

# Optimising outcomes for children in out-of-home care: Strengthening social support systems for carers

Findings from the project 'Enhancing children's journeys through out-of-home care: A multi-perspective study'

Presented by: A/Prof Jenny Povey



# Acknowledgement of Country

The University of Queensland (UQ) acknowledges the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which we meet.

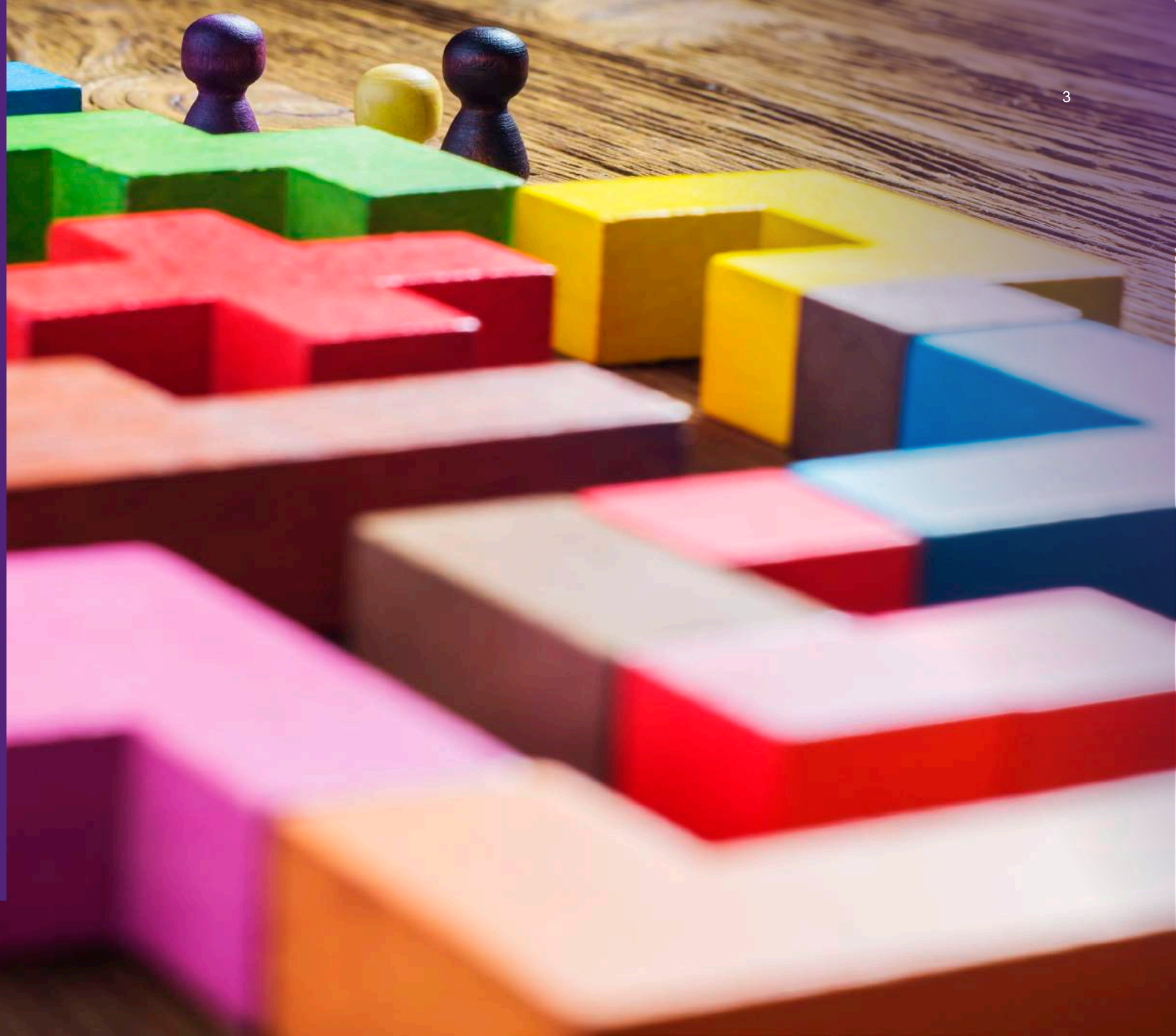
We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country.

