Supporting Aboriginal children to learn: 
The use of Reading for Life in 
Barnardos Australia Learning Centres

Report on Phase One

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Purpose of this report

Barnardos Australia is a non-Government registered charity which provides family support, adolescent, and care services to approximately 8,000 children in NSW and ACT. In three of Barnardos Childrens Family Centres there are after school Learning Centres. These are located in rural, urban, and regional areas in:

- Orana Far West: at Wellington- Yalmambirra Learning Centre, Nyngan and Barradine;
- Redfern Waterloo-at Yurungai Learning Centre; and
- Queanbeyan.

The children attending the Centres are from Years 1-6 at their local primary schools and are predominantly but not exclusively Aboriginal. These Centres are predominantly staffed by Aboriginal workers and some Centres use volunteers. They are managed in an integrated way with Barnardos family support programs such as home visiting and crisis care.

In 2011, Barnardos sought assistance from Learning Links, a children’s charity and the owners of Reading for Life, to help the staff and volunteers in Learning Centres to be more effective in their work on children’s learning. The Reading for Life program has begun in Orana Far West and will be implemented in the Yurungai and Quenbeyan Centres in 2011. An estimated 60 Aboriginal children will be using the system by the end of 2011. By 2012 any child new to these Centres will use the system.

Reading for Life has been subject to evaluation (e.g. Hornery, 2011). However, no work has been undertaken on the program’s impact on Aboriginal students’ learning. At the end of 2011, Barnardos entered into a partnership with the Centre for Positive Psychology and Education (CPPE), School of Education, UWS to evaluate the impact of this program. Barnardos nominated the Yalmambirra Learning Centre as the centre of focus for this research.

The research strategy to be employed was constructed in collaboration between Barnardos and CPPE, UWS. The research strategy adopted incorporated two distinct phases: Phase One (consultation) and Phase Two (data collection). The purpose of Phase One was to elucidate the research design and methodology of Phase Two. This was achieved by consulting with the local community stakeholders who would be directly involved in, and affected by the research.

This report provides a synthesis of:

- The methodology of Phase One;
- The findings derived from Phase One; and
- The implications of the Phase One findings for the structure of Phase Two.
Methodology for Phase One

The successful completion of Phase One was achieved through the implementation of the following processes.

1) A research agreement was constructed in a collaborative manner between CPPE and Barnardos Australia. Barnardos nominated the Yalmambirra Learning Centre located in Wellington to participate in the research;

2) Researchers received approval from the UWS Human Research Ethics Committee to conduct the research;

3) A locally-based co-researcher was identified by Barnardos to assist in the project. The chief researcher and the co-researcher met to determine the best way to conduct consultation with the community;

4) The chief researcher and co-researcher successfully presented to the Wellington Community Working Party to seek support to conduct the research in the community;

5) The chief researcher met with key Barnardos staff in order to become more familiar with their work and the community. Discussions with staff determined that the optimal time to conduct Phase One would be during the school holidays. This would ensure that a maximum number of participants were available;

6) The participants were identified and recruitment commenced. The co-researcher advised that it would be inappropriate to only invite a portion of the caregivers and Elders to be involved as this may cause social tensions within the community. As a result, all participating caregivers and Elders representing all of the extended families in the community were invited to be involved. Signed consent forms were gathered from all participants. The co-researcher facilitated this process;

7) To facilitate attendance and participation, the Barnardos staff organised a Karaoke session with the children while the chief researcher and co-researcher interviewed caregivers and Elders. Caregivers and Elders received payment for engaging in the interviews. The chief researcher interviewed the Barnardos staff members.

Phase One: Participants

Participants in Phase One included:

- 8 parents and caregivers (1 male, 7 females), over 3 focus groups;
- 4 staff members who had served as tutors on the program (2 males, 2 females), over 2 focus groups;
- 2 managers (2 females), individually; and
- 4 Elders (1 male, 3 females), individually.
Findings from Phase One

The specific questions posed by Phase One are presented here, along with the range of responses and the recommendations for Phase Two.

