

Recent Australian child protection and out-of-home care research

What's been done – and what needs to be done?

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A research-led reform strategy is urgently required in the field of child protection in Australia. While international research can be a valuable resource, a strong research base which is relevant to this country's needs, legislation and service systems is essential. Two recent audits of Australian research completed over the past decade – one on out-of-home care and the other on child protection more broadly – have highlighted significant gaps in existing research. There is a number of important topics that have not been addressed – as well as an over-reliance on small-scale, qualitative studies and a very low level of funding for research. This paper explores these gaps and identifies crucial areas for development, encompassing: the development of a national child protection and out-of-home care research agenda; adequate funding for research, especially for multi-site, cross-jurisdictional studies; and closer collaboration between researchers, policymakers and practitioners to close the gap between what we know and what we do.

Child welfare services are under severe pressure in Australia, the US and the UK as increasing numbers of children are coming to the notice of statutory child protection authorities. Nationally, the number of children who have been the subject of a notification or report has increased dramatically. For example, in the past five years, notifications nationally have more than doubled from 107,134 in 1999-2000 to 252,831 in 2004-5 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2006). There are several explanations for these increases, such as changes in mandatory reporting, public campaigns and government reviews highlighting the problem of child maltreatment, and the changes in child protection systems focusing on the role of receiving, recording and investigating allegations of harm. The number of allegations of harm or risk of harm that are substantiated is also increasing (albeit at a lower rate than notifications), with a rise from 24,732 in 1999-2000 to 46,154 in 2004-5, with a widening gap between the rates of notifications and substantiations (AIHW 2006).

At the same time, the rate of children aged 0-17 years on care orders in Australia also increased from 3.3 per 1,000 to 5.2 per 1,000 (1997 to 2005), and the number of children in out-of-home care in Australia has increased each year from 13,979 to 23,695 (1996 to 2005), an overall increase of 69% (AIHW 2006). The rate for Indigenous children in out-of-home care is markedly higher than the rate for non-Indigenous children in all jurisdictions, and over six times higher overall.

The increasing demand for out-of-home care services comes at a time when the supply of foster carers and professionally trained and experienced workers is under increasing pressure (Bromfield, Higgins, Osborn, Panozzo & Richardson 2005). Most children entering care (91%) are in some form of home-based care (e.g. family foster care, kinship, family group home, etc.), although it is increasingly clear that other options are needed for the increasing numbers who enter care with seriously challenging behaviour (Delfabbro, Osborn & Barber 2005). A cycle of placement breakdown and disruption means that these children and young people have an increased likelihood of adverse outcomes unless appropriate intervention occurs.

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What is clear is that the child welfare systems in Australia – both child protection and out-of-home care – will not be able to cope with a continuing increase in child protection notifications and a continuing increase in the numbers of children in out-of-home care (AIHW 2006; Scott 2006). Although state and territory governments are committing increased resources to child protection services (especially investigations), more resources by themselves will not resolve the problem. Even if jurisdictions were able to afford to continue to expand the size of their statutory child protection services, there is now considerable concern and debate about the way child protection and out-of-home care services are operating and whether they can produce positive outcomes for children or prevent the re-victimisation of children (Barber & Gilbertson 2001). Alongside the extra resources that are needed to meet an increasing demand for child protection and out-of-home care services, innovative policy and practice will be needed. The next generation of child welfare policy and service developments requires an evidence-base and a research and evaluation framework.

The need for an increased focus on and effort in relation to prevention and early intervention is now clear and well accepted, but the needs of the children and young people already in the system often do not receive due attention – until a crisis or a crisis-led inquiry brings them into focus (for example, the New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 2002; Queensland Crime and Misconduct Commission 2004; Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2005; Mendes 2005). The purpose of this paper is to examine research that has focussed on the child protection and out-of-home care systems and the children and young people they serve.

A viable and effective approach to the care and protection of children and the prevention of harm requires these efforts to be informed by a broad, robust research base. We need to know which approaches work, which approaches used internationally are likely to be appropriate for Australia, and where our efforts and research funds are best targeted (i.e. which areas have the most pressing need for an evidence-base to inform policy and practice). A national child protection and out-of-home care research agenda is needed to move toward a more systematic and coordinated approach to research.

