



UNSW
SYDNEY

*Building the evidence about restoration
from Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal
children and families*

DCJ Webinar- 29 April 2022

Dr BJ Newton b.newton@unsw.edu.au



Overview of the session

- OOHC and restoration statistics in Australia and NSW
- Family is Culture findings and recommendations regarding restoration
- Restoration research using the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study data
- Aboriginal community led restoration research and how you can contribute to building the evidence

Aboriginal child restoration: what the evidence tells us

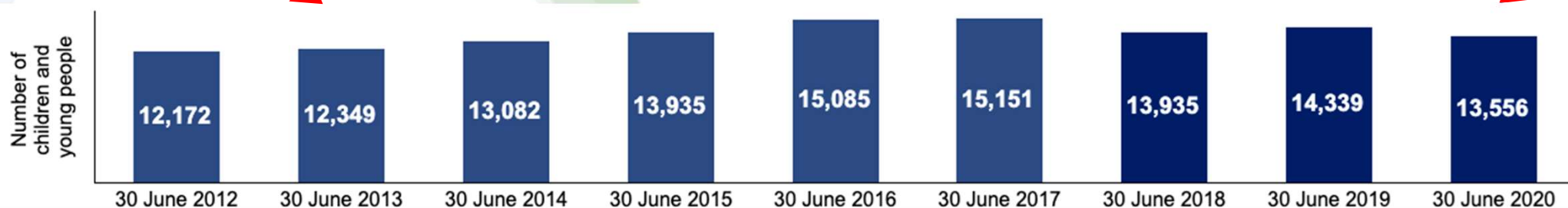
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Australia-wide):

- Restoration rate for Indigenous children was lower compared to non-Indigenous children: 15% vs 21% in 2019-2020 statistics (AIHW 2021).
- Of the 4700 Indigenous children where restoration was a possibility in 2018-2019, 19% of children (n=911) were restored and most restorations (58%) occurred within 6 months of OOHC admission (AIHW 2020).

Children and young people in statutory OOHC- NSW

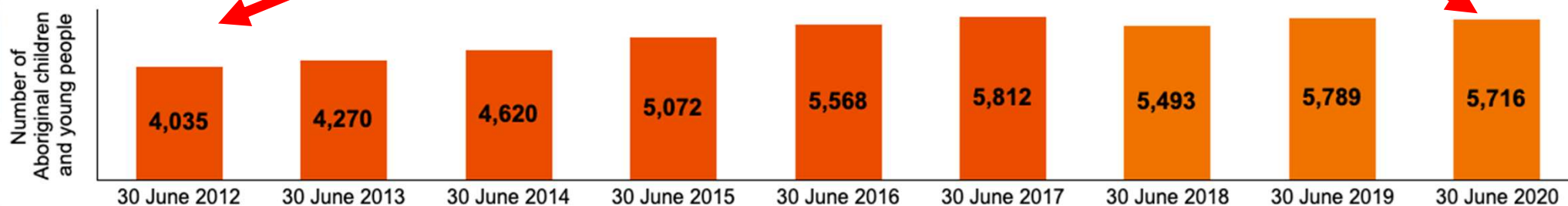
All children

The number of children in statutory OOHC has increased over the past 8 years, but has been on a downward trend for the past three years.



