the outcome of the decision-making process (Bessell, 2011, 2015; Lansdown, 2018; Sinclair, Vieira, & Zufelt, 2019). These key aspects of meaningful and authentic participation also include having the space and time to reflect, form a view, change one's mind, and consult with an advocate that may shift the inherent power imbalance in residential care decision-making (Davis, 2019; Wong, Zimmerman, & Parker, 2010). Because young people in residential care have experienced an extreme intervention in their freedoms and rights, participation should necessarily involve more than having a say in individual matters and include expressing views and being taken seriously in matters relating to policies and systemic decisions that affect their lives (Davis, 2019; Lansdown, 2011).

Yet in a survey of 321 children and young people in residential care in New south Wales, Australia 60% of whom were aged 15-17 years old, only 49% said they usually get a chance to have a say and usually feel listened to; 21% said they don't usually get to have a say and don't usually feel listened to, and these rates were worse amongst females (Robertson, Laing, Butler, & Soliman, 2017). When this survey was repeated in 2018 with 143 young people, the percentage who reported that they usually get a chance to have a say and usually feel listened to reduced to 48%; and the proportion who don't usually get to have a say and don't usually feel listened to increased to 25% (NSW Department of Communities and Justice, 2019).

This presentation will examine contemporary research, theoretical models and practice considerations in young people's participation in decision making in therapeutic residential care. Key messages from the research and theoretical literature will be discussed before the implications for practitioners and organisations are considered. The role of the Centre of Excellence in Therapeutic Care, an Australian Intermediary Organisation promoting knowledge translation in this sector, will be explored.

Presenters:



**Dr Lynne McPherson, BSW, MSW, M.AASW, Ph.D. (Churchill Fellow).
Director of Research CETC
Associate Professor Southern Cross University**

Dr McPherson joined Southern Cross University in 2016 as a senior lecturer, social work in the School of Arts and Social Sciences. Prior to this appointment she held a tenured position in social work and social policy at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Before becoming an academic, Lynne spent more than 25 years as a senior social work manager and practice leader in child protection, out of home care and the wider child, youth and family sector.

Lynne's research interests include responses to complex developmental trauma, therapeutic approaches in out of home care, child, youth and family issues, and supervision and leadership.



**Janise Mitchell – Director CETC
Adjunct Associate Professor, Southern Cross University**

Janise is the Deputy CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation and Director of the Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care. She completed a Master of Social Work in 2008 in which she researched the implementation of therapeutic foster care in Victoria. In doing so she researched best practice elements in therapeutic models of care and looked at the change process required to move an existing way of delivering care to a therapeutic model of service delivery. Janise has 30 years' experience in the field of child protection and therapeutic care. She has extensive experience consultancy to governments and organisations, policy analysis, program development and evaluation. Janise is an Adjunct Associate Professor with Southern Cross University and lead editor of a Handbook on Therapeutic Care published in September 2019 by Jessica Kingsley.



**Meaghan Vosz
Southern Cross University**

Meaghan is a PhD candidate researching the practices associated with giving due weight to children and young people in out-of-home care policy making with the Centre for Children and Young People. She teaches youth work, social policy and disability practice in the social work and social welfare programs at Southern Cross University, drawing on over twenty years' experience working with young people, families and communities in OOHC, domestic and sexual violence, child protection, housing and homelessness and regional/rural community development. Her research interests focus on the ways adults can enable, listen and take seriously children and young people's views in individual, organisational and policy decision making, and she was lead author of [*Enabling the participation of young people in residential care decision making*](#) in 2020.