1. Are the initial research questions proposed appropriate?

Participants concluded that all four research questions proposed were useful.

Outcome:

- Implement all four research questions in Phase 2 of the research:
  - What are Barnardos Learning Centre stakeholders’ (Centre workers, parents, and children) perceptions of the impact of Reading for Life on Indigenous children’s literacy?
  - To what extent is Reading for Life culturally appropriate for Indigenous children?
  - What factors do stakeholders perceive as effecting the success, or otherwise, of Reading for Life within Learning Centres?
  - What do stakeholders identify as factors that facilitate the effective implementation of Reading for Life within Barnardos Learning Centres for Indigenous and any non-Indigenous children?

2. Which stakeholders should be invited to participate in Phase Two?

Responses from the community members on this issue were consistent. They all nominated that the children’s parents and caregivers should be interviewed. It was emphasised that other significant caregivers, such as grandparents or elder siblings should also be invited to participate.

All participants identified that the children’s classroom teachers at their local school should be interviewed. Teachers were considered to be well placed to discuss whether the child’s skills had changed throughout the duration of the program, with particular reference to the child’s reading level at school both at the beginning and end of the Reading for Life program. Similarly, the tutors at Barnardos who deliver the Reading for Life Program were nominated as having important insights to offer.

Lastly, participants believed that the children themselves who participated in the Reading for Life program should be interviewed in order to gather their unique perspective on the program and the impact on their lives.

Outcomes:

- Seek UWS and SERAP ethics approval to contact schools and teachers.
• **Invite the following stakeholders to participate in Phase Two: parents and caregivers, school teachers, Barnardos tutors, and the children who have participated in the program.**

3. **What approach should the researcher adopt to gather information from these stakeholders?**

The majority of participants stated that small group interviews were the most effective manner to gather views from the participants. Most believed that holding an event at Yalmambirra would be the best avenue to include all participants. One staff member felt that the researcher would be more likely to gather deeper information if the researcher went to the participants environment (for example, their home). It was agreed that the chief-researcher should be joined by the co-researcher to conduct these interviews.

Participants advised that when placing children in small groups to be interviewed, the researcher should not place “close mates” together as they could be disruptive. Lastly, staff reinforced the need to provide a payment to adult participants to assist in reimbursing participants for their time and travel expenses to ensure that they will engage in the research as “this is the way the community works”.

**Outcome:**

• **Conduct small group interviews at Yalmambirra where both the chief researcher and co-researcher are present. Barnardos will advise the researcher on the suitable membership for each group of children to be interviewed. Adult participants should be offered incentive payment to reimburse participants for their time and travel expenses.**

4. **What type of information should be gathered from participants in order to answer the research questions?**

Responses from participants focused on the type of information that would address the first research question (What are Barnardos Learning Centre stakeholders’ perceptions of the impact of Reading for Life on Indigenous children’s literacy?). Given that the Barnardos staff and the parents have already witnessed the children experience Reading for Life, many of these themes emerged as a direct result of changes they have already noticed.

Themes centred on changes in children in the following areas:

- Enjoyment of the program;
- Increased skills in reading, spelling, writing, and other school work;
- Use of reading skills in a creative way, better able to express themselves;
- Enjoyment of reading (eagerness to read, choosing to read at home);
- Self esteem and confidence in reading (volunteering to read in class, giving reading a try);
- Social skills (mixing with other children, communication with children and adults);
- Improved behaviour (manners, being part of a group);
- Life skills;
- Reading behaviour (going to the library, borrowing a book, taking responsibility for home readers); and
- Enhanced aspirations (e.g., staying on at school).

Themes centred on changes in families in the following areas:
- Family commitment to each other;
- Reading being valued by home and community; and
- Parental involvement.

**Outcome:**
- Review the draft interview questions in light of this feedback to include probes addressing the above themes. Consult with the co-researcher to ensure the language is appropriate for participants.