Such an agenda needs to be based on a thorough analysis of the existing research. Before we move forward and set an agenda for future research priorities, it is timely to take stock of what research has already been conducted or is currently under way. This will inform the development of a national research agenda by enabling us to answer questions such as:

- What have been the areas of focus?
- What are the gaps in research?
- What research is focused on child abuse prevention?

- Where has the funding for research concerning child protection and out-of-home care come from to date?
- What research has been conducted to show which programs or interventions are producing positive outcomes – and thus should continue to receive funding?

The UK embarked on this strategy over a decade ago with the publication of a *Messages from Research* series and research-practice collaborations (e.g. *Research into Practice* at Dartington, the Centre for Evidence-based Social Services at the University of Exeter), and innovative research in action studies with multi-site and international collaborations. While Australian jurisdictions can learn much from the approach and experience in the UK and elsewhere, it is important that our own strategies and research-base take into account the particular features of the Australian service systems. Research and research-to-practice initiatives are a vital part of this process.

THE AIMS OF THE AUDITS

Two audits – one of out-of-home care research (Cashmore & Ainsworth 2004), and one of child protection research (Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson & Aldana 2005) – were conducted to take stock of existing research conducted in Australia in the ten-year period from 1995 to 2004. The purpose of both audits was to map research activity and effort in child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care and to provide a register of recent and ongoing research (1995-2004) which can be updated; knowing what has already been done is important in planning for what still needs to be done.

The specific aims of the two audits were fourfold:

- to identify research projects throughout Australia concerned with (a) child protection and child abuse prevention, and (b) out-of-home care;
- to assess the gaps in the research effort;
- to place Australia's research effort and findings in this area into an international context; and
- to identify priorities for future research.

The particular objective was to provide a foundation for building a research agenda that could harness key university and other research efforts and support evidence-based models of policy and practice.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for both audits relied on extensive consultation with research and welfare networks, peak bodies, service agencies, state and territory government departments, and searches of various databases for projects funded by government research bodies (e.g. the Australian Research Council) and philanthropic trusts. Similarly,

university websites-homepages and linked research entries were scrutinised for relevant research projects. Individuals and organisations, identified through this search strategy and the network of the researchers involved in the audits, were contacted, mainly via email, and asked to fill out a template for each project that met the inclusion criteria for qualitative and quantitative empirical research over the ten-year period. Follow-up phone calls and emails to collect additional information were also undertaken. The methodology for the child protection audit was amended to list a variety of different descriptors for 'research'. It appeared that some project workers did not identify their projects (particularly for case audits and program evaluations) as 'research', despite the project meeting the audit inclusion criteria.

We need to know which approaches work, which approaches used internationally are likely to be appropriate for Australia, and where our efforts and research funds are best targeted.

For the purposes of the audits, research was defined as the systematic gathering of information involving data collection and analysis, using either original data or administrative datasets.¹ Since these were the first audits of research in these two areas in Australia, the aim was to be inclusive so a flexible approach to inclusion criteria was adopted for sample selection and size, research design and methodology, and statistical analysis. The scope of the child protection and out-of-home care audits was also quite broad. For example, research areas included: evaluations of child abuse prevention programs; identification of risk factors for maltreatment; issues associated with adult or adolescent offenders; service delivery and casework issues in child protection and out-of-home care; outcomes for children in care; placement stability/instability; family preservation/reunification; and issues associated with carers. For additional information about the specific strategies utilised in the two audits, the inclusion criteria, and to see a copy of the template used for recording responses, see Cashmore and Ainsworth (2004) and Higgins et al. (2005).

RESPONSE AND OUTPUTS

The two audits identified 94 research projects on out-of-home care and 135 projects on child protection over the ten-year period. The level of response to both audits was lower

than anticipated, with library searches for the child protection audit in particular identifying a number of publications and theses that would be relevant to the audit, but whose authors did not respond to the audit.

The largest proportion of the research projects identified by both audits (about 60% for both child protection and out-of-home care research) were conducted by university-based researchers, either alone or in collaboration with government departments or with non-government agencies. This included research conducted as part of a post-graduate degree (23 in out-of-home care research and 47 in child protection; mostly PhDs, some Masters).

