

Centre for
Relational Care



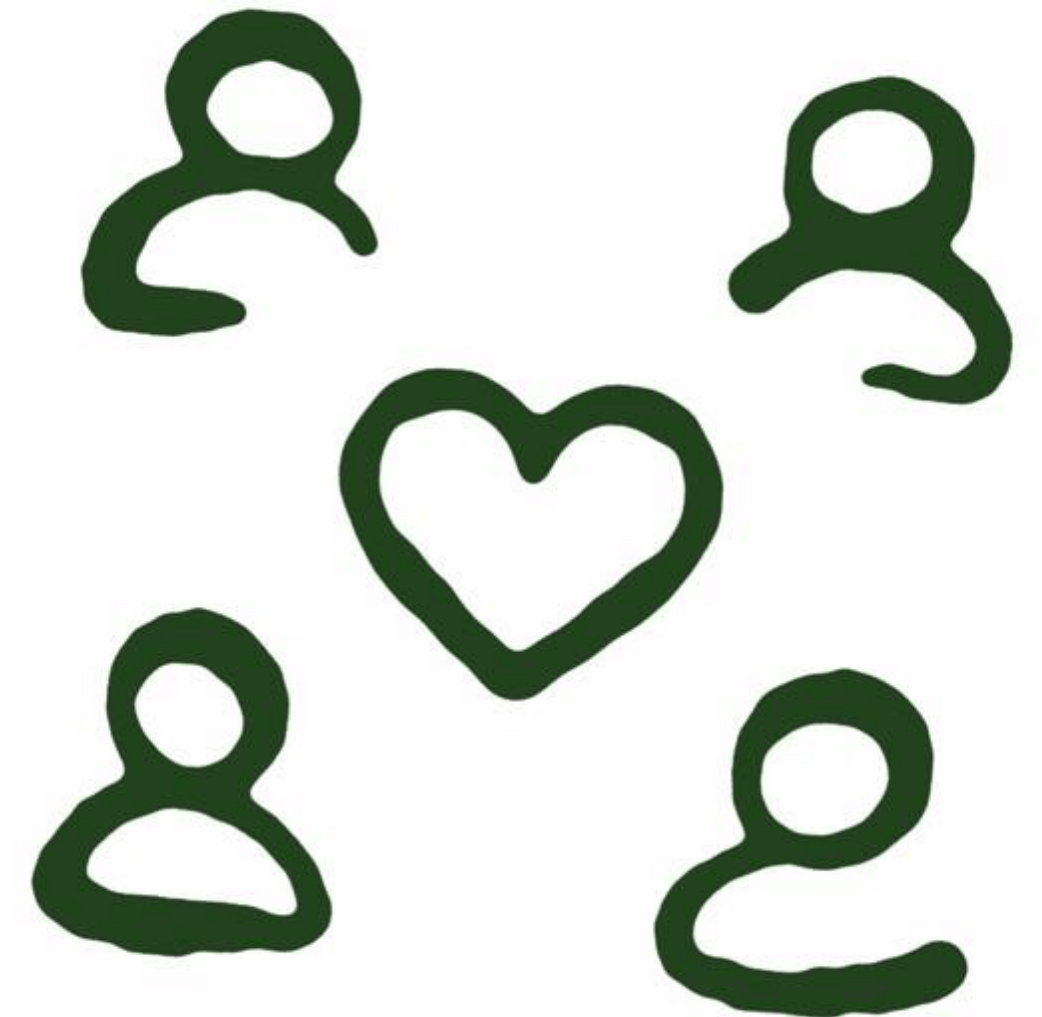
PIC

Supporting children and families to flourish

Changing the paradigm from protection to connection

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ABOUT THIS SESSION

Introductions

- Professional Individualised Care (PIC)
- Centre for Relational Care (CRC)

The PIC model

- deinstitutionalising care
- individualised social sector care workers
- system interventions

The work of the CRC

- system shifts and incentives
- naming ground truths
- a vision for an alternative 'connection system'

ABOUT PIC

- Relationship-based therapeutic care model for children and young people in out-of-home care
- Based on German model of OOHC that has been running for over 30 years
- An alternative style of care for children and young people living in group homes, hotel style accommodation, residential care.



ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR RELATIONAL CARE



- A community of concerned people committed to fundamental reform in child protection and out-of-home care (OOHC)
- Independent, not-for-profit advocacy body launched in December 2023
- Working to remove barriers to secure relationships for children and young people
- Proposing a shift from a “child protection system” to a Child Connection System
- Our work is informed by people with lived experience of OOHC including young people, families and carers. We engage with First Nations organisations, foster and kinship care providers, government, psychologists, social workers, academics and policy experts.