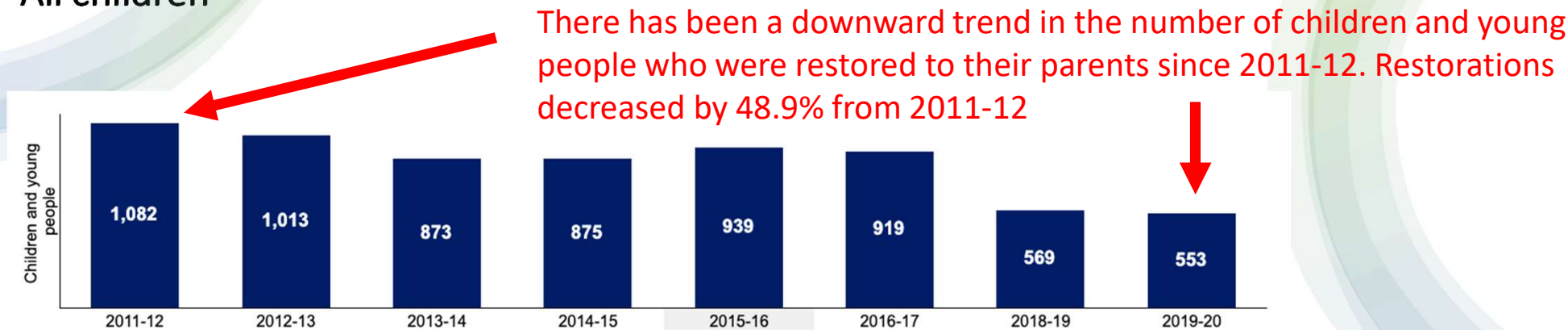
Aboriginal children

The number of Aboriginal children in statutory OOHC has increased over the last 8 years by 29%

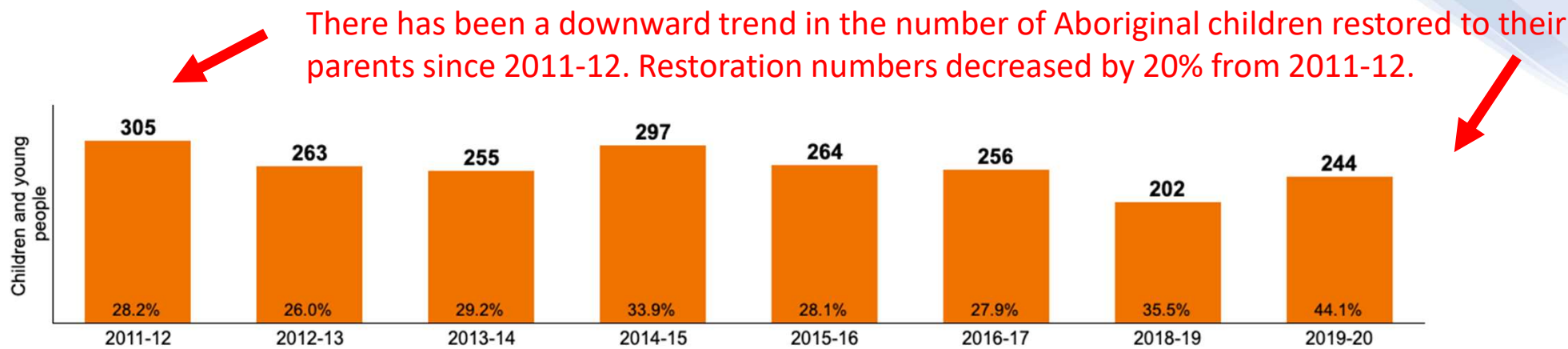


Children and young people restored to parents- NSW

All children



Aboriginal children



Aboriginal child restoration: what the evidence tells us

Family is Culture Review:

- DCJ Administrative data of 1,318 Aboriginal children taken into care over 2015-2016 found a restoration rate of 17.5% (n=230).
- Restoration was not considered possible in 84.1% of cases. The restoration rate could have been much higher if the possibility of restoration was identified in more cases and appropriate casework was directed towards that goal with more families.
- In 70/200 (35%) cases in the case file reviews, no casework was provided to parents to assist restoration.
- Barriers to restoration: unclear restoration processes, unrealistic restoration goals, a lack of appropriate support services, and potential legal barriers to families achieving restoration.