We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.





01  
The  
broader  
study



# Study focus:

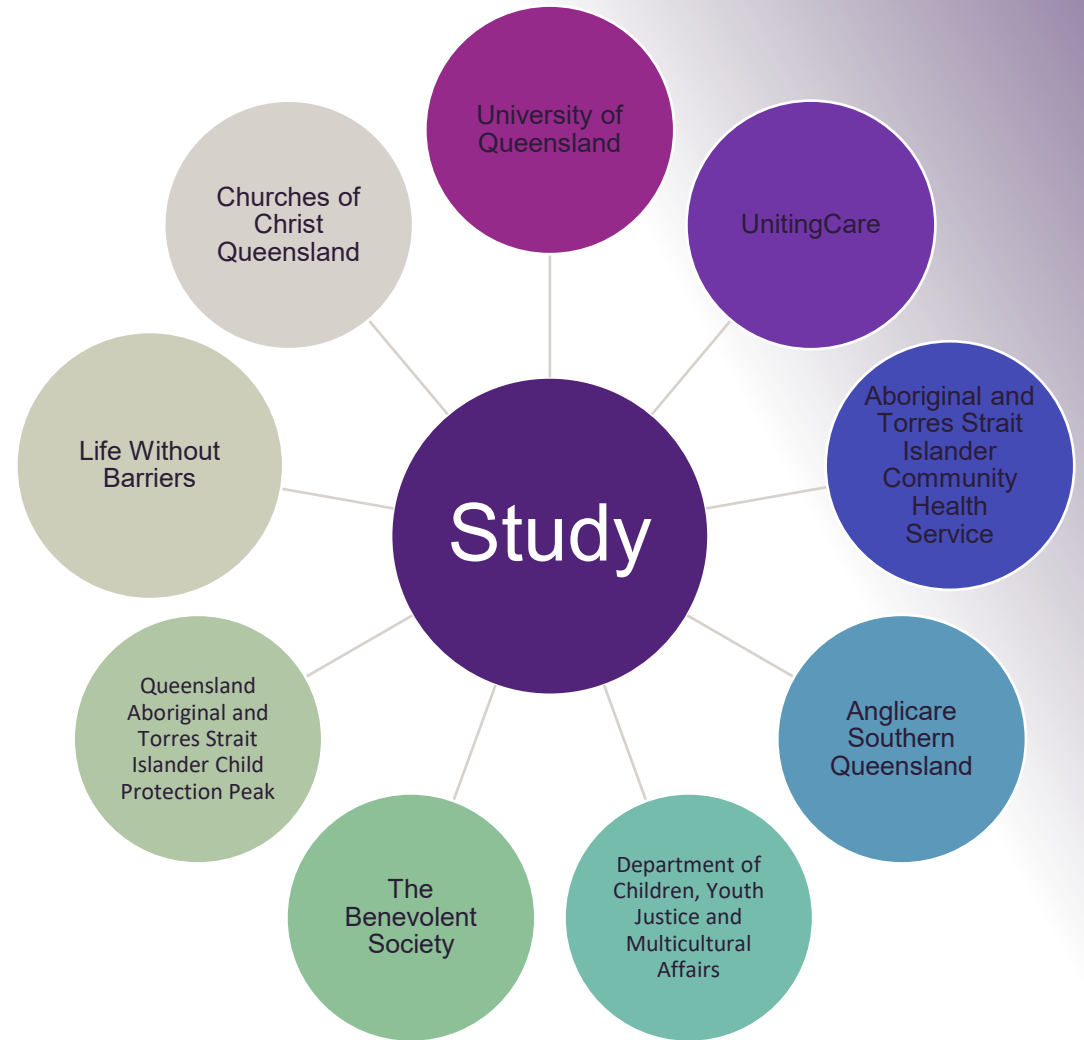


*“What happens prior to and during the out-of-home care experience that impacts on the social and emotional well-being of children and, for building and maintaining cultural connections and the cultural well-being of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children** and children from culturally and linguistically diverse communities?”*

This research project seeks to build knowledge and evidence that can be used to improve the social and emotional well-being of children in out-of-home care

# Our partners

This project is funded by the ARC and the cash and in-kind support of our partners



# Structure of the research

## Study 1

The views and experiences of children (1-12 years) over time in their journeys through out-of-home care.

