

## Learning report from Charlotte Robertson

Recipient of the Margaret May Blackwell Fellowship, 2018

Thank you for the incredible opportunity receiving the Margaret M. Blackwell Travel Scholarship provided. I was grateful to be able to research so intensely issues around children of prisoners. I adjusted the itinerary from my original proposal as many of the individuals and organisations responses affected my proposed itinerary with people having moved, being unresponsive, having commitments, summer holidays and being unwell. It was a huge learning curve for me organising so many appointments, accommodation and travel.

When I reassessed my options, I chose to exclude some destinations: Griffin and Huddersfield Universities, parts of the States, Norway and Finland. However, in the end I also visited destinations not in my initial proposal as opportunities arose from recommendations or responses including Oakland, Bristol, Cardiff, and Portugal.

My itinerary was divided it into two sections. The first two weeks in Melbourne in July–August and the second seven weeks in September–November. I was granted a maximum of six weeks leave so by using the term breaks/unpaid leave I was able to be away for nine and a half weeks. Summaries of my visits and findings in each location are arranged chronologically below.

### The Fellowship gave me new knowledge

In every country I visited there were similar concerns around health problems, both mental and physical, associated with toxic stress identified as ‘continuous exposure to arguing and violence in the family, neglect, parental mental health and substance abuse issues, poverty contributing to damage to the developing brain, and body growth and learning.’ The effects of adverse childhood experiences—risky health behaviours, chronic health conditions, low life potential and early death—were mentioned in many countries. Some countries were investigating and initiating reforms within their judicial system on how to address these issues.

What struck me throughout my travels was that the key is ‘attitude.’ From my perspective it is vital that the person responsible for the whole prison or educational setting supported and promoted the rights of children and their families, relationships and reintegration and understood the effects of trauma, stigma and shame. In some countries there is an expectation that staff who come in contact with children have had UNCROC training to increase their understanding. However, it was the attitude of the individuals who I met, their passion for their work in face of both rewards and challenges, and their respect for all people that was the highlight for me. Their overarching vision was that the rights and best interests of children are paramount.

I met many individuals and organisations who work with and advocate for children of prisoners, their families, prisoners or marginalised communities. I discovered many of my taxi drivers had been prisoners! I even stayed with one of only two children (the other her brother) to ever visit their parent in Alcatraz. It would have been impossible for me to feel so motivated without the input of those who supported my research, shared their time, information and ideas so readily. I am forever grateful for the overall spirit of collegiality that pervades within this sector.

Thank you for enabling me to research this topic and, more than that to gain renewed confidence to have a voice, to advocate within the education sector and beyond and to believe in myself.

## Margaret May Blackwell Fellowship: Learning report from 2018 recipient

There are so many aspects that I want to focus on. If you would like more information, please let me know. I have learnt substantially more than I am able to write here.

### July–August 2018

#### Melbourne

While in Melbourne I met with Sheryl Forrester, Shine for Kids who introduced me to Monash University students who were to scope their programme to support children of prisoners in schools. Trained volunteers support a school child for one hour, once a week. Sheryl explained how Shine for Kids, a non-governmental charity with staff and dedicated volunteers, advocate, provide case work services, individual and group work, and support child and family centres, activities during prison visits and in community, child minding, and child/parent recreational and sporting activities, a homework club, supported transport as well as providing adult mentors. They work with young people in the juvenile justice system for 12 months prior to release and on release. They organised Dad's photo on pillowcases for children, family days for caregivers, donated bikes with safety lessons. Sheryl raised concerns about young people who take on care for siblings.

I met Catherine Flynn, a chief investigator and Tess Bartlett, a researcher, from Monash University, for research on 'The Impact of Incarceration on Children's Care: A strategic Framework for Good Care Planning' which identifies differences in Australia (Victoria and New South Wales). Their recommendations include focussing on holistic services at every stage of the judicial process, child sensitive arrest procedures, magistrates identifying dependent children and having this information in pre-sentencing reports, collection of data on children of prisoners so the scope of the issue is understood, research into post release effects on children, books for children that acknowledge their circumstances, counselling for children and parents, and that children being involved in decision making at time of arrest results in better outcomes for children and Hidden Sentence training for teachers. They are leading the Shine for Kids research.

