WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

Translational Health Research Institute (THRI) Summer Scholarship Research Program 2021 Project Lists

Project 116: Assessment of low physical activity by children as a risk factor of adolescent overweight or obesity and its potential effect reduction midway through a weight reduction and management program in the southwest Sydney population

Supervisor(s): Haider Mannan - h.mannan@westernsydney.edu.au
Principal Supervisor

Project Description

Preventing the onset of overweight and obesity in children is an important public health priority. Among the developed nations, the rate of childhood obesity in Australia is one of the highest with approximately 20% of children at 2–3 years of age being overweight or obese. The overall prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australian children doubled between 1985 and 1995 and the epidemic is evident in children as young as 2 years. Within Australia, the South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) has the highest obesity rate with one in 10 children/teenagers, or more than 20,000 children/teenagers between age 2 and 17 battling obesity. The issue of childhood obesity in southwest Sydney has been a focus of attention for several years, and the latest study by Mannan (2018) showed that for a ten year follow up of children from birth there is a very rapid increase at age two compared to age one in overweight/obesity rates and this reaches a peak at age ten. Within SWSLHD, Homebush Bay and Silverwater have the highest rate (40%) of obese or overweight children 2 to 17 years old recorded by any Primary Health Area (PHA) in greater Sydney. Just over one third of children in the PHA covering Mount Druitt and Whalan are obese or overweight, closely followed by Canley Vale, Ashcroft, Lakemba, Punchbowl and Liverpool.

Broadly, studying childhood obesity is very important from public health perspective because obese children have a 25-50% risk of progressing to obesity in adulthood and this risk may be as high as 78% in obese adolescents. In addition, there are significant medical and psychosocial consequences, which affect the obese child during the childhood period.

Having low level of physical activity can be a risk factor of childhood overweight or obesity. In Australia, 74% of the children aged 5 to 12 years and 92% of the children aged 13-17 years do not perform the recommended level of physical activity for their age. However, the availability of opportunities for sports and recreation, including community amenities, positively influences physical activity. These have generally been low in SWSLHD at least in the suburbs where childhood overweight or obesity rate is high. With the aim to enhance community awareness of weight management, encourage physical activity by improvements to the built environment, promote breastfeeding among infants and a balanced diet among children with greater fruit and vegetable consumption and lower consumption of sweetened drinks, the SWSLHD in 2017 launched the SWS Childhood Overweight and Obesity Prevention and Management Action Plan for the period 2017-2025. To implement this integrative weight reduction plan, the SWSLHD has already approached the local government and other stakeholders to increase the region's green space, getting more water refill stations and gyms put in parks and improving walkways. The target which has been set by this plan is to reduce the childhood overweight and obesity rates by 5% in the region by 2025. So we are currently halfway through to reaching the end of the target period although the progress may be hampered to some extent since March 2020 following the onset of covid-19 outbreak.

Project Aims

- The first aim is to investigate whether for a 2004 cohort of children aged 4 to 5-year-old from SWSLHD, low physical activity is a risk factor of adolescent obesity 10 years later.

  Since the target period for the SWS Childhood Overweight and Obesity Prevention and Management Action Plan is only halfway through and also hampered by covid-19, we cannot expect SWSLHD to fully reach the goal of achieving 5% reduction in childhood overweight or obesity rate. However, given that the plan is well underway we can expect some improvements in green space and built environments in the region and associated increase in physical activity levels by children/adolescents. Accordingly:

- The second aim of this study is to examine trends in green spaces and built environments during the period 2004-2020 and examine whether there have been some improvements in their levels particularly since 2016 or 2017 when the weight reduction and management plan came into effect.

- The third aim is to assess how the role of low level of physical activity by children/adolescent has changed as a potential risk factor of childhood/adolescent obesity during the period when the weight reduction and management program was well in effect in SWSLHD compared to the period during which this plan was non-existent.

- The final aim is to examine how since March 2020 covid-19 has hampered the progress of the weight reduction and management program in SWSLHD.