There were few national research or evaluation projects and only one multi-site, cross-state project in the out-of-home care area and three multi-site, cross-state projects reported in the child protection area. Only one study involved an international comparison (a collaborative project involving Barnardos on *Looking After Children* in Canada and Australia), which was funded by the Canadian government.

Information on the publications resulting from the research in both audits indicates a relatively low level of publication in peer-reviewed journals (37 and 12 projects respectively for the child protection and out-of-home care audits). The other avenues of publication included conference proceedings, and government and non-government agency reports which are also appropriate and effective means of disseminating information to the field.

SCOPE OF THE TOPICS

CHILD PROTECTION AUDIT

Although all abuse types were covered in the research, research that investigated a single maltreatment sub-type or a specific combination of sub-types tended to focus on child sexual abuse and family violence. There was a lack of research investigating issues specifically associated with child physical abuse, psychological maltreatment or neglect. There was little research on children in families that were at a high-risk for abuse and neglect (for example, drug or alcohol dependent parents). This is problematic since this is an area where child abuse and neglect prevention efforts are most needed and likely to have a more significant impact.

The largest body of research identified in the child protection audit was research investigating child protection issues and the impact of specific child welfare policies and programs (such as risk assessment, decision-making, child protection service structure and mandatory reporting). Other priorities were maltreatment prevention programs for children, identification of risk factors, and attitudes to child abuse and neglect. Researchers investigating child maltreatment and child protection issues relied heavily on notifications and substantiations of 'maltreatment' recorded by statutory child protection services as their source of data.

¹ Projects which were service development projects, quality assurance projects, and free standing literature reviews were excluded from the audits because they did not meet this definition.

The heavy reliance on statutory child protection data for research purposes is somewhat concerning given the significant reliability and validity problems with these data and the problems with cross-jurisdictional comparability (Bromfield & Higgins 2004, 2005). Research findings based on statutory child protection data may have limited generalisability. Researchers must be aware of the methodological limitations of the data source they have selected and take whatever steps are possible to ameliorate the ensuing reliability and validity problems. For example, professional participants can only report events that they are aware of, children tend to minimise their maltreatment experiences, adult retrospective and parent reports are particularly susceptible to recall bias, and there may be significant reliability and validity problems in abuse designation in statutory child protection data. There is no ideal data source or method for collecting data regarding child maltreatment. However, given the limitations of different data sources, it is important when developing an evidence base to draw data from multiple sources.

With one or two exceptions, there was a general lack of research on specific cultural groups or cultural issues, particularly in Indigenous communities (where there were only two specifically targeted projects).

OUT-OF-HOME CARE AUDIT

The projects identified by the out-of-home care research audit were concerned with four main areas: assessing the needs and outcomes of children and young people in out-of-home care and after leaving care, and examining the factors that promote effectiveness and good practice; addressing service delivery issues in relation to quality of care and funding models, carer and worker satisfaction; evaluating specific types of services such as several residential and mentoring programs; and examining legal and administrative decision-making and casework processes, including *Looking After Children*, and Children's Court processes. A further small set of studies focused specifically on particular groups of children and young people including Indigenous children, young people with high support needs, and children in supported accommodation.

Nearly all the identified out-of-home care research projects focused on aspects of foster care and only three on residential programs (including treatment) and five on kinship care. There were few, if any, studies on treatment foster care or wrap-around services, which probably reflects the absence of these types of care and services in Australia. However, there is increasing recognition of the needs of children and young people with complex needs and challenging behaviours. On the other hand, kinship care is increasing and is already the most prevalent form of care in some states, but there has also been little substantial research in this area. Also under-represented was research on the educational needs and outcomes of children and young

people in care or their physical and mental health needs, and no evaluation studies to assess the impact of policy and legislative change. Consistent with the findings from the child protection audit, there were few studies focusing on Indigenous children, children from other cultural backgrounds, or children with disabilities.

Again, like the child protection audit, there were few studies that replicated the findings from earlier research or from research in other jurisdictions. As with all areas of research, replication and extension of previous studies is a critical method for testing previous findings and expanding our understanding by applying theories that have been supported in one context to another related area.

Overall, in comparison to the cost of the service sector, the amount of money spent on research ... is very small.