I stayed with Jane Bone in Frankston, attended her lecture on Childhood and Innocence at Monash and discussed differences in early childhood services and prisons in Australia and here. Monash students are not visited at all on practicum! I read her articles linking treatment of animals and family violence. (The Same Dart Trick: The Exploitation of Animals and Women in Thailand Tourism and Becoming parent: The role of dog as baby in learning how to care.) I visited Gowrie Victoria ECE Centre on Jane's recommendation observing an inclusive calm atmosphere, focussed teachers with huge, dry, low fenced outdoor spaces, fire pits regularly used but no water play.

I met with Anne Kennedy who is currently researching in an early childhood centre with children in vulnerable contexts and Una Stone, RMIT University, a lecturer in Criminology and Justice who researched women in prison and Neerosh Mudaly who helped found the Australian Childhood Foundation who among other recommendations emphasised the importance of keeping children informed so they didn't have to predict and to be aware of how you might be triggering the child e.g. a look.

## The Children and Trauma Conference

The Children and Trauma Conference keynote presenter's power points focussed on attachment, citing Bowlby and Ainsworth and the importance of brain development and what helps or hinders. A keynote Canadian Gabor Mate, a medical doctor, refuted the emphasis by prior presenters on the importance of hope in preference to acknowledging the 'hear and now.' He delivered his personal story, the insights, the successes and hiccups and what he had learnt along the way and linked trauma with illness. His comments about hope lead to a panel discussion on "What does hope mean to the lives of people who have experienced trauma?" and recognition of the possibilities inherent in the present moment either within us or our culture and the importance of believing that something is going to change. Also discussed was co-regulation rather than self-regulation, different types and timing of mal treatment having different effects on the brain, the opportunities for intervention, resiliency or treating addictions.

In many ways I gained as much from discussions with other attendees as from the workshops and presentations. This learning included to start with the child's experience and make sense of this before helping the child to think about anyone else involved. Tell children what you notice with their body, how they hold themselves, move, make eye contact. From there you can help children to acknowledge shifts in their thinking as their body changes and help them to notice what happens to their body before an incident. Also helping them when they say they are okay but everything about them indicates they are not e.g. "You say that you are okay, but I can see [behaviour]". Recognise that maltreatment can shut down language centres when in crisis, so children use other ways to express themselves.

There was a plea for adults to pay attention to a child's connection rather than assuming it is there and to assure a child that feeling stress and worry is okay and to help attune them to the internal experiences as well as the outward behaviours. The Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy model was about getting it right for parents so that they can get it right for children and help them to see the child's perspective. "I wonder what lead you to feel like that..." "So, what are you going to do to help .....feel better.?" Teachers, like parents, need to understand their own triggers. Teachers have the power to reduce shame-based rage i.e. "I want you in my class" to a child about to throw a chair. Teachers can look at the child's distress rather than their behaviour. In many workshops the acronym PACE was discussed: playful, accepting, curious, empathic. One video clip identified that it took 5 minutes for a mother to give up when her child was not responsive which lead me to wonder what happens for some children in early childhood settings?

There was a strong emphasis on the importance of therapists working with children, yet most identified their time with children was one hour, once a week. It might be contested but I believe that as early childhood teachers see children most days it is important that we have the knowledge, skills and motivation to listen and reassure when these children disclose something through their play. I think referrals to therapists are important but so also so is the opportunity, as discussed in child protection workshops, to alleviate a child's fears at the time of their disclosure and to assure them that it was not their fault and to provide opportunity to experience peace within themselves.

One insightful 20-minute presentation detailed how a teacher changed a child's difficult behaviour. Initially when the child had visited their dad in prison the dad had reinforced the child's inappropriate responses to situations and learning so in order to change what was

happening at school the teacher started sending information about strengths, achievements and interests and the dad changed to responding positively and encouragingly which was reflected in the child's behaviour and learning in the classroom.

Among others Cathy Malchiodi's workshop focussed on resiliency programming and helping children to gain a sense of vitality, self-efficacy and to be in the moment with grounding exercises to develop children's awareness of their feelings and ideas on how to use yoga, dance, breathing, thumb print pictures, matchbox shrines, dominoes, weighted blankets, calm down jars and more. Letting children doodle or draw for 15 minutes was recommended to reduce the cortisol level and to help them verbalise more.

Following on from the conference I have been sent suggestions for contacts, further readings, and have signed up to the Prosody Blog Newsletter through the Australian Childhood Foundation.