Family is Culture recommendations

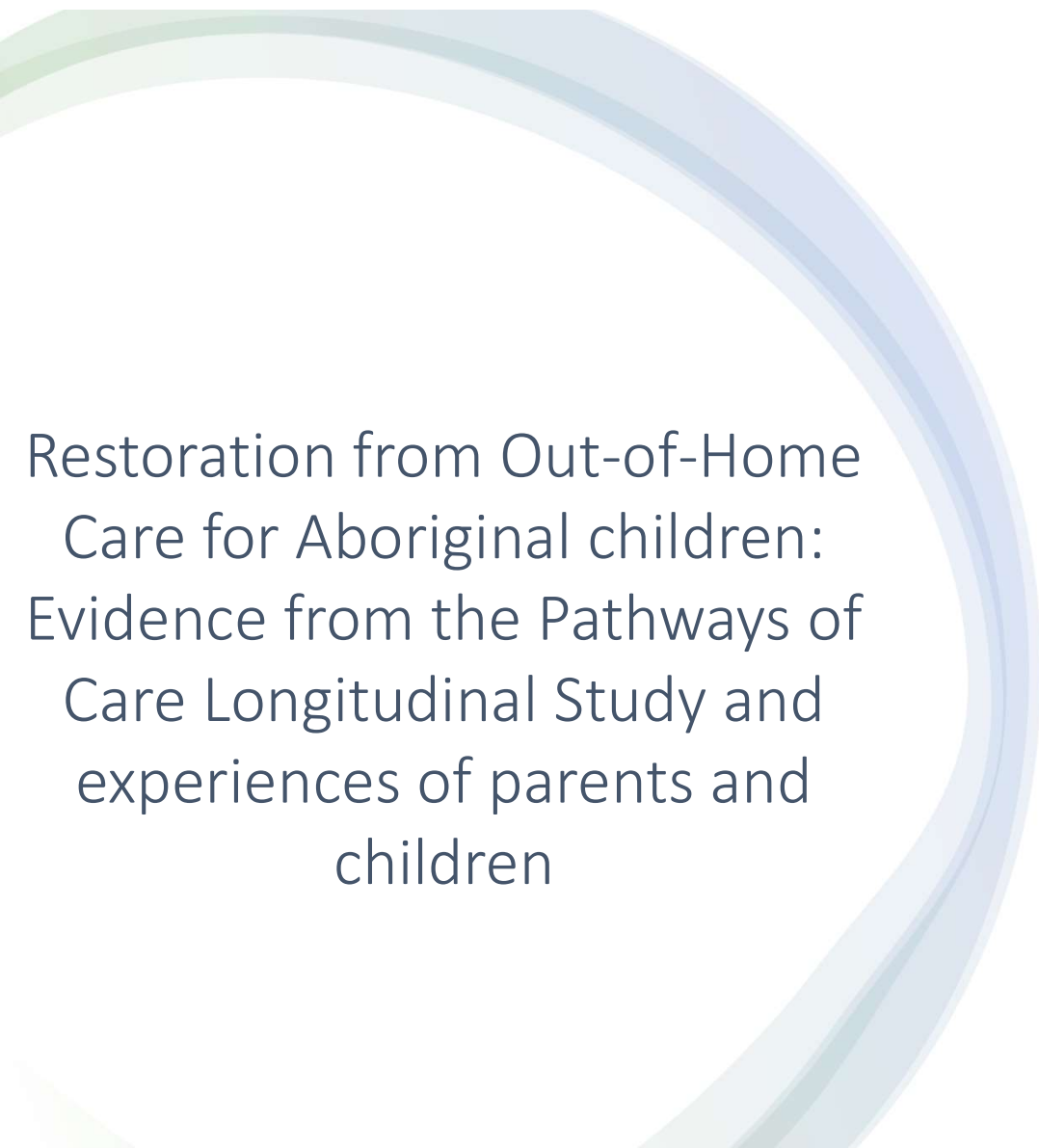
Family is Culture Review recommendation topic related to restoration	Number of recommendations
Legislation changes	4
Improving access to information for parents	2
DCJ strategy development to support restoration	2
Funding allocation to align with restoration priorities	2
DCJ practice and processes	4
Education on historical trauma and impacts	1
Total	15

About POCLS

- Follows the child development and life experiences of all children from birth who first entered OOHC over an 18-month period in NSW between May 2010 and October 2011 (n= 4,126).
- A subset of those children and young people who went on to receive final Children's Court care and protection orders by April 2013 (n= 2,828) were eligible to participate in the interview component of the study.
- Of 2,828 children in the 'final orders cohort', 721 (25.5%) were restored to families by 30 June 2016.
- There is an additional 'survey cohort', where children and their carers (including parents if restored) are interviewed at intervals via the POCLS survey. Data up to Wave 4 is available.



The Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study (POCLS)



Restoration from Out-of-Home Care for Aboriginal children: Evidence from the Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study and experiences of parents and children

Aims of this study is to investigate

- The rate of restoration for Aboriginal children in POCLS
- The factors that influence restoration for Aboriginal children
- The experiences of parents whose Aboriginal children have been restored
- The experiences of Aboriginal children and young people.

Research methods: Two streams, quantitative and qualitative using different data sets

Quantitative sample

- Aboriginal children in NSW on final Children's Court care and protection orders ('final orders cohort') by April 2013 (n= 1,018 or 36% of the 2,828 children).
- DCJ administrative data used to track the trajectory of these children and compare the circumstances of children who have been restored to their parents with those who were not restored.

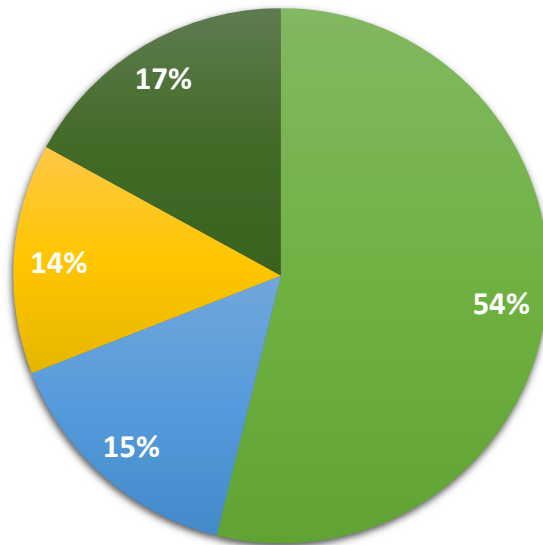
Qualitative sample

- Participants in the POCLS 'survey cohort' (n= 586 Aboriginal children).
- We explored interview data from
 - Aboriginal children, and their caseworkers.
 - Parents whose Aboriginal children had been restored, who participated in at least one interview for the POCLS survey. This was **39 parents in total** including 32 mothers and 7 fathers.

Findings- quantitative

- The rate of restoration for Aboriginal children in the POCLS final orders cohort is 15.2%, or 155 children of the 1018 that were removed.
- The average time in care for children who had been restored was nearly 2.5 years.

