

A home centred approach to supporting young people in state care

Flinders University, the Department for Child Protection (South Australia), Anglicare SA and Life Without Barriers are working together on innovative research designed to centre the concept of home in supporting young people placed in state care. The project is funded by the Australian Research Council and will be led by Associate Professor Kristin Natalier, working with Professor Sarah Wendt, Dr Michelle Jones, Dr Carmela Bastian, and Dr Kate Seymour.

The project is driven by a compelling question: **What does home mean to children and young people in state care?** The research aims to:

- *Determine how understandings of home enhance children and young people's experiences in state care.*
- *Support carers to respond to children and young people's needs.*
- *Develop home-centred principles and practice guidelines for organisations providing state care.*

The idea of home holds personal and cultural significance. It means far more than a physical dwelling: it is a crucial site for developing identity, a sense of belonging and trust in the constancy of people and things. Because home is linked to cultural ideals and individual biographies, it offers insights into children's and young people's families and social relations, psychology, emotions and needs.

Little is known about the meanings of home for children and young people in state care – a group particularly at risk of losing home. Filling this gap and centring children's understandings of home in all its complexity can strengthen how carers and organisations support children and young people.

Across a four year period, the project will focus on children and young people in foster care, relative/kinship care, Aboriginal kinship care, and residential care. It will include:

1. Completing separate in-depth interviews with children and young people in care and their carers.
2. Developing home centred principles and practice guidelines, refined through focus groups with children and young people, carers and social work practitioners.
3. Testing a face-to-face and online training course for family and carers.
4. Evaluating the guidelines and training over time.

The project will also publish a small book designed for children and young people in care. Partners and key stakeholders will also receive a final report and summary.

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