ANALYSIS AND DESIGN

The research identified and reviewed in both audits was mostly qualitative and exploratory (i.e. descriptive rather than testing any hypotheses or identifying underlying causal relationships) rather than theoretically based and confirmatory. These studies relied mostly on interviews and focus groups to collect data, as well as some action research and some small-scale, in-depth case studies, and were generally based on relatively small samples. While qualitative research has real value in understanding the experience or 'interpretation' of those involved in the system, there is a clear need for some larger-scale projects to assess the effectiveness and the outcomes for different policies and practices across states and across agencies.

Some studies used a mixed-method methodology, combining qualitative and quantitative data from interviews with different groups of participants (including children and young people, parents, professionals and workers), case files, and administrative data. Half of the studies on out-of-home care, for example, were based on information from children and young people, and nearly half collected information from workers. Almost half were based on small, non-random samples, often in single agency services, probably reflecting the ethical and methodological difficulties in conducting research in these sensitive areas and in gaining access to vulnerable children and their families.

There are several practical and ethical issues associated with child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care research that may make rigorous research designs

difficult to achieve. Researchers need to consider, for example, whether it is ethical for the comparison or control groups not to receive services. In addition, researchers need to give thought to ethical issues concerning duty of care, confidentiality, mandatory reporting, the potential for harm, and gaining informed consent.

RESEARCH FUNDING FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND OUT-OF-HOME CARE RESEARCH

A key issue in planning and building a research agenda is the availability of funding for research and the infrastructure to support it. The funding for research identified by both audits indicates a very low level of expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care research compared with the overall expenditure on services in both areas.

Only a third ($n = 47$, 35%) of the respondents to the child protection audit and just over two-thirds of the respondents to the out-of-home care audit indicated that they received some funding (grant or 'in kind' assistance) for their research. This included Australian Research Council grants, funding from philanthropic foundations, state government departments and other sources of support. For the child protection projects, the funding per project ranged from \$526 to \$477,000 (median = \$40,612), and for the out-of-home care projects from \$3000 to \$390,000 (median = \$29,500). The higher funding levels per project in the child protection research audit may reflect the focus on the investigatory crisis end of the system. The child protection system also involves greater numbers of children, and therefore the scope and cost of projects may be higher than in the out-of-home care sector.

The overall level of funding for the projects identified in the two audits for the decade 1995-2004 was \$5.3 million for child protection research (Higgins et al. 2005) and \$3.9 million for out-of-home care research (Cashmore & Ainsworth 2004). Even allowing for underestimation of the extent and costing of research², the figures identified in these audits show that the amount of money spent on research in these areas (\$9.2 million was identified across child protection and out-of-home care research audits) is very small, particularly when compared with the massive ongoing

² The reported level of funding for research is likely to be a significant underestimation of the full extent of research expenditure on child protection, as many projects did not include 'in-kind' costs (e.g. where research staff time was already funded by a university or other institution). The audit significantly under-represents the full extent of research outputs when compared with a literature search for publications in the same period. Given that the number of research publications identified through the literature search outnumbered the audit entries by a ratio of 2.6:1, however, if the level of funding identified in the current audit is multiplied by 2.6, it still only represents \$13.8 million.

investment per annum in the associated service sectors. Over the same period (1995-2004), using estimates based on Productivity Commission figures since 1999-2000, the total cost of running the eight statutory child protection and out-of-home care systems in Australia is estimated to be \$6.9 billion (Higgins et al. 2005). In 2004-5 alone, current expenditure across the eight jurisdictions on child protection and out-of-home care was \$1230.8 million (Australian Government Productivity Commission 2006). This does not include the significant expenditure by non-government agencies and the philanthropic sector on prevention or other non-statutory early intervention activities. Overall, in comparison to the cost of the service sector, the amount of money spent on research – as reflected in responses to this audit – is very small.

Organisations need to be supported to develop a culture which is receptive to research and to have the capacity to manage the change which its implementation requires.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The main issues that these audits have highlighted are the overall shortage of research and the low level of research funding for child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care research in Australia, such that it is not possible to claim an adequate evidence-base for sound policy and practice decisions, or to be able to single out particular areas as a priority for research.

We believe there are seven crucial areas for development to build research capacity and to promote a research culture in agencies, government departments and other organisations implementing programs or services for the prevention of child abuse and neglect or the protection of children.