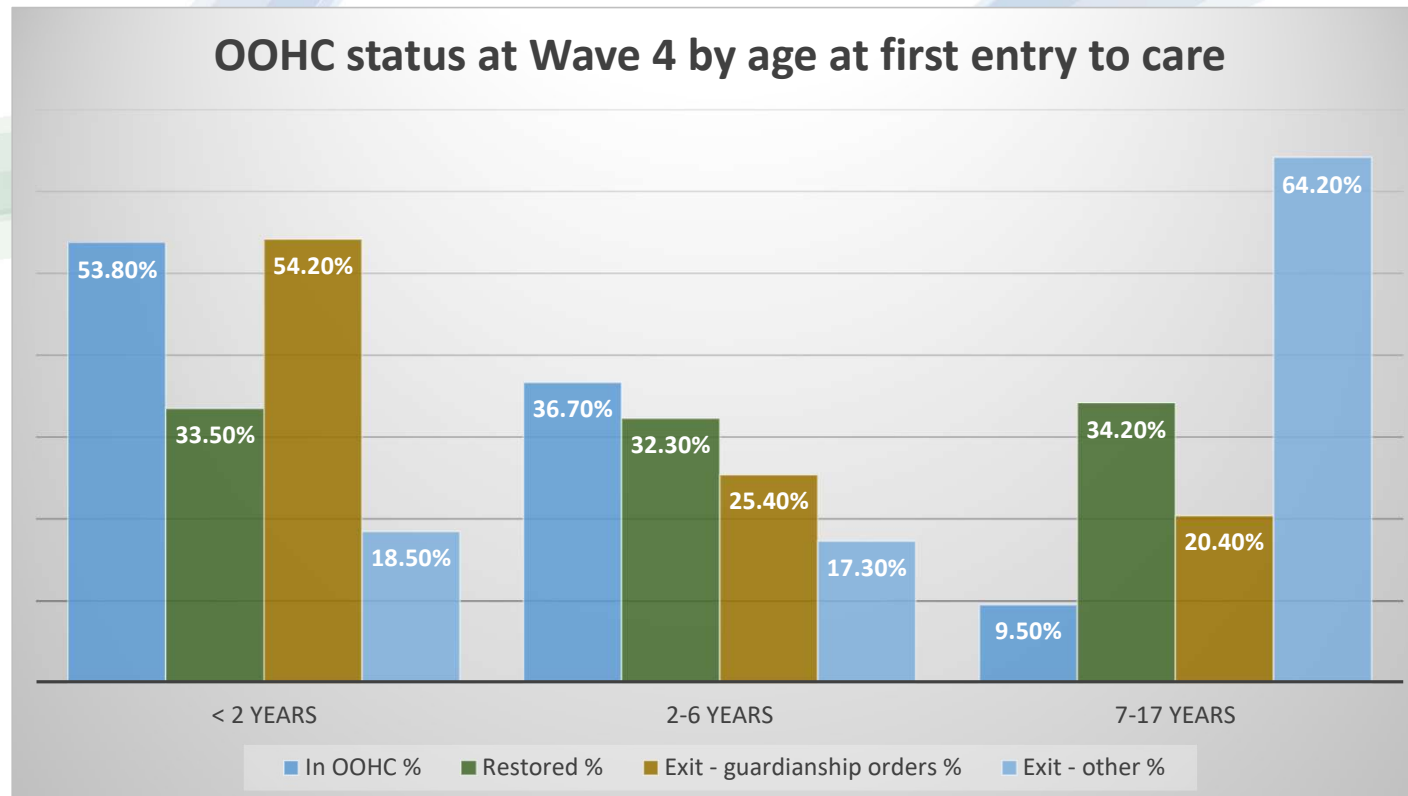
*OOHC status for
Aboriginal children
at Wave 4*