## Study 2

The views and experiences of birth families and **carers** of children in out-of-home care over time.

## Study 3 (*PhD study*)

The factors shaping the cultural connections and cultural identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.



02

The paper:

*Strengthening  
social support  
systems for  
carers*



## Guiding questions:

1. What are the sources and types of formal and informal supports that carers access when looking after children in OOHC?
2. What are the challenges and gaps in carers' formal supports that may impact their ability to care for children in OOHC?

## Data collection & analysis:

- The data came from the Wave 1 interviews with the 113 carers.
- We undertook qualitative, semi-structured interviews with the carers focused on: a) you as a carer; b) experiences of looking after the study-eligible children; c) experiences of the OOHC system; and d) relationships with child/ren's birth family
- Interview transcripts were analysed thematically

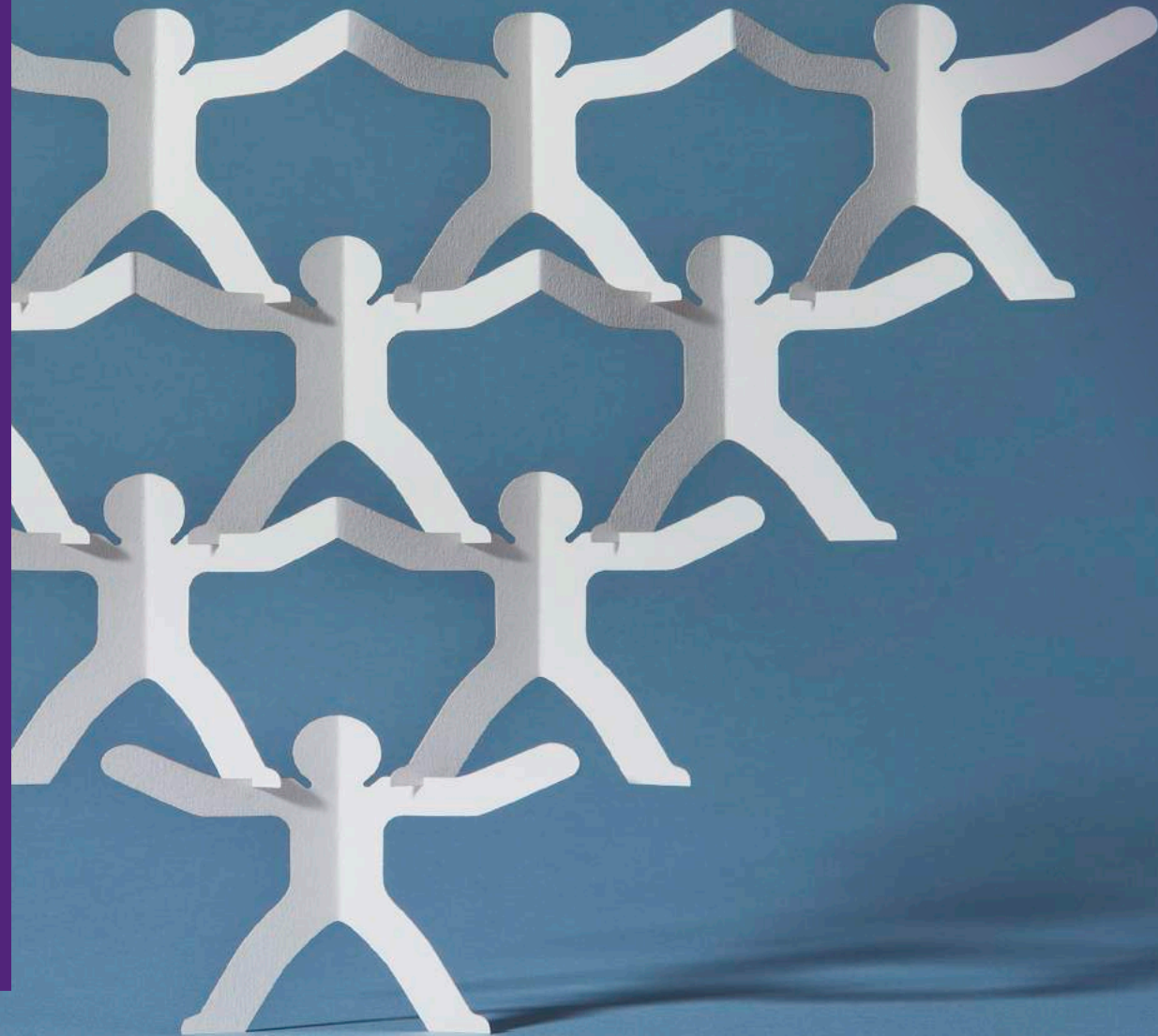
## Our sample:

- 113 carers looking after 194 children aged 1-12 years old

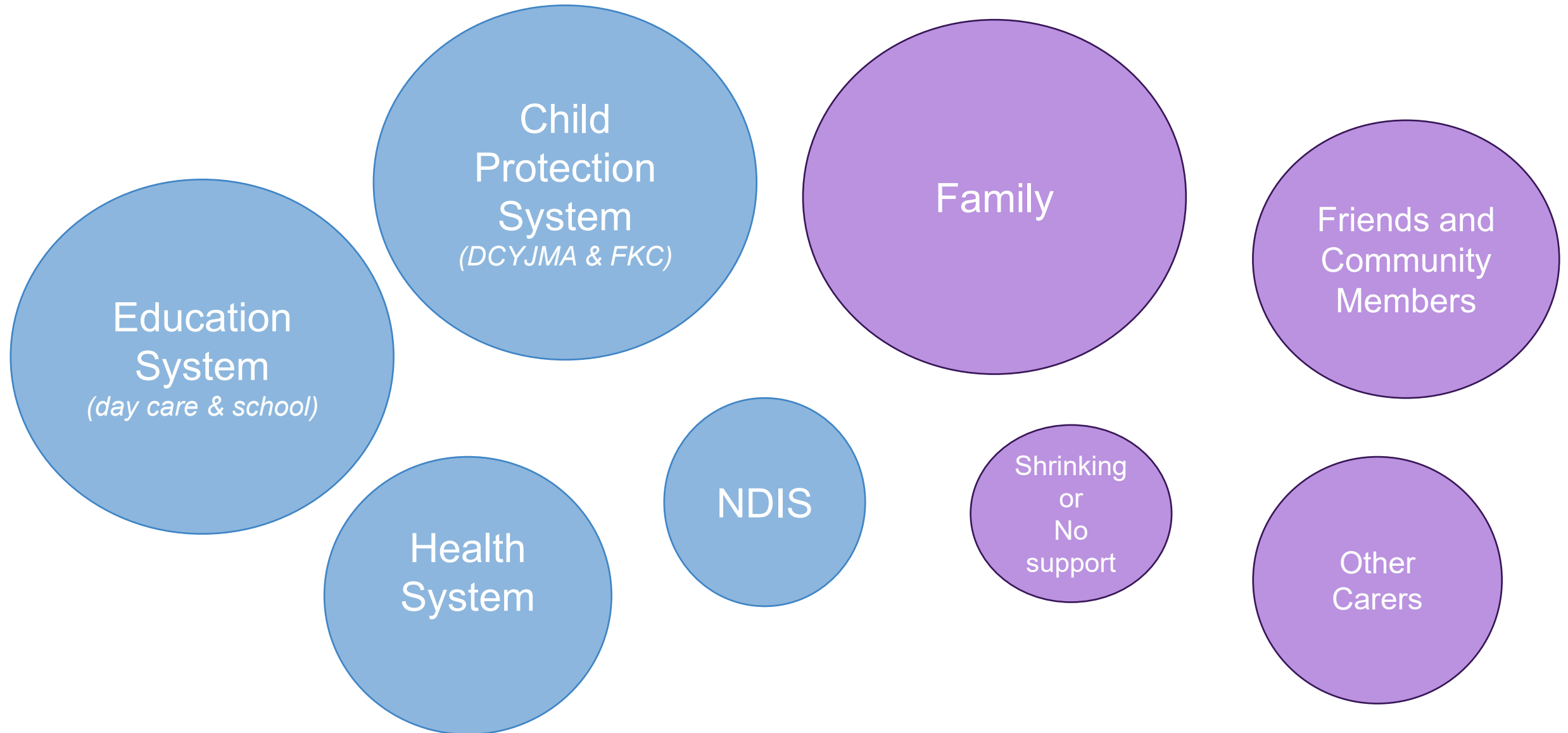
Item	Characteristics of participant	Total (n=113)
Type of care provided	Kinship care	36
	Foster care	77
Gender	Female	91
	Male	22
Cultural identity	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	10
	Non-Indigenous	103
Age	20–29 years	4
	30–39 years	13
	40–49 years	31
	50–59 years	33
	60–69 years	28
	70–79 years	3
Experience as a carer	80–89 years	1
	< 1 year as carer	3
	1–5 years	57
	6–10 years	24
>10 years	29	