Centre for
Relational Care

WHY WE EXIST : The Urgency of the Problem

In Australia

- 45,000+ children removed from families and placed in state care
- Over the past year, nearly 20% moved placements three or more times, and 8% moved four or more times
- Aboriginal children are 12x more likely to be in care – more than 20,000
- Thousands live in facilities where all adults are rotating shift workers

In NSW

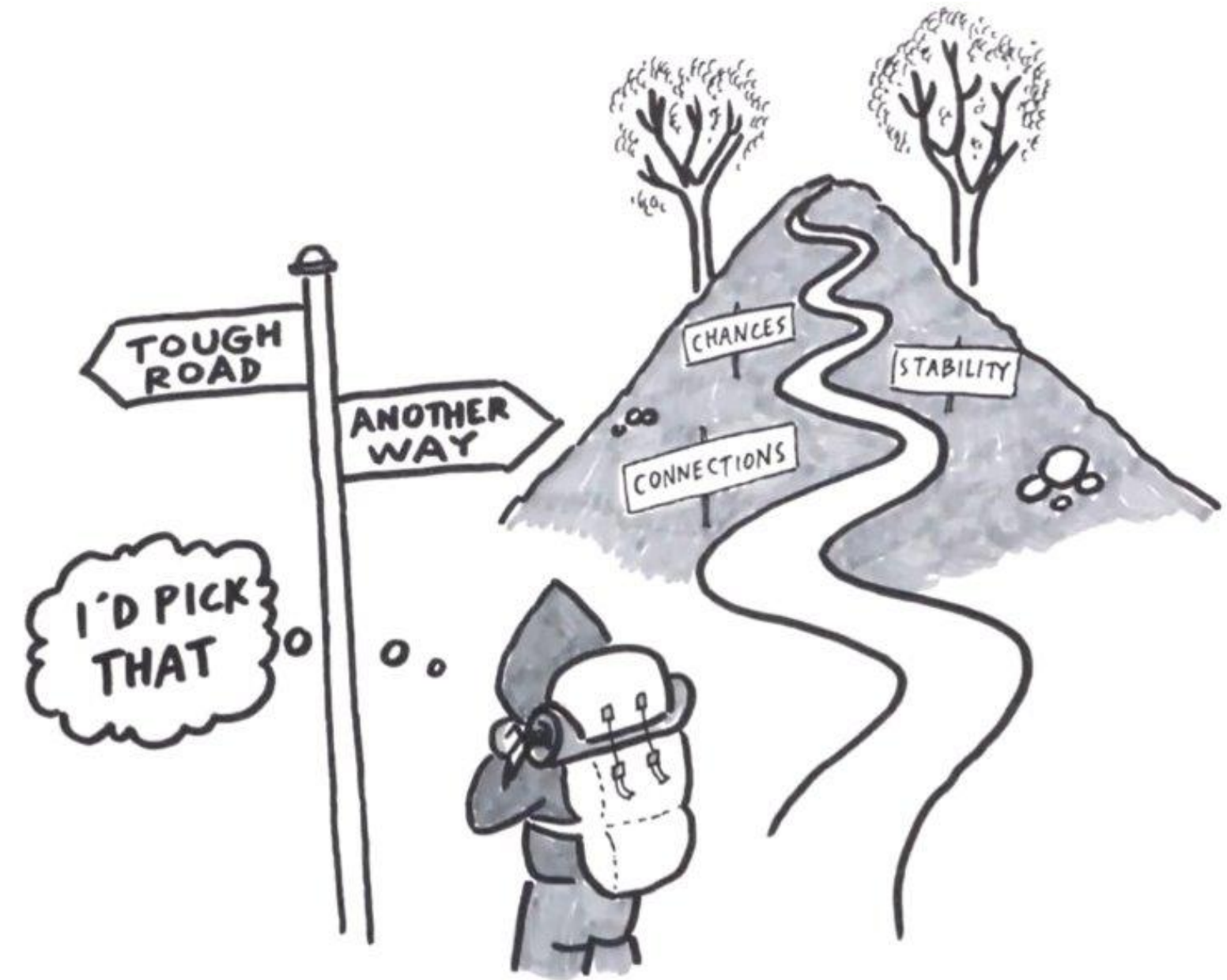
- OOHC spending up 45% in 5 years, from \$1.4 billion to \$2 billion, with a \$500 million overspend on emergency accommodation
- Rules and regulations for NSW child protection have more than doubled (2.6x) in 20 years. Nearly 1000 pages of regulations and guidelines
- 14+ reform attempts since the 1980s - yet outcomes for children remain unchanged or worse



WHY WE EXIST : An alternative

How we are addressing this:

- PIC is a model that moves away from the type of institutional care that increases likelihood of placement breakdowns/further trauma toward individualised, holistic care that provides a foundation for young people to heal and transform their lives.
- CRC offers a reimagined alternative system - where all children experiencing out of home care have safe relationships, trust and genuine connection. We're calling for a whole of system approach that puts our humanity over bureaucracy.



More about PIC

Professional

- Working with people who have the skillsets to appropriately respond to complex trauma and attachment needs

Individualised

- Creating individualised care based on child's needs as well as the professionals skillset and lifestyle

Care

- PIC is a relational model of care – i.e not reproducing medical constructs of care



PIC Stationary settings

- At the core of our model is stationary settings
- One young person is placed with a Professional Therapeutic Carer in a home setting
- Focuses on stable, trusting relationships and personalised support
- Carers integrate therapeutic skills into everyday life and respond effectively to complex trauma and attachment needs

Core principle: every young person has a real, trusting relationship with an advocate and mentorship



PIC system interventions

Ambulant settings

- supported independent living – while the other factors remain the same the child remains independent

Therapeutic Assessment Pathways

- short-term, ultra flexible, relational interventions

Aim is to reduce the need for shift work models of care



Common questions about PIC

“How much does it cost in comparison?”