**5. When should Phase Two occur?**

To maximise participants’ capacity to provide feedback about their experience, it is desirable for Phase Two to occur as close to the cessation of Reading for Life as possible. Children began participating in Reading for Life prior to the research project commencing. Approximately fifteen children participated in Reading for Life in 2011. Approximately four of these children will continue to complete Reading for Life in the first half of 2012, and approximately five children will start and complete Reading for Life in the first half of 2012.

As a result, the recency of the participants’ Reading for Life experience is varied. This may impact on the likelihood that participants can vividly recall their experience. Additionally, if other programs have been implemented since Reading for Life finished the results may be confounded with effects from other programs.

**Outcome:**
- Conduct Phase Two at the end of Term 2, 2012. The researcher will need to construct interviews so that participants vividly recall their Reading for Life experience. This timeframe will be influenced by a) when approval and funding is provided by Barnardos, and b) the speed of approval received for ethics to interview the classroom teachers.
6. **What is the best way to disseminate information about the findings of the study to the community?**

Community members reported that they would be comfortable receiving feedback either in written or verbal form. Firstly, they suggested that a newsletter or feedback sheet could go home. Several identified the “Whispers” newsletter from the local primary school as an appropriate source as they “read this top to bottom every week”. This could be a suitable avenue for communication; however, inclusion of such information is at the discretion of the local school principal as it is a school publication. Community members also believed that information could be communicated verbally at an event where parents, children, and community members were invited to come along for a gathering (e.g.; BBQ). An Elder highlighted that it would be important to celebrate and reward the participation of the children at this event.

The managers at Barnardos provided additional input regarding the delivery of community feedback. They would like the event held at Yalmambirra to further engage the community with this setting. There was a preference to link this event with other significant events (e.g. Closing the Gap, NAIDOC Week) if possible. It was also noted that the verbal presentation of information was preferred as low levels of literacy occur in the home context amongst parents and carers. Lastly, feedback gathered from the study should be provided to the local school so they are informed about the program and outcomes.

**Outcomes:**

- **Provide written feedback about the study.** Attempt to insert this in the Whispers publication. If this is not possible, draft a brief feedback sheet to go home;
- **Hold a community day at Yalmambirra to convey the findings verbally.** A BBQ could be held and the children could be recognised for their work on the program. Attempt to hold this day alongside another significant education event (e.g. Closing the Gap, NAIDOC Week); and
- **Send written feedback to the local primary school about the outcomes of the research.**
## Timeline and budget for Phase Two

### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barnardos Australia approve and fund Phase Two of the research</td>
<td>May 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft probes for each interview question in consultation with co-</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>researcher and submit amendments to the UWS Human Research Ethics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submit to the Department of Education and Communities Ethics Committee</td>
<td>June 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SERAP) so we can interview school teachers. Note this approval process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>takes at least 2 months</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent gathered from participants</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief researcher travels to Wellington to conduct interviews with all</td>
<td>August 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio recordings of interviews transcribed</td>
<td>September 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis and interpretation of audio conducted</td>
<td>October – December 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final report completed</td>
<td>April 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to community</td>
<td>May 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore future research options</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel – Senior researcher (HEW 7 $56.14 per hour inc. 16% oncosts) x 14 days</td>
<td>$5501.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conduct Phase 2 activities including drafting probe questions, UWS ethics and SERAP ethics applications, travelling and conducting focus groups, analysis and interpret qualitative data, prepare report, travel, and provide feedback to community.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel - Research assistant to conduct cross-checking of thematic codes (HEW 6 $51.21 per hour inc. 16% oncosts) x 2 days</td>
<td>$716.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription of 10.5 hours of interview audio (provided by Pacific Transcription Solutions $3.65 per minute)</td>
<td>$2299.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel to conduct focus group interviews</td>
<td>$820</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| - Flight @$300 per internet  
- Incidents @$80 per day x 3 days = $240  
- 2 nights accommodation and meals @$140 per night = $280 |           |
| Travel to provide feedback to community | $380      |
| - Flight @$300 per internet  
- Incidents @$80 per day |           |
| Travel – Barnardos will provide transport for the researcher whilst at the centre. If this is unable to occur $110 per visit will be invoiced. | $0        |
| 15% of total costs ($9718.16) for infrastructure support to UWS | $1457.72  |
| TOTAL (inc 10% GST) | $12,293.47|