# 03 Findings



# Carers' **formal** and **informal** support systems





# Challenges and gaps in carers' support systems



**“Navigating & fighting the system”**



**“Practical & emotional support needs”**



**“Training needs”**



**“Poor integration of support systems”**

# Navigating and fighting the system

## Worker Churn and Variability

*“... would be the turnover of caseworkers... because then the new caseworker comes in and has a different perspective and... its like, “Girl, we have the train rolling, jump on board. Let’s go”*

(CA048, Foster, Female, 29-years-old)

## Rationalised Carer Resources

*“because of the escalating behaviour of [child] and the [police] call, that brought about a more solid response from [CPA], where they got him into a psych... It was kind of pushed through then.”*

(CA077, Kinship, Female, 58-years-old)

## Red Tape and Radio Silence

*“you can see why sometimes... kids slip through the cracks, because it takes so long to get help... Nearly two years to get behaviour management plans in place. If they were in place 12 months ago, maybe [child] would never have been suspended.”*

(CA035, Kinship, Female, 60-years-old)



# Practical and emotional support needs

## Financial resources



## Formal Respite

*“if you look after yourself,  
then you’ll be a better  
carer”*

(CA002, Foster, Female, 42-years-old)

## Transport



# Training Needs

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## Child Development, Attachment & Unique Needs of Child

*“It’s a lot of waiting [for formal supports] and you’ve got traumatised kids and what are you supposed to do in the meantime if no one’s providing you with support on how to manage those behaviours? We’ve been fumbling through...”*

(CA035, Kinship, Female, 60-years-old)

## Managing Contact with Birth Families

*“... you’re actually putting an inexperienced person... most carers come in and they’ve got beautiful hearts and want to save the world... and then you take the children to contact and the parent turns around and goes, “\*%\$# Leave my kids alone.” You’re like... hang on!”*

(CA048, Foster, Female, 29-years-old)

## Child’s Culture

*“It would be nice... if there were more Aboriginal people there, because I’ve only dealt with the Department with white Australians... they’re still good... but I just think they’re still not maybe giving me enough information on her heritage or where I could go or what I could do for her”*

(CA004, Foster, Female, 63-years-old)