### September–November 2018

#### San Francisco

I was keen to visit San Francisco because they had formulated a Bill of Rights for Children of Prisoners that is acknowledged globally however, I realised after talking to social workers, police, and community groups that they have a roller coaster ride putting it into practice themselves. Police are required to minimise the trauma on children where possible and social workers work at Police Stations. I had an appointment with the Public Defender's Office, who are strong defenders of the rights of children of prisoners. There is a programme delivered in schools that I am still trying to access. I met Megan Comfort from Research Triangle Institute who co-authored 'Taking children into account: Addressing intergenerational effects of parental incarceration in Criminology and Public Policy' (2011) and many other publications related to health particularly HIV/Aids, poverty and imprisonment. An easy recommendation was to put incarceration in newsletters/notices alongside other everyday occurrences like sickness, divorce and to work on making children safe. Megan asked how we advocate for change around the important service that families provide by caring for those released? I learnt US has free buses driving all night specifically to prisons also Get on the Bus programme with counsellors on buses to and from prisons but they are also moving to more on-screen visits. Some children can move outside the prison to supervised play areas during all day visits.

I was fortunate to visit a community based childcare centre with parental helpers where children accessed the local playground for climbing and sand play.

Close to San Francisco is Oakland where I attended a 40th celebration of Legal Services for Prisoners with Children. A plea to find ways to fix/heal those who are not ready re addictions and to get rid of the idea that justice means punishment and punishment means confinement and to focus more around prevention and restorative justice. I was often confronted by the American judicial system e.g. I met a woman volunteer visiting a man on death row for ten years who didn't kill anyone himself but has lost his appeals yet is now a changed person.

One teacher of 11/12 year olds I met from Oakland spoke of her despair when a young person arrived at school the day after being present at a fatal drive-by shooting into his lounge the night before. Over 80% of her pupils had a parent in prison and have difficulty focussing on learning. Oakland has moved to reduce school numbers and in schools providing health, dental,

counselling services so children can access them within their school day and to provide a sense of community.

I spent time with De Angela Cooks, Project WHAT, who provide an inspirational service for children of prisoners aged 12-17 for two hours each week for one year teaching them about slavery historically and today, encouraging them to tell and write their own story, to learn public speaking, group facilitation, advocating and then with support they facilitate workshops for teachers, health professionals, police etc telling their own story and advocating for others (We're here and Talking, 2016). I shared the 'Addressing colonisation, racism and enhancing Māori led justice keys to reducing Māori prison population report' (2018) with them.

### Portugal

In Lagos, Portugal, I spent time with a psychologist in a mixed institution for young people 12 - 25, Lar de Incãncia e Juventude. One young person had both parents in prison and received 5-minute phone calls initially once a month but subject to the prisoner's behaviour. While I was told the children were free to go home, the doors were locked and there was no open outdoor space and barbed wire over the gate. This led me to query what we do here when we are concerned for the wellbeing and welfare of young people and what the effect is being locked in just as your parents are? As in San Francisco I visited a police station and the equivalent of child, youth and family support where no one had any idea what happened for children when the parent is arrested or any understanding of UNCROC. I meet with a probation officer and later a lawyer who identified differences between Portugal and England in their approach to young people being arrested and monitoring after arrests and how much support is or isn't there. In Lisbon I had a day in Cascais with Luis Gagliardin Gracato of Confiar Prison Fellowship who are starting up a private/public funded partnership to support prisoners and their families on release. Prison Fellowship is a global non-governmental organisation who work within prisons and provide support for all prisoners but have a focus on interdenominational care. Portugal has greatly reduced the number of prisoners by first referring to drug and alcohol services before instigating a prison term if it is not successful.

### United Kingdom:

In London PACT (Prisoner Advice and Care Trust) provide work for recently released prisoners who answer their phone queries from families wanting to visit a prison. PACT has been funded through the European Union so they were uncertain how the Brexit deal would affect their future.

I was pleased to have the opportunity to visit six prisons: PARC prison (outside Cardiff), Cardiff, Bristol, Eastwood Women's Prison (outside Bristol), Shotts (outside Glasgow), and Barlinnie (Glasgow) as each provided valuable insights. It can be a complicated process to be able to visit a prison, let alone participate in a programme, so I was very fortunate to have opportunities to observe and to participate in and help with playgroups and family days. I was shown the facilities for children and families visiting whether in reception areas, visiting rooms or family units. The atmosphere and facilities in each prison varied and sometimes reflected its reputation "best or worst". Every prison had non-governmental organisations and individuals that supported child/family engagement and they were very open about their practices, programmes, what worked, what had been evaluated and what they still wanted to focus on. They also shared readings, booklets and practical ideas as well as ideas on how teachers could support children.

