



Zac Craig from BackTrack sharing his experiences of relational approaches at the launch of the James Martin Institute's report 'Supporting Children and Families to Flourish', a collaborative project with the Centre for Relational Care

## Reimagining the child protection system

This past month, we launched a landmark report, *Supporting Children and Families to Flourish*, developed in partnership with the James Martin Institute for Public Policy. The report is not just another policy proposal, but a call to reimagine our entire child protection system, shifting from a framework of "reporting, investigation and removal" to one that nurtures meaningful relationships for children and families.

As CRC Chair Jarrod Wheatley noted at the launch of the report, too many children in care are deprived of the relational security every child deserves. A child can't thrive without consistent, caring adults. Our current system often leaves children emotionally stranded, and it's clear that compliance and monitoring alone won't deliver better outcomes.

The Centre for Relational Care is committed to advancing the report's opportunities. We are on a journey of exploring practical alternatives both now and in the long term. There are many voices in the system that can and should contribute to this and have been calling for reform for a long time. For example, relational practice is at the heart of Aboriginal-led organisations and knowledge, and in many grassroots community organisations.

This research sets out to complement these efforts, while opening up new collaborations.

In the coming months, we will continue to work alongside stakeholders in collaborative co-design of this reimagined care system. We will also boost efforts to ensure the voices of children, families, and frontline workers are heard directly. Our engagement is growing, and we are truly appreciative of the support and interest in our work.

The path ahead won't be easy. We recognise systems change is complex and often slow. Yet we can walk towards an alternative care system that doesn't just protect, but truly connects - offering children the relationships they need to flourish.

Sophi Bruce  
CEO



## Learning from lived experience

Embedding lived experience in every phase of policy design, implementation, and improvement is crucial to meaningful system reform.

We've curated some of the recent work on lived experiences on the *Your Stories* section of our website, including reports from the Advocate for Children and Young People in NSW and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

We'll also be expanding our collection of stories to help keep our work rooted in the wisdom of lived experience.

For more information, or if you have a Lived Experience resource you would like to share, visit *Your Stories* on our website:



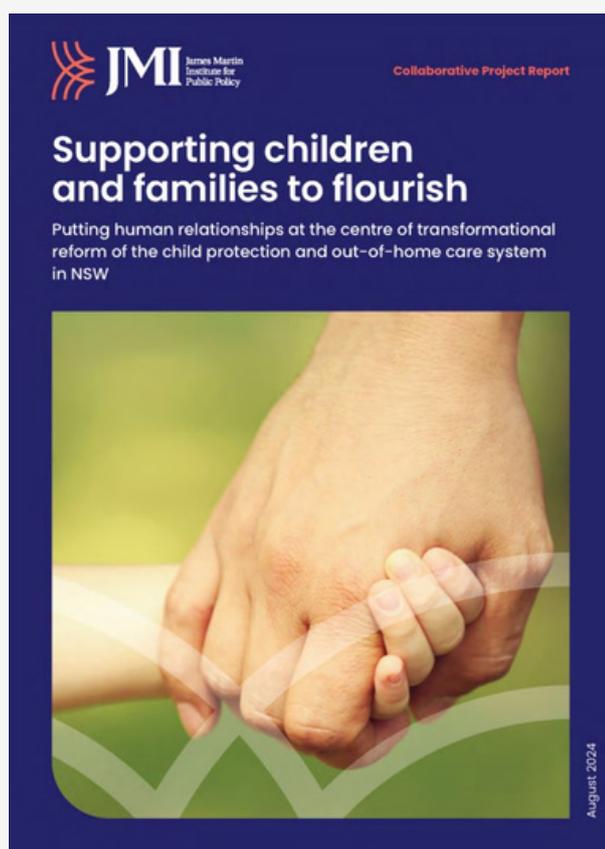
[centreforrelationalcare.org.au](https://centreforrelationalcare.org.au)

## Report provides a guiding light for system reform

In August we welcomed the release of the *Supporting Children and Families to Flourish* report from the James Martin Institute for Public Policy, developed in collaboration with the Centre for Relational Care, and with support from the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. The report offers a new paradigm for the child protection and out-of-home care system in NSW.