Project Methods

The study will adopt the Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study for Australian Children (LSAC). This study commenced in February 2004 with a representative sample of Australian children in two cohorts: families with 4–5 year old children and families with 0–1 year old children. The seventh round of data collection (wave 7) was completed in early 2017, and wave 8 commenced in June 2017 and the second round of wave 8 in February 2018. In this study, we will use the cohort of families with 4 or 5-year-old children. Data for these children were collected every two years from study informants (until the children turned 21 or 22 years of age) including parents, carers, and teachers when the child was small and from the child when he/she was of an appropriate age. The first round of data collection for wave 9 was completed in May 2019. Round 2 of wave 9 commenced in June 2019 but ceased in March 2020 due to covid-19. A revised survey 9C also examining the impact of natural disasters and covid-19 commenced and was completed online on March 2020. Fieldwork for survey 9C1 commenced which was completed online in October 2020. Finally, fieldwork for survey 9C2 commenced and was completed online or by telephone interview in June 2021.

There is a unique opportunity for researchers to apply for additional data linkages based on geospatial units. Bespoke linked datasets can be tailored to suit this research projects' needs and interests. Some examples of geospatial linkage projects include access to greenspace, distance to services, walkability and air pollution.

Statistical analyses will include descriptive statistical analysis, binary logistic and mixed effects logistic regression. The student will be required to perform these analyses under the guidance of the primary supervisor.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The student will learn how to perform literature review, learn state-of-the-art epidemiologic and biostatistical methods for performing data analysis.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

Good knowledge of epidemiology and intermediate level knowledge of biostatistics having at least completed an introductory statistics unit from a University or College. Basic knowledge of regression analysis will help.

Project 117: Does ethnicity and socioeconomic status matter in childhood obesity risk in Western Sydney?

Supervisor(s): Haider Mannan - h.mannan@westernsydney.edu.au
Principal Supervisor

Project Description

Preventing the onset of overweight and obesity in children is an important public health priority.

Among the developed nations, the rate of childhood obesity in Australia is one of the highest with approximately 20% of children at 2–3 years of age being overweight or obese. The overall prevalence of overweight and obesity in Australian children doubled between 1985 and 1995 and the epidemic is evident in children as young as 2 years. One in 10 children/teenagers, or more than 20,000 children between age 2 and 17, are battling obesity in the South Western Sydney Local Health District (SWSLHD) which is the highest in Australia. Within Australia, SWSLHD has the highest childhood obesity rate. Within SWSLHD, the highest childhood overweight/obesity rate is found in Canterbury at 28 per cent followed by Bankstown at 27 per cent. The issue of childhood obesity in southwest Sydney has been a focus of attention for some time now, and a recent study by Mannan (2018) showed that there has been an obesity epidemic amongst children of the region with a very rapid increase at age two compared to ages one, however, afterwards there was little change in overweight/obesity rates at ages four, six, and eight, which was followed by a rapid increase at age ten when the overweight/obesity rate was the highest.

Studying childhood obesity is very important from public health perspective because obese children have a 25-50% risk of progressing to obesity in adulthood and this risk may be as high as 78% in obese adolescents. In addition, there are significant medical and psychosocial consequences, which affect the obese child during the childhood period.

SWSLHD's director of health promotion Mandy Williams says "Southwest Sydney comprises many cultural groups and has a larger portion of lower socio economic backgrounds ... poverty is a key factor". However, it has not been studied whether childhood overweight/obesity is more common among low SES and CALD groups even though in many developed countries it's been found to be more common among the low SES groups.

To combat childhood obesity, SWSLHD has been proactive in partnering with pilot programs like The Chat Study, to complement other programs offered at childcare through to high school students. The Chat Study provides mothers, who give birth at Liverpool and Campbelltown hospitals, with a regular text message or phone call offering nutritional coaching to help with healthy development.

SWSLHD also is talking with local government and other stakeholders to discuss the region's green space, getting more water refill stations and gyms put in parks. But even with programs, Ms Williams is realistic about how long it will take to turn the figures around — about 30 years. "Smoking rates used to be at 35-37 per cent, now they're back to a lower level," Ms Williams said. "It took 30 years of investment and obesity in a sense is far more complex, so we're going to need the same amount of time to get rates back down."

Project Aims

- The first aim is to examine whether low SES and CALD population groups within Western Sydney have higher rates of early childhood overweight or obesity.
- The second aim is to determine whether children belonging to low SES and CALD population groups also have higher risks of developing childhood overweight or obesity by the time they turn 10-year old.