The booklets covered topics like children being able to write their own book on visiting their parent, what prisons are like for young children and separately for young people, ideas for parents/caregivers on the outside and for others supporting children e.g. health or education professionals, baby massage, antenatal care... my suitcase was heavy!!!

Some themes emerged from the practices that were shared with me and from the printed information I was given:

- early intervention reduces negative effects of incarceration on children
- everyone in contact with the children in and outside the prison needs to understand how incarceration of a loved one can affect children's physical and mental health and their ability to learn
- information on where to get support should be readily available and displayed openly in doctors' rooms etc e.g. helpline numbers, about prison support, drug and alcohol abuse, grief services, women's centres, free food sources
- all those in contact with children should understand the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and what that means in practice
- early in the judicial process someone needs to be responsible for identifying if families are involved in other organisations so that all can work together to support the child and their family
- family contact officers in prisons let families know they have someone they can go to.
- statistics should be kept on how many children are affected
- maintaining family relationships is crucial for successful re-integration.

### Interaction with prisoners

During prison visits chances arose to interact with prisoners, which contributed to my understanding of their concerns for the wellbeing and welfare of their children. For example, a prisoner received feedback from a teacher about her child's concerns and was able to address them without disclosing the source and a prisoner's request that the victim and the offender's children are not in the same class. All the staff involved, including volunteers, were passionate about the role that they played in sustaining bonds and their perspectives were reflected in the way they spoke with and of prisoners and their families. They worked hard to provide an environment that was child friendly, had resources that children could use independently or do close to their loved one. They had to set up and clear up so in some cases it was like running a community playgroup here. They were innovative with their limited budget and resources. In many prisons they also had themes such as Halloween with extra resources for art and construction provided. They also manned tuck shops or served food on family days, which was often part of funding their non-governmental organisation. As volunteers were present in most prisons it was easy for me to slot in and be useful. There are some things I found challenging during visits and one was that by providing the tuck shop families with little money might feel obliged to spend it on unhealthy snacks.

### PARC Prison

One of the highlights for me was Corrin Morgan-Armstrong who hosted me for one day at HMP and YOI Parc Men's' Prison, Bridgend, outside Cardiff. It is a privately-run prison that exemplifies current best practices for family engagement and interventions in a traditional prison

setting by focussing on evidence-based practice. They allocate the time to share their knowledge and skills with visitors, like me. They have worked on implementing the 19 recommendations of the Lord Farmer Review (2017) and the 46 HMIP Expectations for children and families (2017) reflected in having a family intervention unit with mentoring before and after release, units where all prisoners are engaged in parenting programmes and children's rights, goals, dreams, photos are displayed within the unit. They have monitored digital services including emails, voice mails, e payments and Skype contact which are available in some units. They encourage play and have areas inside and outside and in visiting rooms and have events like fire-fighters days for fathers and their children to share an activity. Their books for children visiting have real photos of what a cell is like. They have homework groups where children can regularly do homework with their father, parent/teacher evenings, plays which fathers present to their children, antenatal education programmes and more. (HMP & Yoi Parc 2018 'Family and Significant Others Strategy' The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime' 2017)

### Cardiff and Bristol Prisons

In Bristol I was fortunate to meet Joanne Mulcahy, author of "Locked Out". She helped with an entree into Cardiff and Eastwood Prisons too. At Cardiff Prison I was able to help Suzanne Cartwright with a family day held in the visiting rooms and to realise the important role that non-governmental organisations play.

At Bristol Prison Stuart Harrington from Nicco and Barnardo's discussed policies, including challenges implementing the recommendations from the Farmer's Report, children forming own charter and took me to a visit a sex offenders' unit. Children of sex offenders face extra stigma when a parent or family member offends, and family are often the victims. They seldom visit prisoners. Stuart shared resources.

### Eastwood Prison

Eastwood was the first and only women's prison and baby unit I have been into. The baby unit was new and pristine and had educational equipment for babies and toddlers but only had two mothers who would not be there next year. In this prison two prisoners interview new arrivals, one had planned for her incarceration, the other was completely flawed by getting a prison term. They discuss with the new arrival what care she has in place for any children, finances, visits etc and report what support is needed. A postnatal book is available for mothers who are pregnant.