“Has it been evaluated?”

“What’s the criteria?”

“Why not scale?”



SOURCE : INSTITUT FÜR KINDER
UND JUGENDHILFE (IKJ) ·
INSTITUTE OF CHILD AND
YOUTH WELFARE, 2012

The limits of a protection paradigm in Australia

MYTH

Governments can care for, and protect, children. Laws, regulations and audits can keep kids safe.

- Rooted in control, risk management, and compliance - focused on *doing to* rather than *working with*.
- Success is measured by avoidance of risk (to the entity)
- Innovation and care are constrained by hierarchical control.
- Rigid boundaries and reactive systems result in fragmentation, fear, and disconnection between children, families, and services.

Harmful 'status quo' institutional patterns reinforce and *creates more trauma*

Changing the paradigm: protection through connection

REALITY

Families and communities can keep kids safer through real relationships...but it's messy, imperfect and often painful, because it's human.

- Make children safer by building and strengthening connections with people – family, kin, carers and community - who have their back.
- The more attuned adults a child has, the safer they are from harm, as unsafe individuals are more likely to be identified.

Aligns with a **public health approach** that provides support for families at all stages, not just at the point of crisis:

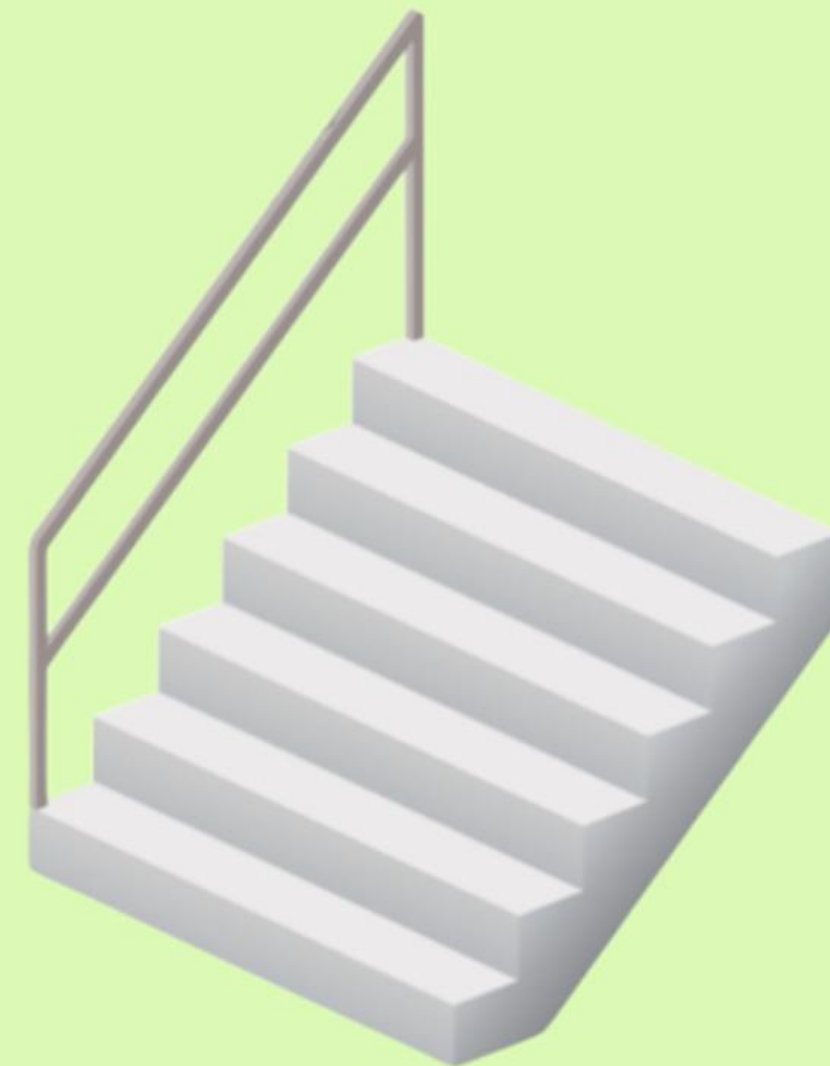
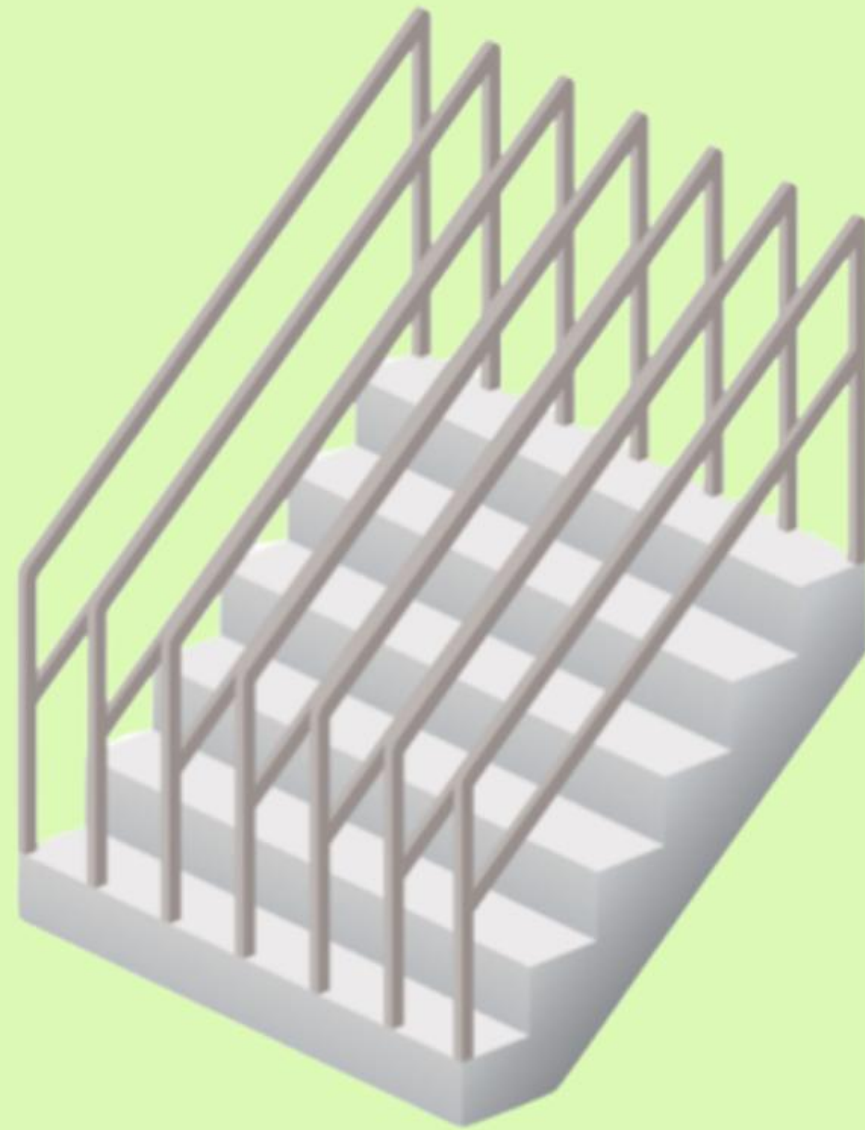
Relational early help and universal support for all families