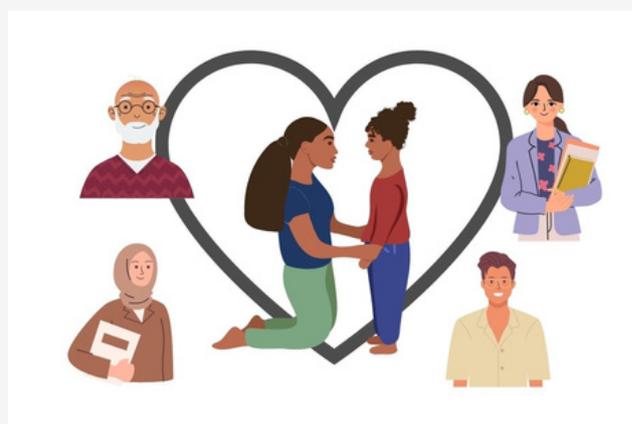
Launched by The Hon. Kate Washington, NSW Minister for Families and Communities, the report was hailed by the Minister as a "guiding light" for much-needed reform of the sector.

Key areas for action include the need for changes to laws, regulations, policies and processes to dismantle bureaucratic barriers and create a care system centred on relationships. This is not about tweaking our current system; it's about reimagining the entire sector, based on the most up-to-date understanding of trauma, neuroscience and lived experiences.



The report is the product of extensive collaboration with many experts from academia, government and the wider practice community, in close collaboration with NSW Department of Communities and Justice and the Centre for Relational Care.

A sincere thanks to all the contributors for sharing their time and expertise.



The report outlines a comprehensive vision that prioritises community-led, relational programs. Key actions include:

- **A new social compact:** A shared commitment between government, the care sector and the community to protect children through supportive family and community relationships.
- **Relationship-based models:** Prioritising these when commissioning care, especially with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).
- **Family and carer feedback:** Introducing new metrics to learn from their experiences.
- **Redefining performance indicators:** Reflecting the goals of families, carers and children in frontline work.
- **Legal reforms:** Undertaking substantive legislative reform to reflect a relationship-based approach to care. This includes revising mandatory reporting to direct low-risk cases to non-statutory support.
- **Streamlining regulations:** Simplifying processes to allow workers more time to support children and families. Part of this includes reframing "risk", to consider the long-term risks of relational deprivation.
- **Supporting ACCOs:** Redirecting investment to help them reach more First Nations families.
- **Investing in early help:** Funding community-based support to prevent families from entering the statutory system.
- **Economic modelling for funding:** Using detailed economic modelling to inform increased funding for early intervention programs and foster carers, with long-term savings from reduced out-of-home care.

While the report sets a vision, achieving it will require sustained commitment and multiple rounds of regulatory, legislative and policy reforms. The Centre for Relational Care will work alongside stakeholders in co-designing this reimagined care system, guided by the wisdom of lived experience.

To find out more, and to watch a webinar and Q&A session about the report, visit:  
[centreforrelationalcare.org.au/jmi-report](https://centreforrelationalcare.org.au/jmi-report)

## Welcoming Aunty Rhonda as our Elder in Residence



The Centre for Relational Care is privileged to have Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor join us this month as our Elder in Residence. Aunty Rhonda is a respected Gadigal, Bidjigal, and Yuin Elder with deep roots in the Sydney (Warrane) area and the South Coast of NSW.

With over 50 years of experience as a cultural storyteller, poet, writer, actor, and consultant, Aunty Rhonda is a passionate advocate for social justice, human rights, self-determination, decolonisation, and cultural revitalisation for future generations.

As Elder in Residence with the Centre for Relational Care, Aunty Rhonda brings cultural guidance through storytelling, ceremony and connection to Country. We are grateful for Aunty Rhonda's help with cultural learning and listening in light of the persistent over-representation of First Nations children and families in child protection and out-of-home care.

## Sharing ideas on relationship-based practice

At the Centre for Relational Care, we love to share ideas from people and organisations who are adopting relational approaches in their work.

One inspiring example comes from mental health service, The Base, which developed self-reflective cards to help clinicians, caseworkers and carers build stronger, more meaningful relationships with children in out-of-home care.