### My Time Ltd, Liverpool

In Liverpool I met Lorna Brookes from [www.mytimeltd.org.uk](http://www.mytimeltd.org.uk) who was currently a lecturer for early childhood education. We discussed her role of facilitating a support group for children. She is adamant about respect for children's privacy when they disclose a parent is in prison especially around teachers building trust with the child. She spoke about prison visits specifically for autistic children. She later forwarded details of

Kahya, Orhan & Ekinici, C. Ergin (2018) In their own words: school lives of children with an imprisoned parent. International Journal of Education Development.

## Glasgow, Families Outside

### Shotts Prison

In Glasgow I visited Families Outside organisation. I am grateful to Nancy Loucks who had arranged all the Families Outside appointments and recommended contacts in Lisbon, Liverpool and Stockholm and also sent a copy of Sarah Roberts Winston Churchill Travel Fellowship Report. Nancy is the chairperson of COPE a European group who meet once a year to garner support and share information and also INCCIP who had their first meeting in Rotorua 2017. I met Tracey Burns and visited Shotts Prison with Janine Bonner to meet Denise Kelly and their Family Support Worker and learnt about their Family Time Project which support the family's interests, the child's age and stage of development and links with their National Curriculum. Their focus is to develop parents' capacity to be the best parents they can in or out of prison. They provide a wide range of shared experiences that are recorded in books for child and for prisoner. Fathers have reported crediting this programme with spending better quality time with their children during children's visits than before they were imprisoned. Families Outside have a national helpline. On imprisonment, information is given to prisoners and to their families around their rights and available services. (The Families Left Behind and Picking Up the Pieces: Support for Families of People Convicted of a Sexual Offence.)

### Barlinnie Prison

At Barlinnie Prison I participated in their family PlayStation within the prison visits under the guidance of Margaret Forbes.

I was able to discuss similarities and differences in supporting children with Madelein Kattel from Sweden, Vivianne Schekte from Switzerland and Kate Philbrick from Scotland who were about to attend a three-day COPE meeting. Kate gave me a copy of her book 'Children of Imprisoned Parents'.

I met Tracey Thompson from Early Years Scotland. Their rooms inside Barlinnie Prison, which were more relaxed and inviting than those that Families Outside were able to provide—a key reminder to us to work collegially in the best interests of children.

## Edinburgh, Midlothian Sure Start

In Edinburgh I spent a day with Cheryl Brown, a contact from the Melbourne Conference, who was the Manager of Midlothian Sure Start. I attended a voluntary sector meeting for children and young people where I was given time to speak, met the Counselling Lead and Health Improvement Project Lead, visited an early childhood centre that focussed on parent education and attended a presentation at the local primary school on building resilience.

## Stockholm

### BUFFF

In Stockholm Carlotta Lindell hosted me initially visiting Camila Orellana at BUFFF an innovative organisation that supports children and their families and advocates with foresight, courage and commitment. The next day, with Stina Sjödin, Carlotta and I visited Skänninge Prison near Mojlby. She later forwarded a handbook on the child's perspective Kriminal Vårdens

Handbok and a website for children <https://insidan.friminalvarden.se/>  
<https://insidan.friminalvarden.se/>. I am getting a translation. In Sweden parents can have free phone calls to their children, local authorities pay for children to visit their parent, every prison has a children's ombudsman responsible for improving processes and facilities, some prisons have apartments for families to stay overnight others have apartments for day visits, unlimited visiting for children, regular temporary release, parenting groups in each prison (from Mulready-Jones 2011 <http://www.wcmt.org.uk/sites/default/files/migrated-reports/814>). Sweden is following Norway and legislating UNCROC.

### Vancouver

I visited the Elizabeth Fry Foundation in Vancouver, where Kirsty Gordon introduced me to ways women ex-prisoners interact with support services for families provided by their organisation. We visited organisations within the community reflecting on the ups and downs of working with children of prisoners and their families. She talked about being sensitive to the child's normality, non-judgemental, not affronted by differences. This means changing our mindset, thinking how they think, putting ourselves in their shoes and helping change their perceptions of bureaucracy.

### Sharing new knowledge with the profession

- I have already shared some issues with Tracey Martin, the Minister for Children and early childhood colleagues at an OMEP (international organisation for pre-school education) meeting.
- I have promoted the scholarship to kindergarten colleagues and North Shore Playcentre members.
- I would like to facilitate workshops for teachers in prisons, as happens in Scotland. I have yet to negotiate with the Department of Corrections.
- I have approached a journalist about an article in the Education Gazette.
- I will be facilitating a workshop in a few months (2019) in Auckland for anyone interested through the International Play Association and OMEP.