Voluntary and place-based relational support for families that are struggling

Acute relational and holistic care for children in OOHC

Changing the paradigm

**Too many handrails create barriers,
not safety**



**We need to balance safeguards
with human connection**

Shifting to a connection system



SHIFT



PEOPLE OVER PAPERWORK

**Relationships take priority;
kids raised by attuned adults**

In a Child Connection System, children are cared for through connection. They have consistent, trusted adults who know them and have their back.

Care workers have space to be present, to listen, and to build trust. There is no excessive red tape – only ‘good sense’ rules and guardrails.

Shifting to connection

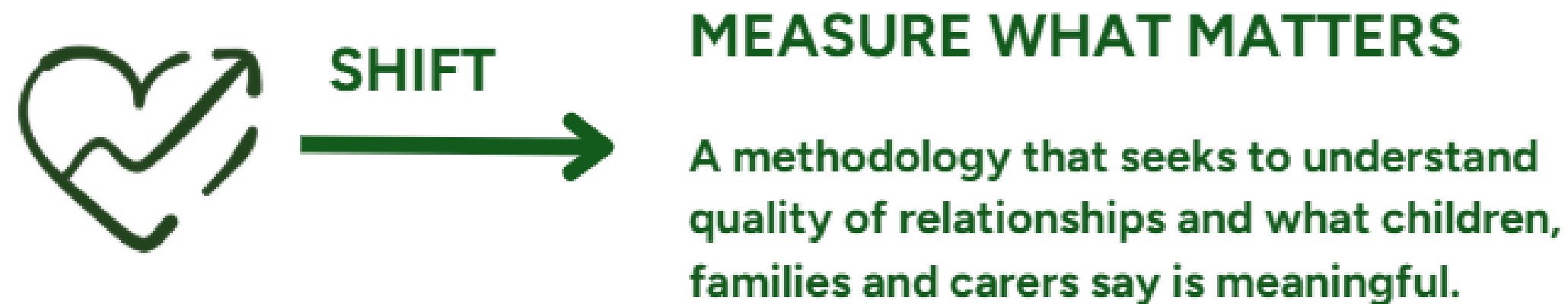


Risk is addressed through trust and connection, rather than managed through surveillance and control.

Safety grows as families, children and caregivers are supported to open up, seek help, and stay connected through strong, trusting relationships with caseworkers and those closest to the child.

The risk of relational deprivation is understood and balanced against other risks.