- **A critical review of the identified research** to determine the implications of the present body of research for policy and practice. The brevity of the information provided to the audits was not sufficient to undertake such a review as part of the audits.³

³ Some progress has been made in relation to the out-of-home care research area with a review and critique of each of the out-of-home care studies carried out by the Australian Institute of Family Studies' National Child Protection Clearinghouse, and funded by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Bromfield et al. 2005).

- **A national research agenda** – a ‘road map’ to identify priorities and provide some direction and a systematic framework for research and to situate this area of research within a broader context with theoretical underpinnings.
- **Adequate research funding** to boost the overall low level of funding for research and to support more larger-scale projects so as to overcome the limitations of small-scale, isolated projects with limited generalisability.
- **More collaborative research effort**, cross-jurisdictional cooperation and coordination which draws upon the practical on-the-ground knowledge and understanding of workers and policy makers as well as the skills of well trained researchers.
- **Research centres** to provide some concentrated focus for linked research projects and make available PhD scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships to develop the next generation of researchers.
- **Data repositories** to allow researchers to carry out secondary analysis of existing data as well as access to de-identified administrative data sets with individual case level data.
- **Research-to-policy-and-practice initiatives** to facilitate the translation, communication and implementation of research findings, and to investigate the conditions under which effective policies and practices might be replicated elsewhere.

The following sections will elaborate on several aspects of these identified priority areas.

NEED FOR COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Given the low level of expenditure on research, it is essential to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of the research effort. One way of doing this is to increase the amount of collaborative research, preferably within a cohesive research agenda. The low number of interagency collaborations, or collaborations between universities and government and non-government agencies is concerning. By the very nature of their roles, service agencies have personnel with the ‘on-the-ground’ experience in program development, program implementation and other aspects of service delivery, but few agencies have the resources for specialist research staff that universities can offer. Universities have access to the latest literature, theory development, data, analytic techniques, and expertise in evaluation. University researchers may not have the knowledge and understanding of policy and practice and many are constrained by pressures from other duties and by funding disincentives for collaboration across departments and universities. The findings from these audits indicate that the opportunities for fruitful research partnerships are just beginning to be developed – for example, by using Australian Research

Council linkage grants, particularly in relation to the national research priority area of ‘promoting and maintaining good health and ensuring “a healthy start to life”’.

On a positive note, some jurisdictions have recently established external research collaborations or have funded external research centres, which may enhance their research capacity. New research centres in child welfare at several universities have recently been established.⁴ While together these constitute promising developments, all are in the early stages of development and will need continuing support and strong leadership. Australia still has some way to go for this field ...

... to be seen as a professionalised work force that has a strong intellectual life, that has a scientific basis, that has a research program, that has reliable data that informs its own work and the work of others, that has a library, and that values new theory and research in issues such as child development (New South Wales Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues 2002, p. 151).

DATA AND RESEARCH REPOSITORIES

One of the indirect outcomes of the audits was that they highlighted the absence of systematic repositories for child abuse prevention, child protection and out-of-home care research. Without such repositories it is difficult to foster a coordinated approach to the building of a knowledge and evidence base in these areas. The audits provide a repository of current and completed Australian research, but provide a snapshot only at one point in time and are not exhaustive. For example, there were more published studies identified through library database searches than there were responses to the audit (Higgins et al. 2005). Other ways of enhancing research accessibility, maximising the use of previously collected data and furthering coordinated approaches to future research include:

⁴ The new centres include:

- The Australian Centre for Child Protection and the Chair of Child Protection at the University of South Australia, with a Commonwealth Government grant of \$10.5 million over the next ten years;
- The Alfred Felton Chair in Child and Family Welfare, supported by the Alfred Felton Bequest and based on a partnership between the University of Melbourne and the peak body, the Victorian Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, commencing in 2006;
- The Centre for Research, Policy and Practice for Vulnerable Children and Families at the University of Western Australia in partnership with the Department for Community Development (DCD);
- The National Research Centre for the Prevention of Child Abuse in the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences at Monash University, a joint initiative with the Australian Childhood Foundation;
- The Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University funded by the Australian Capital Territory.

1. 'live' audits that are publicly accessible, able to be added to, and searchable to provide a national repository for what has been – and what is being – done;
2. a catalogue of research reports in a national library that will enable research users to readily determine what has been found from what's been done;
3. repositories for data collected by other researchers (such as the National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect⁵) and for service data (such as Chapin Hall in Chicago⁶ and the proposed Australian Institute of Health and Welfare national case level data⁷) that can be accessed by researchers to undertake their own analyses, adding value to what's been done.