Project Methods

The study will adopt the Growing Up in Australia: Longitudinal Study for Australian Children (LSAC). This study commenced in February 2004 with a representative sample of Australian children in two cohorts: families with 4–5-year-old children and families with 0–1 year old children. The seventh round of data collection (wave 7) was completed in early 2017, and wave 8 commenced in June 2017 and the second round of wave 8 in February 2018. In this study, we will use the cohort of families with 0 or 1-year-old children. Data for these children were collected every two years from study informants (until the children turned 10 or 11 years of age) including parents, carers, and teachers when the child was small and from the child when he/she was of an appropriate age. The final round of data collection (wave 10) was completed in late 2013.

A retrospective cohort study design will be used to perform the analysis. Statistical analyses include descriptive statistical analysis and mixed effects logistic regression.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The student will learn how to perform literature review, learn state-of-the-art epidemiologic and biostatistical methods for performing data analysis.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

Good knowledge of epidemiology and intermediate level knowledge of biostatistics having at least completed an introductory statistics unit from a University or College. Basic knowledge of regression analysis will help.

Project 118: Integrated, intergenerational care

Supervisor(s): Rebekah Grace - Rebekah.grace@westernsydney.edu.au
Principal Supervisor

Kelly Baird - k.baird@westernsydney.edu.au
Second Supervisor

This project is in partnership with **TReSI (Translational Research and Social Innovation, School of Nursing & Midwifery WSU), Uniting & UTS**

Project Description

This project is part of a larger joint, multi-year, cross-disciplinary program of research currently being developed by members of TeEACH in collaboration with our industry partner, Uniting and our university partner, UTS. The program of research gives focus to Uniting's new multi-function facility at Westmead (located in Western Sydney) that includes a co-located residential aged care facility, retirement living apartments, a senior's gym, community facilities and a flagship early learning centre. It is anticipated that this program of research will support Uniting to make informed decisions about service integration and community engagement, support the best possible client outcomes and greatest social impact, and make a significant contribution to the evidence for integrated intergenerational models of care and support.

BACKGROUND

Intergenerational programs and models of care are relatively new within the Australian service context (with the exception of the Intergenerational Care Project that has been led by Griffith University in Queensland since 2017). This is in contrast to these programs being widely implemented in the USA, UK and Japan. Intergenerational programs and models of care range from mentoring and community service to service learning and workforce development. While the primary focus for programs may differ (e.g., improving outcomes related to academic achievement, physical health, cognitive health, psychological health, social wellbeing, housing security or quality of life), all intergenerational programs intentionally unite the generations in ways that enrich participants' lives, help address social and community issues, and build on the resources and skills younger and older people have to offer each other and their communities. Intergenerational programs are designed to promote greater understanding and respect between the different generations through joint engagement in ongoing, mutually beneficial and planned activities.

Intergenerational programs benefit everybody, from babies to older adults. Benefits include improvements in mental, physical and cognitive health, a greater sense of belonging and increased community connectedness. It has also been demonstrated that intergenerational programs have a 'spill-over effect' to program staff, family members of program participants, and the community, supporting positive outcomes such as increased sense of community, neighbourhood trust and social cohesion, - decreased social isolation, and increased sense of purpose.

This research will explore a range of outcomes related to Uniting's intergenerational program designed to bring togther young children attending an early learning centre and older residents of the co-located aged care facility/retirement living apartment in Uniting's multi-function centre at Westmead.

Project Aims

The overarching design of the Integrated, Intergenerational Care research program is to understand how intergenerational care impacts wellbeing and development outcomes for young children and older adults who participate. The research is particularly interested in understanding what aspects influence outcomes and why (e.g., factors related to design, space, process, workforce, client etc.).

More specifically, this program of research aims to:

- Understand the ways in which integration occurs within services;
- Understand the impact of different configurations of co-location and integration on behaviour of, and outcomes for, clients and staff as well as the local community;
- Enhance the deliberate use of co-location and integration within services; and
- Support the development, implementation and evaluation of trailblazing/flagship programs and initiatives.

Project Methods

The central program and research design are being refined through a co-design process involving WSU, UTS and Uniting. The project the Summer Scholarship student will undertake will have a direct impact on the co-design process, including the development of the intergenerational program.

SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The Summer Scholarship student's involvement in this project is as follows:

Support the preparation of a scoping review of literature on co-location and integration of intergenerational models

- Conduct database searches for national and international peer-reviewed literature on intergenerational models, with particular focus given to:
    - Identifying different program models that work with young children and older adults
    - Understanding the theory of change adopted/used by each model to support change in clients' lives
    - The quality of evidence used to demonstrate outcomes
    - The inclusion of young children's perspectives/voices in the existing literature

[NB: this stage would involve liaising with the university librarians for support in effective search strategies and working with the research team to develop inclusion/exclusion criteria. The student will also be required to undertake EndNote training (if necessary) to ensure papers are organised systematically and in a way that supports collaboration across the supervision and research team.]

- Work with supervisors to identify the final sample of papers for inclusion (Stage 1 also involves ensuring a scoping review process such as the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) is utilised).
- Collate and synthesise the papers that meet the inclusion criteria for the review. This will include identifying key aspects of the study, including aim/research questions, participants, data collection methods, and main findings
- Liaise with supervisors about the findings from the database searches as they relate to the aspects that the scoping review gives particular focus to (e.g., attend meetings with the study team to discuss findings etc.)

- The student will be invited to be a co-author on the scoping review – it is likely that the student will write the methods section as they will undertake the database searches and will be invited to support the writing of the findings and discussion

Training and support will be provided to the student to ensure their successful engagement (including skills development) with this project.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The supervision team would guide the student in the development of a range of academic/research skills which include but are not limited to:

- Conducting literature searches by accessing databases and developing effective search strategies using relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Identifying key variables in terms of research participants, methods used and main findings
- Synthesising research literature and drawing conclusions based on key findings across a broad range of projects and outcomes
- Critically reflecting on research methodologies and the quality of the outcomes data used as evidence to support a model's usefulness
- Preparing a methods section for publication and enhancing their academic writing skills generally.

It is expected that within the Summer Scholarship period, the student would be able to complete the tasks related to the literature searches and development of the comprehensive document that forms the basis of the scoping review. It is anticipated that the student should be able to begin preparing the methods section of the scoping review paper following completion of the literature search. If this is not possible, the student will still be invited to co-author the paper with the research team.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

Essential

- Enrolled in their third year in an undergraduate degree (however 2nd year students could also be considered for this position)
- Excellent communication skills, including in academic writing
- Proficient computer skills (e.g., proficiency in Word and Excel)
- Willingness to be involved in different aspects of the project (e.g., literature searches; synthesis of eligible papers; thematic analysis related to overarching findings; preparation of a publication)
- Willingness to attend project meetings with our Steering Group if relevant and appropriate
- Taking initiative and ability to work independently
- Willingness to work from TeEACH at Campbelltown campus or from TReSI in the Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research in Liverpool (depending on COVID-19 restrictions).

Desirable

- Enrolled in a social work, social science, education, psychology or related discipline
- Knowledge and skills in the use of EndNote

Project 119: Wellbeing in the Early Childhood Years

Supervisor(s): Rebekah Grace - Rebekah.grace@westernsydney.edu.au
Principal Supervisor

Kelly Baird - k.baird@westernsydney.edu.au
Second Supervisor

This project is in partnership with **TReSI (Translational Research and Social Innovation, School of Nursing & Midwifery WSU), Uniting & Funded through an Ingham Institute and Narellan Rotary Mental Health Research Grant**

Project Description

This project explores the concept of wellbeing in the early childhood years by gathering the perspectives of young children, their parents, and early childhood educators. It is being conducted in South West Sydney in partnership with Uniting, a non-government organisation involved in the provision of early childhood education. This exploratory study forms Phase 1 of a larger program of work that aims to understand and measure wellbeing in the early years. It will help us to understand and identify concepts of subjective child wellbeing from the perspectives of key stakeholders, and trial and refine a creative methodological approach with young children. Subsequent phases of the project will expand upon this work to ensure the elements of wellbeing identified in Phase 1 are meaningful in diverse cultural and geographical locations across the country. Findings will inform the development of a measure of subjective child wellbeing that will be piloted and trialled in the Australian context.