Note. This budget assumes that invitations to participate will be extended to all of the children who have received Reading for Life in 2011 and 2012, and their caregivers. Barnardos may wish to consider only incorporating the children who received Reading for Life in 2012, and their caregivers, to reduce the issues of confounding effects from other programs. This would alter the budget.
Centre for Positive Psychology and Education (CPPE) – Who are we?

CPPEs High Quality Research Environment
The Centre for Positive Psychology and Education (CPPE) is a recognised leading international research program for multidisciplinary and multi-method scientific research on Indigenous Education research, self and well-being, and educational and social research that enables life facilitation with a particular interest in enabling the potential of Indigenous Australians and communities. CPPE’s mission is to capitalise on excellence in international psycho-social theory, research, and practice in Educational Psychology, Education, and Indigenous Education to explicate new tangible research-demonstrated innovations that foster excellence and address critical educational and social issues of our time. CPPE seeks to empower individuals, families, and communities to: Reach their full potential and lead productive and fulfilling lives; build social cohesion, capability, and capacity; and contribute materially to community, national, and global well-being.

CPPE also works in close collaboration with a wide range of stakeholders, including the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc., the Aboriginal Studies Association, the Aboriginal Education Council, and the NSW Department of Education and Communities. CPPE also collaborates with international colleagues, including colleagues from France, Germany, Hong Kong, USA, and Canada. CPPE houses the Global Self-concept Education and Learning Facilitation (SELF) Research Centre and utilises this established network to attract leading scholars, undertake collaborative research, and promote the public face of the CPPE research program and output in the international arena. CPPE also houses 2 Indigenous ARC postdoctoral research fellows and 8 Indigenous PhD students.

Quality of Research at UWS
The quality of research at UWS is well reflected by the performance in competitive national research funding. For example, UWS ranks among the most successful universities in ARC grants in education, ARC Linkage grants, and is strongly represented in ARC Discovery grants funding including in Indigenous Education. UWS has a vibrant and dynamic culture of multidisciplinary research, especially in key areas prioritised by the University including Aboriginal Education. Its key strategic plan is to develop focused, relevant and world-class engaged research by developing effective research partnerships with industry partners and communities in order to produce relevant, high impact research.

CPPE academics currently hold 12 ARC grants and have made a substantial contribution to UWS’s achievement as the 5th ranked Australian University in ARC grants in Education. CPPE has achieved international recognition (450 members from 45 countries; Satellite Centres at leading universities around the world) as evidenced by its research track record (publications, grants, PhD students) and its status as one of the world’s premier educational programs (leading UWS to be named as the 7th leading university in the world in educational research). In recognition of this tremendous success, UWS provides CPPE with substantial research infrastructure funds (research-only academic researchers, research administrative and support staff, post doctoral researchers, and PhD scholarships) and has made several new academic appointments.
Acknowledgements

Barnardos Australia has demonstrated a clear commitment to evidenced-based practice by initiating and supporting this research in order to inform their work through empirical, community-based feedback.

The CPPE, University of Western Sydney researchers would like to extend their gratitude to the following people who have provided valuable guidance and support throughout Phase One. A special thank you to Helena Stanley for her crucial expertise as a co-researcher. Thank you to Sue Tregeagle, Jodi Burnstein, Liz Dutton, and Elizabeth Whale for their assistance. The researchers are grateful to the parents, caregivers, Elders, and staff who participated in the consultation phase, and the Wellington Working Party for their support.