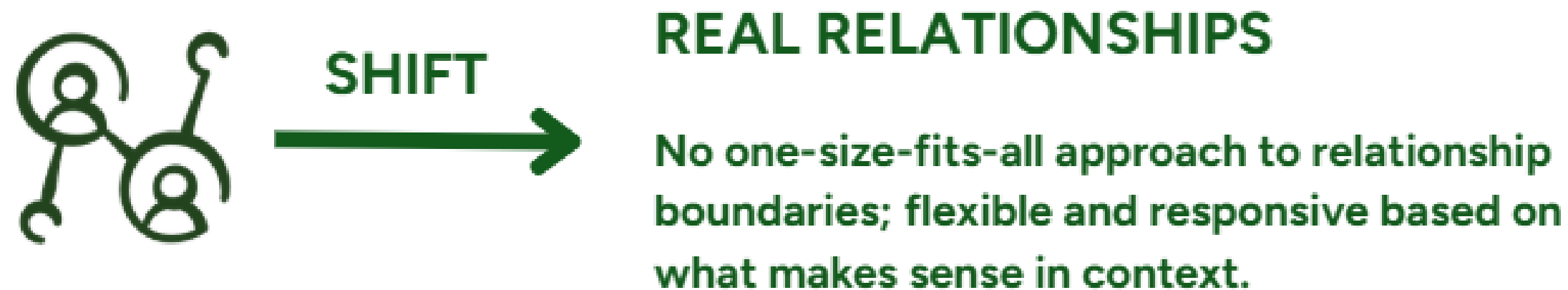
Shifting to connection



A connection system focuses on quality of relationships and listens to what children, families and carers say is meaningful to them. It has a methodology that values human experience over process, and connection over compliance. What matters most can't always be measured, but it can be felt.

Commissioning is based on how care is delivered, not just what is delivered. Focusing and reflecting on how services provide care is what shapes real progress and outcomes, and the system rewards that.

Shifting to connection



Professional boundaries still matter, but rigid rules no longer block the trust that is essential to connection in interactions with children and families. Professional attuned adults shape how real, safe relationships can form - and meaningful care and healing can take place.

Moving from a risk-first mindset to a human-first one enables care workers to feel empowered and supported to show up with empathy, warmth, and humanity. Children feel safe because they are seen, heard, and consistently cared for according to their own context and needs.

Calling out Ground Truths

So why isn't this happening here?

- The illusion of rescuing children is a powerful story. Too many children are being removed from their families, extended families and communities, when they don't need to be.
- The system makes it almost impossible to give kids the relationships they need - unless carers and caseworkers bend the rules and carry the risk load.
- The West hasn't incentivised relational care. It doesn't suit the bureaucratic business model.
- People say they're doing relational care but they're not. The type of relationships people offer in the sector are never relationships that they would want or accept for their own families.
- The system is working for itself and anxious adults. Some kids manage to do OK, but it's not because of the system, it's in spite of it.

The work of the CRC

Elevate Lived Experience

- Listen to, learn from and amplify voices of children, parents, families, carers and workers

Build the Movement

- Build a coalition of partners and supporters. Run a campaign to galvanise support and action

Offer a Practical Alternative

- Co-design a model for a relational system with new incentives that transforms OOHC towards connection