BACKGROUND

- Defining wellbeing

The term 'wellbeing' is widely used in research, practice and policy contexts when we discuss desired outcomes for children. There is broad and undisputed understanding that child wellbeing is essential to health (including mental health), learning and development. However, there are conflicting views on what is meant by the term 'wellbeing', and how to measure it. This is a term that is frequently used interchangeably with other health and learning outcomes. For example, when Cheung describes assessing child wellbeing, he is referring exclusively to the measurement of health outcomes such as childhood obesity. Others argue that wellbeing must incorporate measurement of physical, social and emotional factors. The concept of wellbeing is abstract. It is multi-dimensional, and it is socially and culturally constructed. The purpose of the proposed research is to operationalise this term from the perspectives of children, parents and early childhood educators. We want to understand what child wellbeing means to these stakeholders in the Australian context.

- The absence of the early childhood years in child wellbeing research

Current research focused on child wellbeing, both nationally and internationally, gives focus to children in the middle childhood and adolescent years, such as the Australian Child Wellbeing Project that explores child wellbeing in the 8-14 year age group. However, strong research evidence tells us that the early years of life, and especially the first 2,000 days, set lifelong trajectories for health, development and wellbeing. We also know the early years lay the foundations for mental and

emotional health, including the development of social and emotional skills, a sense of security and confidence – essential components for children to thrive and grow into well-adjusted, resilient adults. Thus, the absence of early childhood in child wellbeing research is surprising. The proposed research offers a unique contribution to the field by giving focus to the early childhood years.

- The inclusion of young voices in understanding child wellbeing

Exploration of wellbeing in the Australian context is yet to include the subjective perspectives of young children themselves. Child voice and the engagement of children with issues that directly impact on them is essential as part of their human rights, as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Beyond honouring their right to contribute to this discussion, given the very subjective nature of the wellbeing concept, it is important that we understand from children what this term means to them and what they think is needed to bring a greater sense of wellbeing into their lives. This project prioritises the perspectives of young children themselves.

Project Aims

The research will be guided by the elements of wellbeing identified in the The Nest, Australia's first evidence-based framework for national child and youth wellbeing (0-24 years) provided by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). These elements are: (1) being loved and safe; (2) having material basics; (3) being healthy; (4) learning; (5) participating; and (6) positive sense of culture and identity. We are keen to understand whether our informants agree with ARACY on these elements of wellbeing.

Specifically, the current project aims to understand:

1. What 'wellbeing' means to young children, parents and early childhood educators;
2. What the components of wellbeing are; and
3. How we might better support wellbeing as an important outcome for the early childhood years.

To address these aims, the proposed research is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do young children, aged 3-5 years, describe wellbeing in their lives? What is important to them and their sense of happiness, safety and comfort?
2. What are the perspectives of the parents of young children (aged 3-5 years) on the factors essential to the wellbeing of their children? When they observe wellbeing in their children, what does this look like?
3. What are the perspectives of early childhood teachers on the factors essential to the wellbeing of young children? When they observe wellbeing in the children they work with, what does this look like?

Project Methods

This project will employ a qualitative design, using semi-structured interviews and creative research techniques with the children.

PARTICIPANTS

The project comprises three participant groups: (1) young children aged 3-5 years (N = 20); (2) parents of young children aged 3-5 years (N = 20); and (3) early childhood educators (N = 10). Participant samples will be representative of diverse cultural and sociodemographic backgrounds.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Children will participate in interviews using a creative drawing approach. On a piece of paper, the children will be asked to draw a picture of themselves in the middle, and the pictures of the people and things that mean the most to them. This exercise will be used to stimulate conversation about who and what makes them feel happy and safe, the people and things that they need, and how they feel about themselves. The purpose is to understand their subjective experience of wellbeing.

Parents and early childhood educators will participate in a semi-structured interview that explores the concept of wellbeing for young children, guided by the ARACY wellbeing elements. However, the interview will also provide an opportunity for parents and early childhood educators to identify other elements of wellbeing or to dismiss any elements they think are not important. Parents and early childhood educators will also complete a short demographic survey.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed and entered into NVivo for reflexive thematic analysis.

SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The Summer Scholarship student's involvement in this project is as follows:

1. Support the preparation of a scoping review of literature on child wellbeing research (Stage 1)
    - Conduct database searches for national and international peer-reviewed literature on child wellbeing research designed to include children's perspectives. Particular focus will be given to:
        i. The inclusion of young children's voices
        ii. The methods used to gather children's perspectives
        iii. Understanding whether findings align (or not) with ARACY's elements of wellbeing in The Nest

[NB: this stage would involve liaising with the university librarians for support in effective search strategies and working with the research team to develop inclusion/exclusion criteria. The student will also be required to undertake EndNote training (if necessary) to ensure papers are organised systematically and in a way that supports collaboration across the supervision and research team.]

    - Work with supervisors to identify the final sample of papers for inclusion. Stage 1 also involves ensuring a scoping review process such as the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) is utilised.
    - Collate and synthesise the papers that meet the inclusion criteria for the review. This will include identifying key aspects of the study, including aim/research questions, participants, data collection methods, and main findings
    - Liaise with the research team about the findings from the database searches as they

relate to the three aspects that the scoping review gives particular focus to (e.g., attend meetings with the study team to discuss findings etc.)
    - The student will be invited to be a co-author on the scoping review with the research team – it is likely that the student will write the methods section as they will undertake the database searches and will be invited to support the writing of the findings and discussion

The Summer Scholar student will not be involved in data collection as this is expected to be completed by the end of this year (contingent on COVID restrictions). However, if time permits and data collection is completed (or partly completed), the Summer Scholarship student will be involved in:

2. Transcription of the interviews with children, parents and early childhood educators (Stage 2)
    - E.g., transcribing participant interviews (or undertaking accuracy checking of transcripts)

3. Preliminary analysis (Stage 3)
    - E.g., supporting the development of a preliminary coding framework for the thematic analysis

Training and support will be provided to the student to ensure their successful engagement (including skills development) with this project.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The research/supervision team would guide the student in the development of a range of academic/research skills which include but are not limited to:

- Conducting literature searches by accessing databases and developing effective search strategies using relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Identifying key variables in terms of research participants, methods used and main findings
- Synthesising research literature and drawing conclusions based on key findings across a broad range of projects and outcomes (including an understanding of using a priori themes)
- Critically reflecting on research methodologies and the extent to which young children have been engaged in the research process
- Preparing a methods section for publication and enhancing their academic writing skills generally.

It is expected that within the Summer Scholarship period, the student would be able to complete the tasks related to the literature searches and development of the comprehensive document that forms the basis of the scoping review. It is anticipated that the student should be able to begin preparing the methods section of the scoping review paper following completion of the literature search. If this is not possible, the student will still be invited to co-author the people with the research team.

In addition, involvement in Stage 2 and 3 of this project (as outlined above) would support the student in developing skills related to the transcription process (either through transcribing interviews themselves or through accuracy checking of transcriptions) as well as gain an understanding of the process around preparing transcripts for analysis (e.g., basic NVivo skill development) and creating an initial coding framework during thematic analysis.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

Essential

- Enrolled in their third year in an undergraduate degree (however 2nd year students could also be considered for this position)
- Excellent communication skills, including in academic writing
- Proficient computer skills (e.g., proficiency in Word and Excel)
- Willingness to be involved in different aspects of the project (e.g., literature searches; synthesis of eligible papers; thematic analysis related to overarching findings; preparation of a publication; transcription and preliminary analysis)
- Willingness to attend project meetings with our Steering Group if relevant and appropriate
- Taking initiative and ability to work independently
- Willingness to work from TeEACH at Campbelltown campus or from TReSI in the Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research in Liverpool (depending on COVID-19 restrictions).

Desirable

- Enrolled in a social work, social science, education, psychology or related discipline
- Knowledge and skills in the use of EndNote

Project 120: Avoiding Alternative Care Arrangements for children and young people in out-of-home care

Supervisor(s): Rebekah Grace - Rebekah.grace@westernsydney.edu.au
Principal Supervisor

Kelly Baird - k.baird@westernsydney.edu.au
Second Supervisor

This project is in partnership with **TReSI (Translational Research and Social Innovation, School of Nursing & Midwifery WSU), & Uniting**

Project Description

An Alternative Care Arrangement (ACA) is a non-home-based emergency and temporary accommodation option for children and young people in or entering out-of-home care (OOHC) when a preferred placement is not available (DCJ, 2000). ACAs can place children and young people in hotels/motels, serviced apartments or other short-term accommodation.