■ Still in OOHC ■ Restored to parent ■ Exit to guardianship ■ Exit other reason

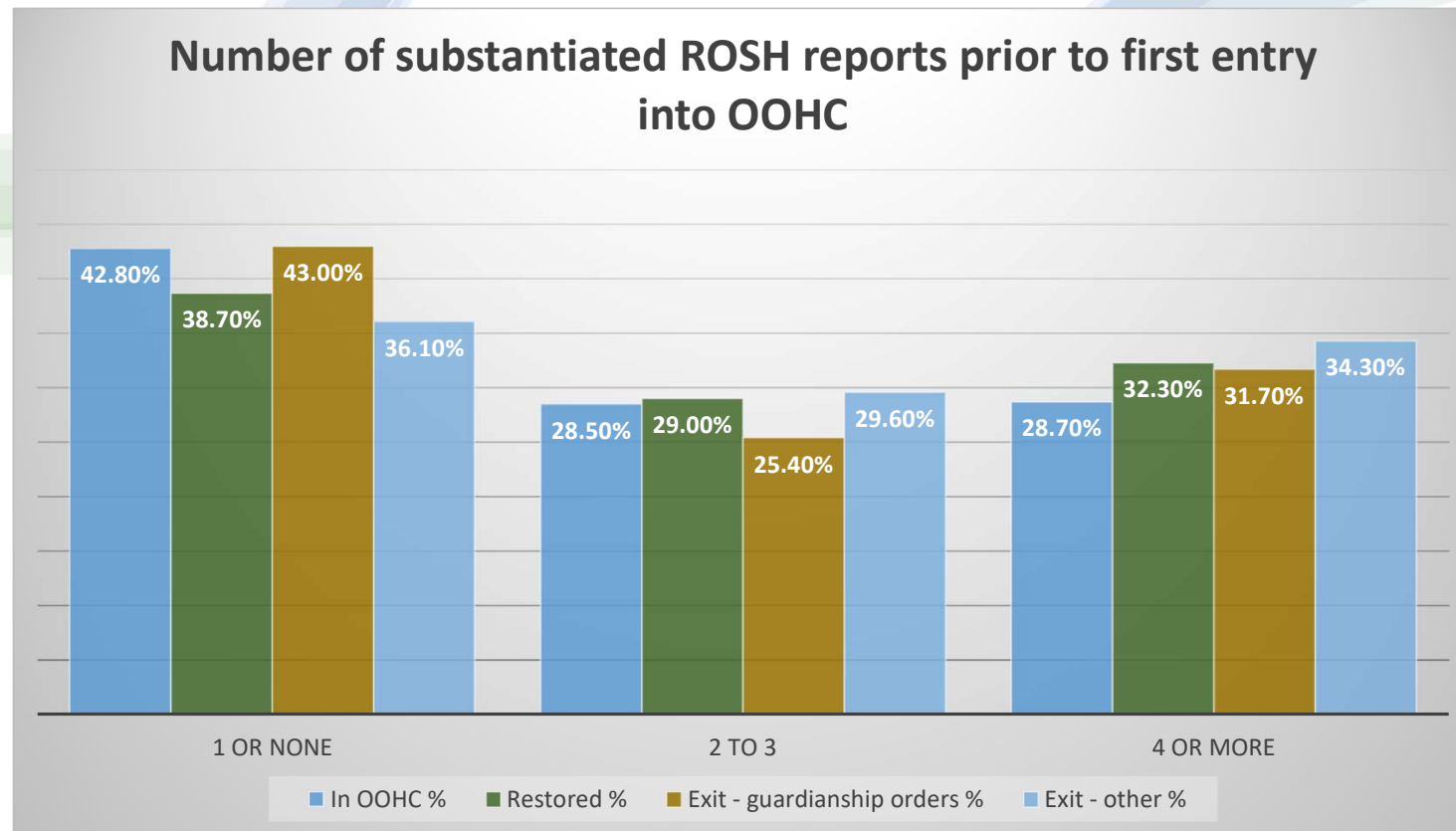
Once on final orders,
restoring Aboriginal
children to their parents is
highly unlikely

Findings- quantitative



Aboriginal children under 2 years were much more likely to remain in OOHC or move onto guardianship orders.

Findings- quantitative



An average of 40% of Aboriginal children entering OOHC regardless of their care outcome, were the subject of just one, or no, substantiated ROSH reports

Findings- parents' voices

When their children were removed...

I was not able to attend court as I had three children at home with no babysitter. At the time I did not realise the situation was that serious. I felt if it had been better verbalised to me and suggested that I needed legal representation the outcome may have been quite different (parent).

Findings- parents' voices

When their children were removed...

They were very sneaky how they did it. We were at the DOCS office, and they took me into a separate room and told me they were taking the children. The caseworker just threw the paperwork in front of me and just said they were taking them. I could hear my children distressed in the other room and I wasn't allowed to see them. I was so distressed (parent).

They should not have had two policeman walk into the labour ward at the hospital and remove my child while I wasn't even in the room...they were sneaky about it and lied to me. I was taken to a room half-way down the hall and I couldn't even walk properly, I had just had an emergency caesarean. I went into a function type room in the hospital, they sat me down and they took a long time to tell me that they had actually taken my child (parent).

Findings- caseworkers' voices

Restoration barriers...

Restoration is being spoken about but casework intervention towards this process has been minimal due to staff levels and staff unavailability (caseworker).

(Caseworker worked hard to engage the family for a year, and then the case was transferred to a new caseworker who) *'...failed to follow through and explore restoration'* (caseworker).