# Poor Integration of Support Systems

## Convincing and Coordinating

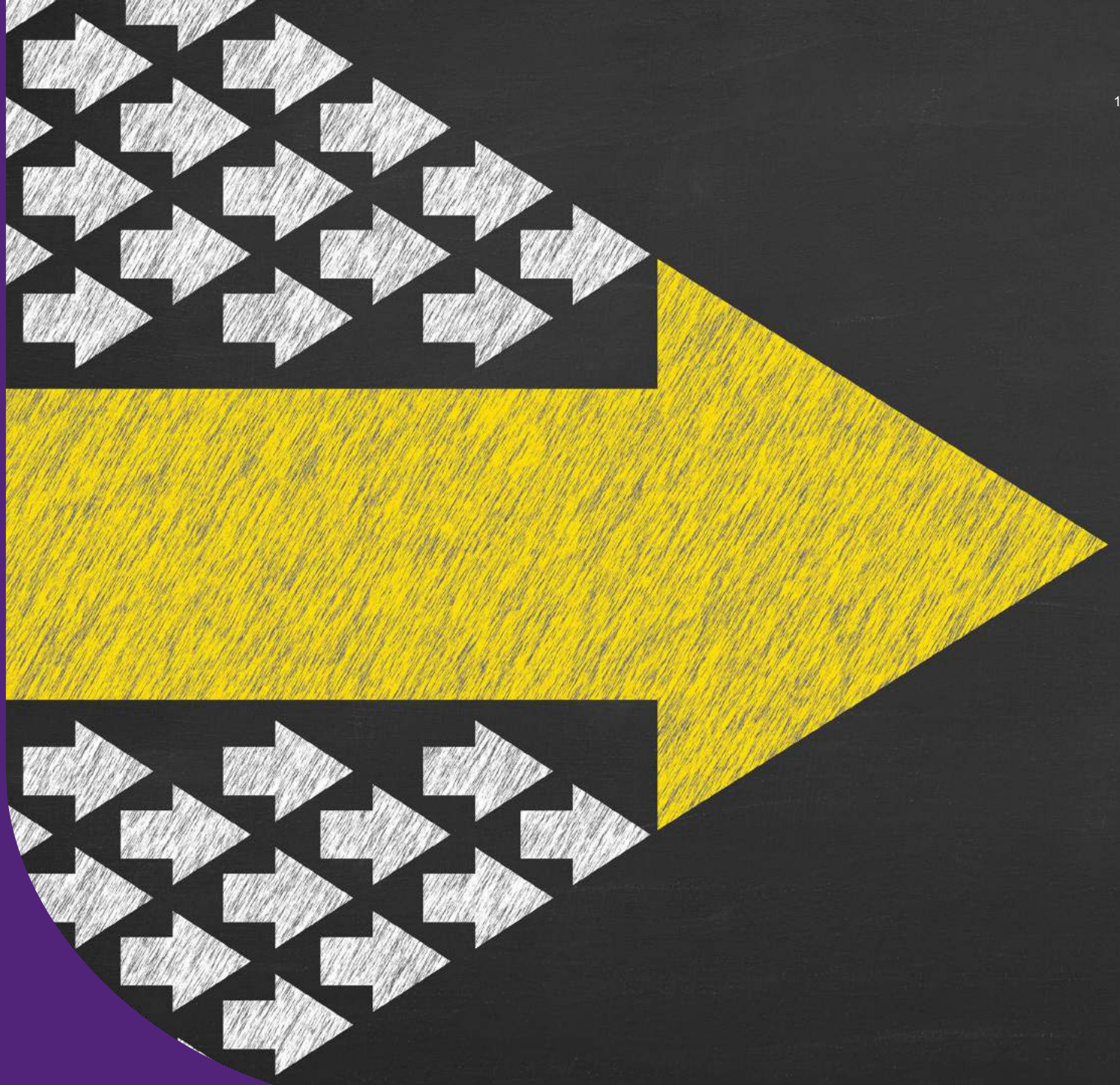


## Mismatch of Needs and Support



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# Implications





Bureaucracy and poor integration of services/supports resulted in significant delays in receiving required supports

- Places further burdens on carers to manage complex needs and behaviours on their own
- Creates stress for carers and can negatively impact informal network
- Highlights need for carer training – but systemic change needed too

Carers play a key role in driving access to services to enhance health & well-being of children in OOHC.

- Need to acknowledge and provide support for the 'invisible' load carried by carers as the coordinate support for the child
- These challenges are magnified by inadequate financial resources

Worker churn significantly disrupts relationships with and support for carers

- Need for organisations to stabilise workforce to help minimise disruption to carer-worker relationships
- When workers change, the new worker needs to join with carers to understand the current situation and what is working (or not) before coming in with a new approach

Fractured and hostile relationships with birth parents creates challenges

- Reform required regarding how parents are engaged
- Further support is needed to aid carers in their role of supporting contact between child and birth parent
- This includes consideration of how to address children's questions

# 05 Questions



# Contact

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