For example, these cards encourage caseworkers to engage in reflective conversations with carers, and to consider the questions themselves.

The cards were inspired by self-reflection questions the CRC developed through engagement across the care sector.

If you have examples of relational approaches to share, please email us at [change@centreforrelationalcare.org.au](mailto:change@centreforrelationalcare.org.au)



### Change Maker Chat

Our Chair Jarrod Wheatley joined the ChangeMakers Podcast this month to share his vision for a Child Connection System that puts humanity and relationships before bureaucracy.

To listen visit: [centreforrelationalcare.org.au/resources](https://centreforrelationalcare.org.au/resources)

## What's next?

Here are some of the activities we'll be working on over the coming months:

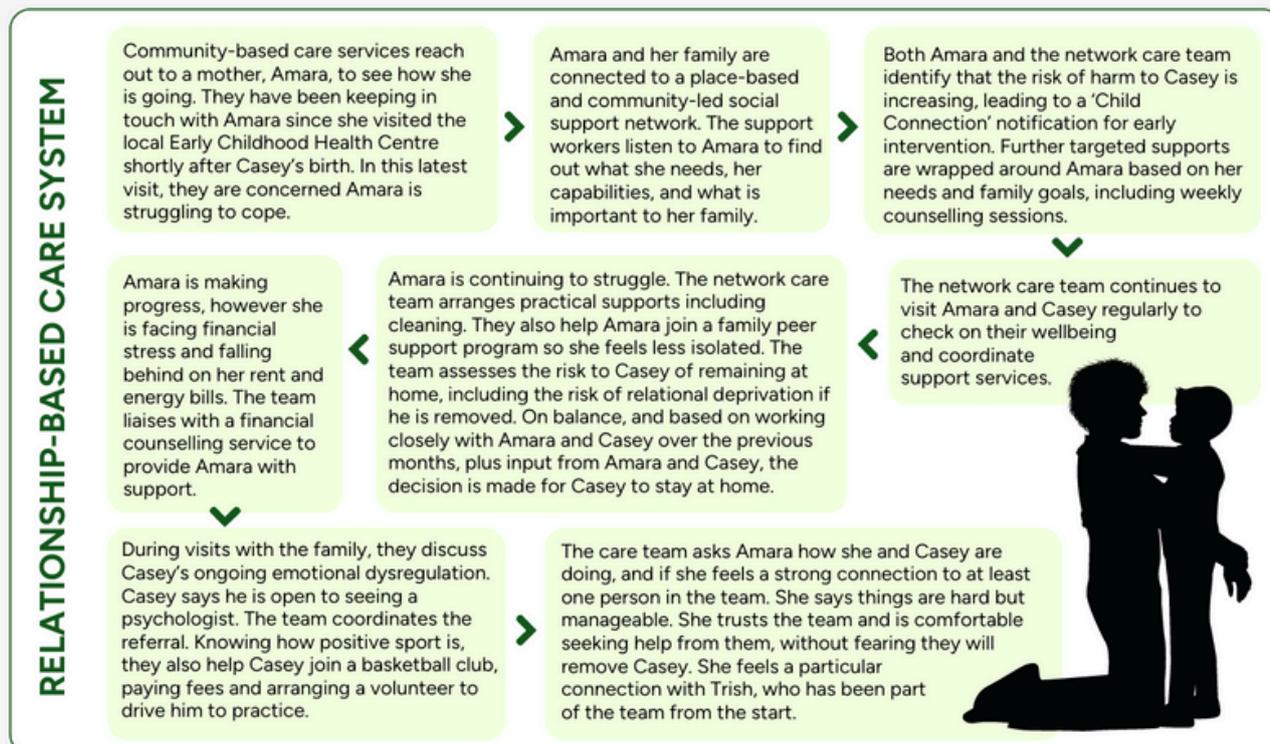
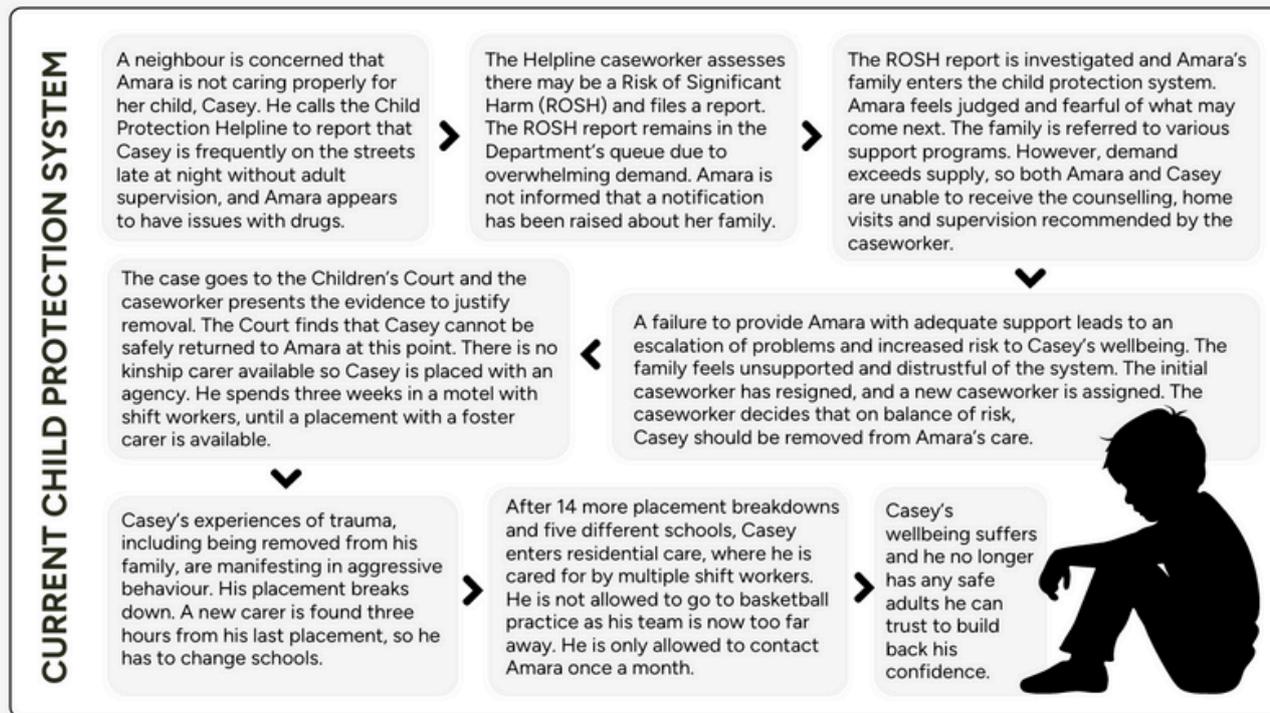
-  Continuing our engagement with stakeholders on opportunities for collaborative co-design of a reimagined care system, and to deepen our shared understanding of relationship-based practice, models and initiatives.
-  Continuing to collect and share lived experience stories to ensure the voices of children, families and frontline workers are heard directly.
-  Exploration of collaborative opportunities and partnerships with research bodies and peak groups.
-  Participation in panel discussions and roundtables.
-  Expanding the team at the Centre for Relational Care to support our engagement program and initiatives.

# Submission on the Redesign of Family Preservation

In our recent submission on the Redesign of Family Preservation, we urged the Department of Communities and Justice NSW to adopt a relationship-centred approach. We included a journey map (shown below) to illustrate a simplified example of how the current system can lead to poor outcomes for children, families and communities.

In contrast, a focus on the child's need for meaningful, genuine relationships with the adults who are raising them can lead to very different outcomes.

You can read our submission at: [centreforrelationalcare.org.au/resources](http://centreforrelationalcare.org.au/resources)



Note: These scenarios are fictitious high-level representations to show how different systems can lead to different trajectories for children and their families. They are not intended to fully represent individual cases. Each step in the journey has layers of complexity.



[linkedin.com/company/centre-for-relational-care/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/centre-for-relational-care/)



[centreforrelationalcare.org.au](http://centreforrelationalcare.org.au)