Findings- caseworkers' voices

Placement impact on restoration...

'...moved child from their country, without any significant discussion with CS [Community Services] and parents, the child has significant contact (monthly) with parents and is 5 hours away...'

and, 'kin assessments have been identified every case plan and nil work has been completed', because 'staff have not been supported to do the assessment' (caseworker).

'bullied by paternal family and carer prior to contact occurring', and 'has only attended half of the planned contacts' (caseworker).

Findings- children's voices

Wanting their parents...

Help the child stay connected to the birth parents. Let them contact their birth parents when they want to (child).

Give the parents another chance with the child. Have overnight stays and more visits (child).

Support, like help them through their tough times. Maybe remind them who their birth parents are and help them keep in contact with their birth family (child).

Findings- parents' voices


Transition to restoration...

More contact before restoration would of [sic] been better. The children came to the family home for supervised visits and they were not allowed to leave the room we were in. they wanted to go to their bedrooms and outside to see the animals but we all had to stay together (parent).

Post restoration support...

When they came home, I didn't get enough support understanding the child's behaviour, where I could have got help for my child; caseworker was not on my side, I was shuffled around a lot, they didn't care (parent).

What would have been helpful was a better understanding by DOCS about what was going on. I had no one tell me what my child had been doing or what had gone on with my baby while they were in care. I was given a note by one of the carers which was helpful, but that was pretty much it (parent).



Take-home messages from the POCLS restoration research

- The chances of restoration for Aboriginal children after being on permanent care orders is very low, particularly for children who enter care under 2 years of age.
- Parents generally lacked information and support at the point of removal and needed to have better access to services and support for a successful transition to restoration.
 - This is particularly significant as both the quantitative data and reports from parents demonstrated that many children had limited contact with child protection systems prior to removal.
 - More contextual evidence is needed to make better sense of this finding.
- Both parents and their children discussed the importance of frequent, quality contact to maintain their relationships and caseworkers and decisions made by agencies play a significant role in this.
- The qualitative data was very limited and there's a lot of work to do in this space to build the evidence about restoration for Aboriginal families...

Bring Them Home, Keep Them Home:

Charting the experiences, successful pathways and outcomes of Aboriginal families whose children have been restored from Out-of-Home Care

What do we want to learn from the research?

- For those parents that have had their children restored, what was their experience? What supported them in restoration and what were the challenges?
- What do the institutional barriers look like for families and supporting services when working towards restoration?
- What restoration practices are happening, and what does this look like around the state and in specific communities?
- The size of the problem (how many Aboriginal children are removed and not restored to their parents in NSW?)

Outcomes from the research

- Mapping successful pathways to restoration, so parents (and been removed are armed with their supports) whose children have knowledge and information
- Building sector knowledge about the experiences of restoration processes, blockages, and best practice
- Resources identified as needed by local communities

The research is funded for 4 years from Sept 2021 through an Australian Research Council Indigenous Discovery grant

Our approach to conducting the research

Aboriginal led and controlled

- Aboriginal researchers
- Partners with Aboriginal organisations



Place based- working alongside Aboriginal communities/organisations

- ACCOs leading the research at the community level
- Supported by NGOs and DCJ

Widest reach possible- Experiences of practitioners and stakeholders across NSW

- Understanding how restoration work looks in different contexts and geographic areas
- Building the evidence of practitioner perspectives of restoration experiences and system engagement across the state

Research methods: State-wide practitioner forums

Series of online roundtables with practitioners, professional and advocacy groups in different regions across the state:

Practitioner forums 1 (From July 2022)

- Data collection: key insights, experiences, needs and priorities for successful and sustainable restoration of Aboriginal children


Practitioner forums 2 (From July 2023)

- Presenting early findings and data interpretation

State- wide Practitioner forum 3 (Aug 2024)

- Presenting the findings, feedback and next steps

If you would like your services to participate in the practitioner forums please contact b.newton@unsw.edu.au



Thinking about everything just
presented...

What stood out for you?

What does it mean for your practice?



THANK YOU!