A recent round table of sector leaders (ACWA/CCWT, 2020) highlighted some concerning trends:

- An increase in the number of ACAs;
- A high concentration of ACAs in metro Sydney and New England;
- An increasing percentage of ACAs involving Aboriginal children and young people,
- Children and young people with high needs, and 8-12-year-old boys (13-year-olds make up around 25% of all ACAs).

Approximately 50% of all ACAs arise from placement breakdowns where stable placement is not available for the child/young person (ACWA/CCWT, 2019).

The challenge of how to avoid ACAs as much as possible is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in the OOHC sector.

Uniting has partnered with TeEACH, WSU, to identify and implement new ways of supporting placement stability for children or young people with complex, multi-layered needs (e.g., trauma, attachment, disability, puberty etc.), so that ACAs can more effectively be avoided. A comprehensive review of the literature is required to identify existing and emerging models of care to support children and young people in OOHC who have complex needs.

Project Aims

The aim of this project will be to conduct review of the literature to uncover existing and emerging models of care to support children and young people in OOHC, and to assess the strength of the evidence base for each model.

Project Methods

The project the Summer Scholarship student will undertake will make a direct contribution to the design of a larger research project, including the co-design of a model of care to be tried by Uniting.

SUMMER SCHOLARSHIP STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The Summer Scholarship student's involvement in this project is as follows:

- Support the preparation of a scoping review of literature on models of Alternative care arrangements for children and young people in, or entering, out-of-home care.
    - Conduct database searches for national and international peer-reviewed literature

[NB: this stage would involve liaising with the university librarians for support in effective search strategies and working with the research team to develop inclusion/exclusion criteria. The student will also be required to undertake EndNote training (if necessary) to ensure papers are organised systematically and in a way that supports collaboration across the supervision and research team.]

    - Work with supervisors to identify the final sample of papers for inclusion (Stage 1 also involves ensuring a scoping review process such as the framework developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) is utilised).
    - Collate and synthesise the papers that meet the inclusion criteria for the review. This will include identifying key aspects of the study, including aim/research questions, participants, data collection methods, and main findings
    - Liaise with supervisors about the findings from the database searches as they relate to the aspects that the scoping review gives particular focus to (e.g., attend meetings with the study team to discuss findings etc.)
    - The student will be invited to be a co-author on the scoping review – it is likely that the student will write the methods section as they will undertake the database searches and will be invited to support the writing of the findings and discussion

Training and support will be provided to the student to ensure their successful engagement (including skills development) with this project.

Opportunity for Skill Development

The supervision team would guide the student in the development of a range of academic/research skills which include but are not limited to:

- Conducting literature searches by accessing databases and developing effective search strategies using relevant inclusion/exclusion criteria
- Identifying key variables in terms of research participants, methods used and main findings
- Synthesising research literature and drawing conclusions based on key findings across a broad range of projects and outcomes
- Critically reflecting on research methodologies and the quality of the outcomes data used as evidence to support a model's usefulness
- Preparing a methods section for publication and enhancing their academic writing skills generally.

It is expected that within the Summer Scholarship period, the student would be able to complete the tasks related to the literature searches and development of the comprehensive document that forms the basis of the scoping review. It is anticipated that the student should be able to begin preparing the methods section of the scoping review paper following completion of the literature search. If this is not possible, the student will still be invited to co-author the paper with the research team.

Students are required to have the following skills/meet the following pre-requisite(s) to apply

Essential

- Enrolled in their third year in an undergraduate degree (however 2nd year students could also be considered for this position)
- Excellent communication skills, including in academic writing
- Proficient computer skills (e.g., proficiency in Word and Excel)
- Willingness to be involved in different aspects of the project (e.g., literature searches; synthesis of eligible papers; thematic analysis related to overarching findings; preparation of a publication)
- Willingness to attend project meetings with our Steering Group if relevant and appropriate
- Taking initiative and ability to work independently
- Willingness to work from TeEACH at Campbelltown campus or from TReSI in the Ingham Institute for Applied Medical Research in Liverpool (depending on COVID-19 restrictions).

Desirable

- Enrolled in a social work, social science, education, psychology or related discipline
- Knowledge and skills in the use of EndNote