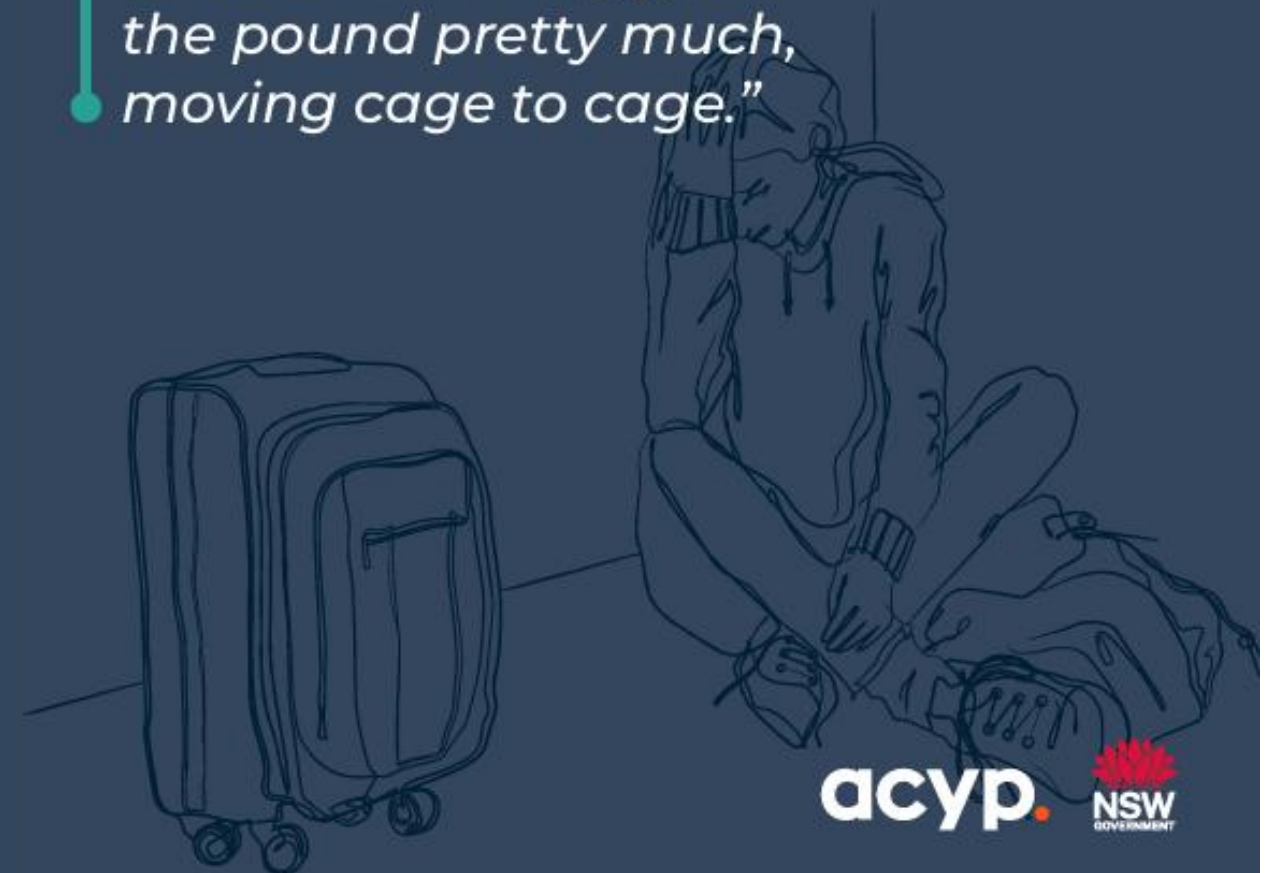


"Safety means when you can have someone open up to you, someone you're comfortable with, someone that ... has your back and protects you from anything."

Moving cage to cage:

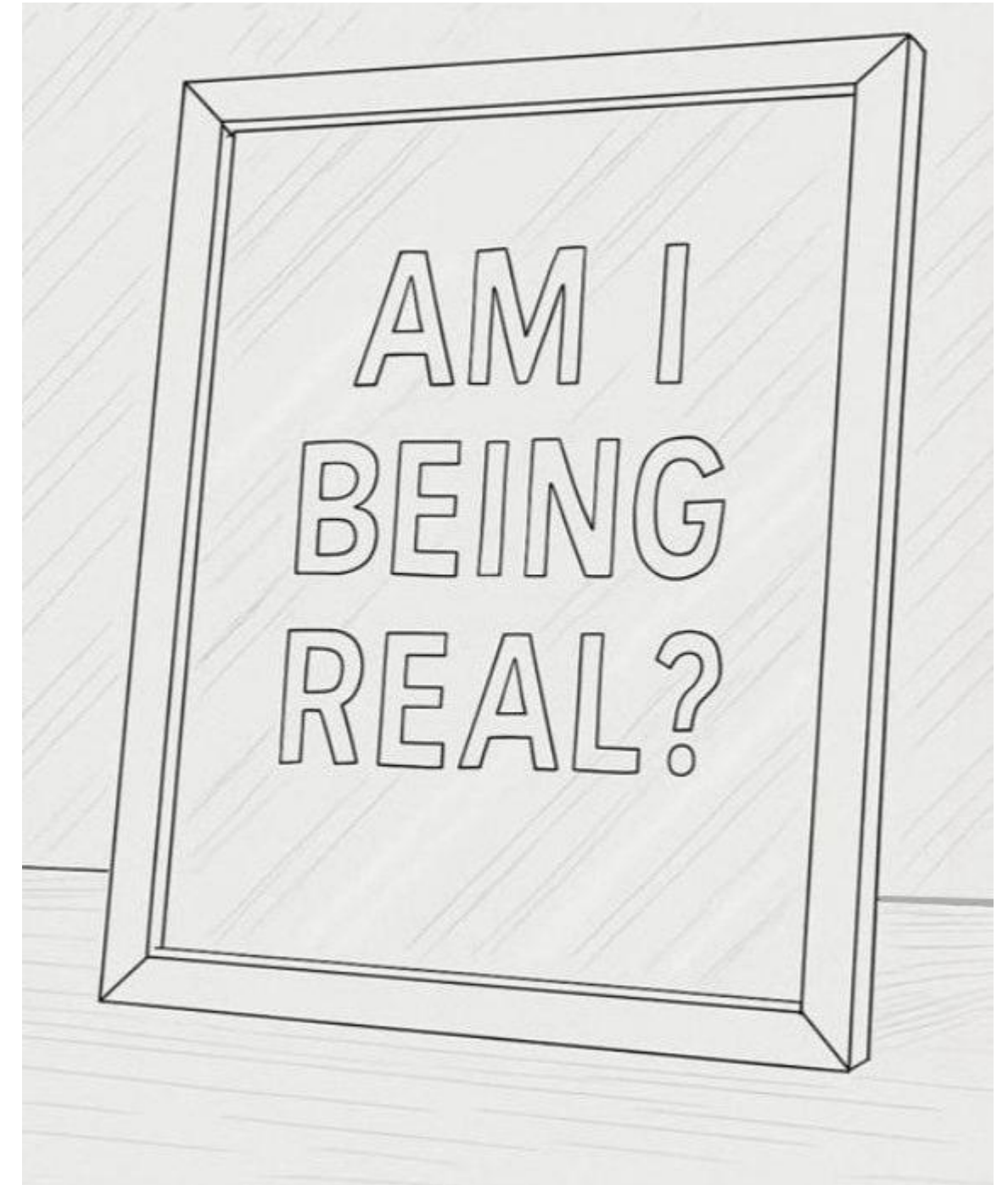
Final Report of the
Special Inquiry into Children
and Young People in Alternative
Care Arrangements

*"They just move me
around like a doggy in
the pound pretty much,
moving cage to cage."*



"We want people to be real
and human.
Connection means being
physically there and
present."

