If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents. John Bowlby, 1951
Poverty is not Neglect, Surveillance is not Support.

Joyce McMillan, Child Welfare Organising Project, New York City

The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust supports Australians to travel overseas to research innovations and knowledge that will benefit Australia.

Family inclusion is urgently needed in Australian child welfare systems

www.churchilltrust.com.au
FAMILY INCLUSION – THE REAL CRISIS IN CHILD PROTECTION

1. The context for family inclusion.
2. The key elements of family inclusive practice

Families are children’s first and most enduring relationship. Relationships are the golden thread in children’s lives. UK Care Review, 2013
THE CONTEXT – WHY FAMILY INCLUSION?

- Evidence support for family engagement

- Child welfare practice has not met the needs of parents, families and children

- The availability of models and programs that don’t always help

- We need to refocus on the lived experience of parents and their children

Every child has the right to their parents to be represented by the best lawyer in town, Professor Martin Guggenheim, 2017
THE ELEMENTS OF FAMILY INCLUSION

Address Power imbalances

Through skilled advocacy, information, education, accountability

Our clients have an advocate at every single meeting – we fight for them. Centre for Family Representation, NYC, 2018

Use a lens of social justice

Poverty, homelessness, inequality, racism…

(intra family interventions) do not address the root causes of most child removal - poverty, racism and entrenched disadvantage. Jeremy Kohomban Children's Village, NYC
“Poverty is the wallpaper of practice in child welfare – unremarkable and unremarked upon.”

Professor Kate Morris and colleagues, Child Welfare Inequalities Project, UK

http://www.harryvenning.co.uk/
www.coventry.ac.uk/CWIP | @CWIP_Research
Parents as Leaders

Peer work, policy reform, training and research

Relational permanence

Change comes from the ground up and parent allies are leaders of change and educators in the system. Dana Dildane, Parents 4 Parents Program Seattle

It is what children experience that matters – not the legal order

Carers often continue a relationship with children post reunification which contributes to safer reunification and greater permanency. Fairfax County VA, Bridging the Gap, 2018
Peer workers are parents who have had personal experiences in the child welfare system and offer **advocacy and support** to parents newly involved in the system (Lalayants, 2013).

*Parent in Newcastle, 2017*

I want to talk to a parent. No offence. I’m sure you’re really nice. But another parent will know what I’m going through (Parent in Newcastle, 2017)
• Peer workers coach, translate, encourage, empathise and advocate – above all they offer hope.
• They influence and role model.
• Peer workers don’t take case notes, they rarely give evidence. They don’t assess, monitor or supervise.

Family partner roles have no actual power. Only influence. They don’t take notes and we have an agreement with the court that they won’t give evidence. Manager

I can trust my parent partner – I can’t totally trust the social worker. It’s as simple as that. I know I won’t be judged by her. She helps me work out how to talk to the social worker. Parent
Professional relationships – the contribution of peer work

Parent’s position
Contested space
Fear dominated, trauma saturated, high anxiety

Peer worker position
(the grey area)
Advocate, question, navigate, interpret, self-disclose and normalise.

Agency position
Contested space
Risk dominated, Rule saturated, high anxiety

Credible messenger – educating and influencing parents and workers, a bridge between parents and the system, building hope for parents and caseworkers
Peer Parent Implementation issues

• Supervision, training and support
• Locate outside of government
• Make access to peer workers easy – no gateways
• Anticipate and plan for resistance
• High expectations of professionalism
• Build alliances with leaders, managers, educators, policy makers, researchers
• Ensure links to systems change – partner with parent led organisations

Parent partners have brought a relational focus back to child welfare. I highly value them as team members. They have improved my relationships with clients. Social Worker
THANKS AND QUESTIONS


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We all share the responsibility for child safety