DISSEMINATION AND RESEARCH UTILISATION

The two audits have determined 'what's been done' in Australian child protection research over the past decade but not 'what's been done with what's been done'. This is a central question, for unless research is to be used there is little point in doing it. How to disseminate research and how to translate research into policy and practice are issues which are now receiving greater attention in the fields of health, education and social services (Walter, Nutley & Davies 2003). It is increasingly recognised that researchers, policy makers and practitioners have different perspectives and operate in very different contexts, and that there needs to be much closer collaboration about which questions are to be addressed, how the research is to be communicated and how the findings might be applied (Shonkoff 2000).

The effective dissemination of research is now understood to require a communication strategy that goes far beyond publishing research findings in technical language in 'high impact' academic journals. For example, there is growing interest in the use of 'knowledge brokers' who are both research-informed and practice-informed and who can sit at the interface of the worlds of research and practice (Lewig, Arney & Scott submitted).

⁵ The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) is a project of the Family Life Development Centre in the College of Human Ecology, Cornell University, New York. The NDACAN acquires micro-data from leading researchers and national data collection efforts and makes these datasets available to the research community for secondary analysis: <http://www.ndacan.cornell.edu/index.html>

⁶ In the US, under a federally funded initiative, foster care case level data is transferred annually in electronic format from key states to the Centre for State Foster Care and Adoption Data based at Chapin Hall Centre for Children at the University of Chicago. It is available for research purposes in a non-identifiable privacy safe form: <http://csfcad.chapinhall.org/index.html>

⁷ The AIHW is currently working on the development of de-identified case level data that will be accessible to researchers.

The effective utilisation of research is a complex issue as research is only one of the many influences on policy and practice. Moreover, 'what counts as evidence' in value-contested and legally-driven fields such as child protection, and what research is worthy of being translated into policy and practice, given the resources that this may entail, are open to debate (Lewig et al. submitted).

Organisations need to be supported to develop a culture which is receptive to research and to have the capacity to manage the change which its implementation requires. Similarly, practitioners, and the professional groups and industrial bodies to which they belong, need to be supported to participate in changing the roles and tasks that may be required in practice. Last but not least, professional educators need to be supported to incorporate current child protection research into their qualifying and post-qualifying courses, and the child protection-related content across a broad range of disciplines needs strengthening.

CONCLUSION

Australia urgently needs to develop a research base for policy and practice in relation to prevention, early intervention, child protection, out-of-home care and child and family welfare in general. Important decisions are being made every day that affect the lives of the 20,000+ children and young people already in out-of-home care and those who come to the attention of the statutory authorities – or should do. Yet neither the evidence to inform these decisions nor the utilisation of the existing knowledge base is nearly as good as it needs to be.

The audits provide a base which pulls together the diverse research which has been done in Australia in relation to preventing, identifying and responding to child abuse and neglect, and children who are in out-of-home care. This is an opportune time to build a sound foundation for a national research base in this area. There are promising developments here, and opportunities to benefit from what is already happening in Canada, Britain and the US, especially in relation to the increasing interest in linking research, policy and practice, and the broader and burgeoning interest in children's development and well-being.

The time is also ripe for a new partnership between funders of research, researchers, policy makers, managers and practitioners. It will require resources such as money and skills, but the most important resource will be the best we can find within ourselves to work together. ■

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The second audit (child protection) was commissioned by the Australian Centre for Child Protection (University of South Australia), which is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training. For full details of the audits, please see:

Cashmore, J. & Ainsworth, F. (2004) 'Audit of Australian out-of-home care research', Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Sydney. Available at: www.cafwaa.org.au/researchaudit.html

Higgins, D.J., Adams, R.M., Bromfield, L.M., Richardson, N. & Aldana, M. (2005) *National audit of Australian child protection research 1995-2004*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne with Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia. Available at: www.aifs.gov.au/nch/pubs/2005/reports/audit/audit.html

To obtain a hard copy of the child protection research audit, contact Elizabeth Oram at the Australian Centre for Child Protection. Email: Elizabeth.Oram@unisa.edu.au

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