CRC youth advisor with lived experience of care



Some further resources

Why relationships matter

The importance of relationships for a child and family support system

FOR ALL OF US

People with stronger social relationships have been found to have a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those with weaker social relationships.

FOR CHILDREN GROWING UP

Positive relationships are critical for healthy childhood development and learning

FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

Positive childhood experiences can be a 'protective factor' to negate experiences which may otherwise create relational trauma.

FOR BUILDING TRUST WITH SUPPORT SERVICES

Trusted relationships are key to engagement. For people experiencing multiple disadvantages "the way in which people are supported may be more important than what is delivered."

FIRST NATIONS AGENCY AND WISDOM

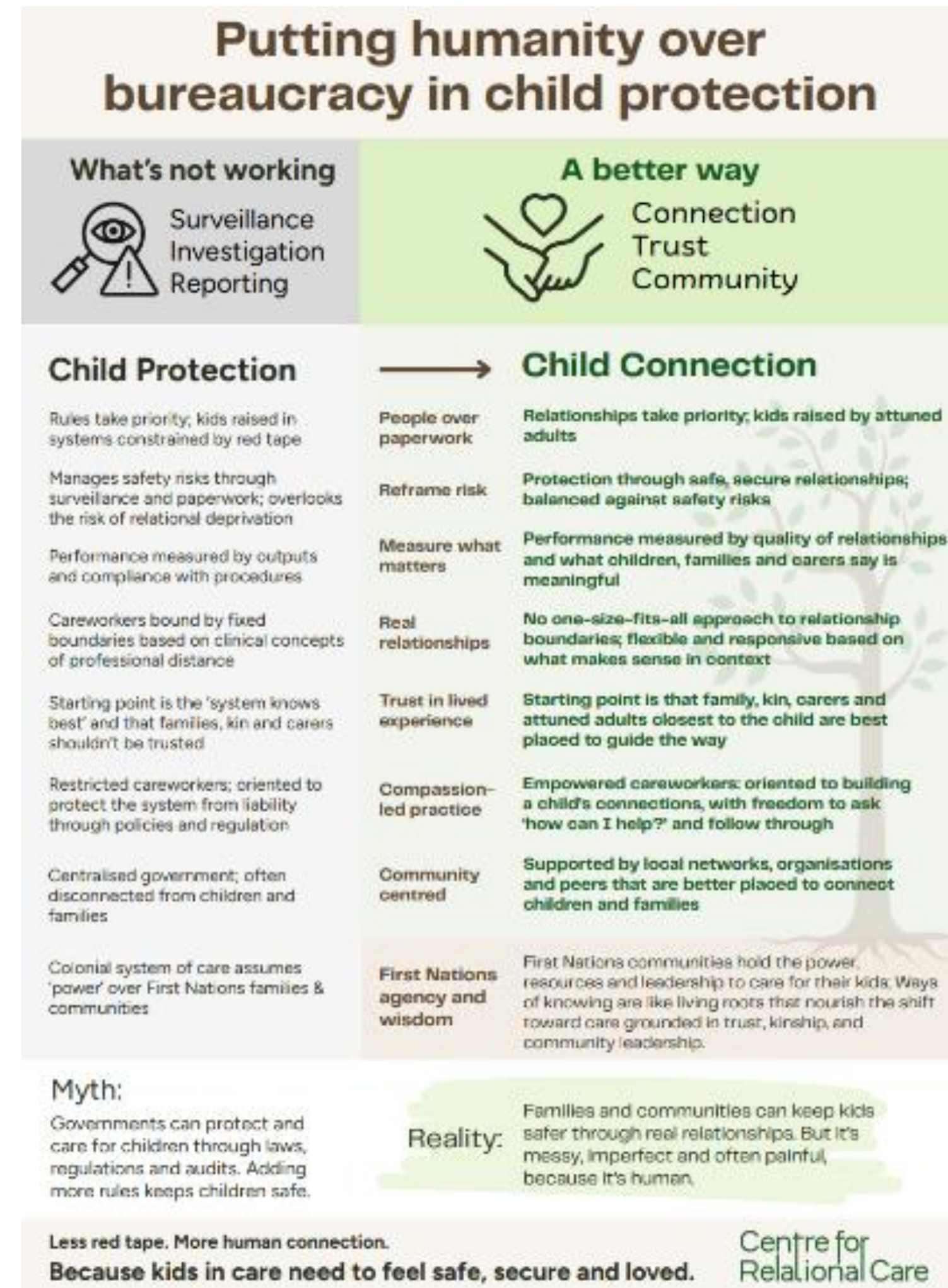
First Nations communities hold the power, resources and leadership to care for their children; ways of knowing are like living roots that nourish and support relational care.



FOR EFFECTIVE, SUSTAINABLE GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

Emerging evidence for the system benefits of a "relational state", centred on building trust, decentralised capability building and backing innovation. "Mission-driven bureaucrats" focused on relationships play a critical role.

A care system that puts relationships first



INCENTIVISING A RELATIONAL SYSTEM

System enablers - **laws, regulations, policies and processes** - must be reorientated to centre meaningfully on connection, trust, empowerment and innovation. This will embed the new relational vision at all levels of the system.

1 **Legislative reform** that promotes positive relationships and family wellbeing

2 **Regulatory culture** that enables relationship and provides accountability

3 **Empowered workforce** with the right time and incentives to engage in relational practice

4 **Community-led commissioning** that incentivises whole-of-family support and real human care

5 **Sustainable investment strategy** to support a whole-of-family model of care

6 **Measurement** of the experience of families and carers

7 **Valued foster carers** who are supported to build meaningful relationships with children and families

8 **Innovative Court practices** that support a relational approach

DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR A RELATIONAL SYSTEM

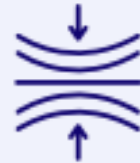
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Holistic wellbeing

The holistic wellbeing of children should be placed at the heart of all decisions, and the perspective and story of the child valued at every stage of their care journey.

2



Reciprocity & equality

The system should enable relationships that have a sense of reciprocity and equality, and create a sense of belonging for children.

3



Reflective system

The system should be reflective, recognising historical harms and actively resetting ongoing power imbalances, to focus on genuine support and healing, especially for First Nations families.

4



Incentives for capability building

The system should enable and incentivise services and organisations to walk with families and build the capabilities of family members to have agency over their own future.

5



Empowerment of workers

Workers and carers should be empowered to use their creativity, judgement, skills and time to build trust with children and families and support them to flourish.

6



Risk redefined

The needs and aspirations of children and families – the risks to their holistic wellbeing – should be prioritised over system-driven monitoring, investigating or administering of risk.

7



First Nations agency and community control

The system should amplify First Nations agency and strengthen mechanisms for community control, especially to deliver culturally-informed, relationship-based family preservation and restoration.

8



Experimentation & innovation

The system should actively create room and possibilities for experimentation and innovation that responds to local circumstances.

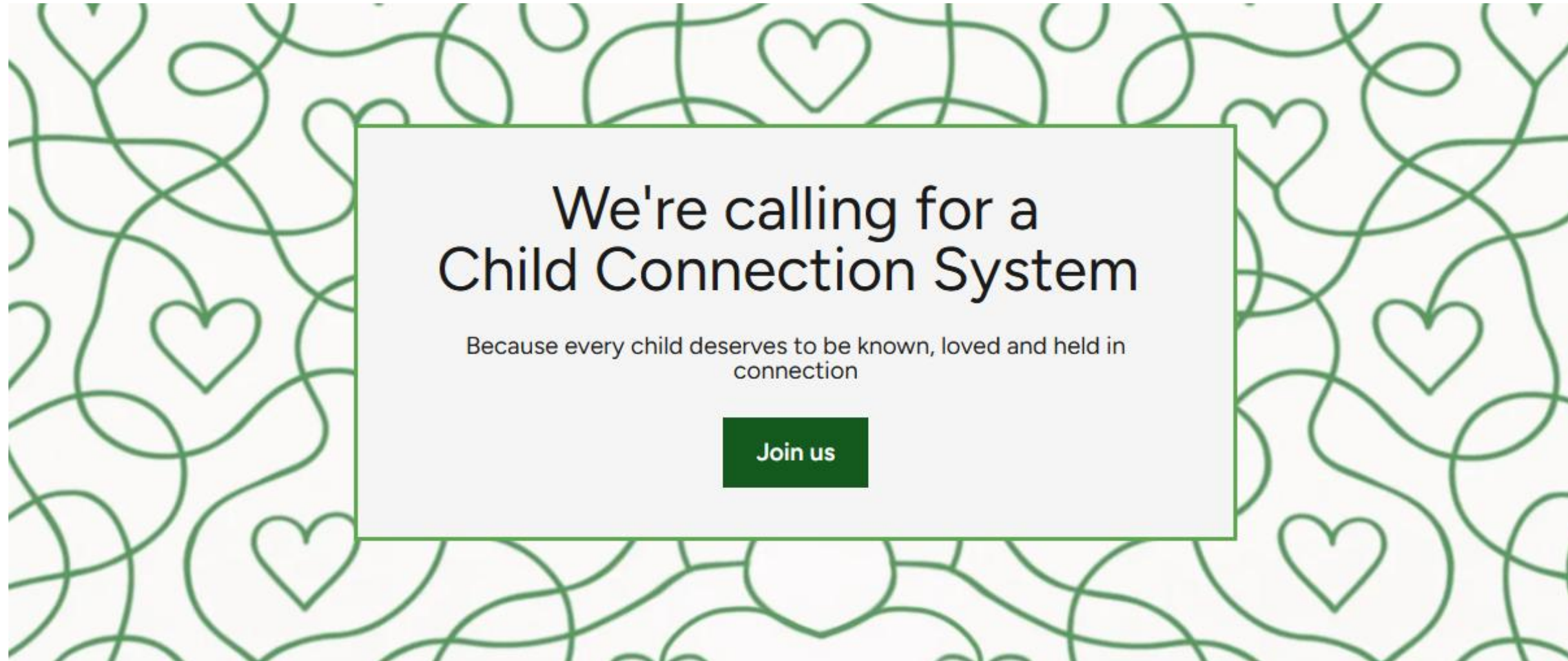
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Family experiences

The system should value direct feedback from children and families about their experience as part of judging success, and actively learn through reflection about what is working well.





centreforrelationalcare.org.au

Thank you



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