### Improving Experiences in Care:

Fostering Family Connections and Navigating Transitions

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# The value of family connection



#### Why this matters

#### 1. Sense of identity

- Family connections reinforce self-understanding and cultural identity
- Key for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Nyland Report, AIFS)
- Sibling ties support identity development (CREATE Foundation)

#### 2. Belonging

- Family relationships reduce placement disruptions (O'Neill et al., 2018)
- Supported contact fosters emotional safety and stability (CREATE Foundation)
- Consistent contact promotes inclusion (Nyland Report)

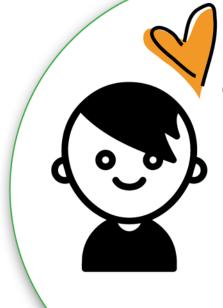
#### 3. Emotional wellbeing

- Strong family ties buffer emotional distress (McGhee et al., 2021)
- Trauma-informed contact planning supports healing
- Emotional health improves with family engagement (CREATE foundation)



### The Impact of Family Disconnection

Family disconnection can have significant impacts on emotional wellbeing, development, and identity formation.



#### **Connection**

- Connected to culture
- Sense of identity
- Belonging
- Placement stability
- Relational safety
- Increased wellbeing



#### **Disconnection**

- Placement instability
- Rejection
- Lack of belonging
- Confusion
- Absence of relational safety
- Chronic hypervigilance



### Jo's Model

#### COREPRINCIPLES

- · Young person centred
- · Safety
- Young people are seen and heard
- Connections and belonging are key
- · Mutual respect
- · Authentic engagement KEYPRACTICES
- Committed to stability
- · House as a Therapist
- · Therapeutic Care Plan
- · Building connections and belonging
- · Placement matching
- · Jo's Family and Jo's Community
- · Creating meaningful childhood memories
- · Working alongside maladaptive behaviour
- · Supporting transition

- Ecological Systems Theory
- · Polyvagal Theory
- · Attachment Theory
- · Therapeutic Milieu
- · Strengths-based Approach



Therapeutic Youth Workers

Senior

Therapeutic Residential Coordinator

Senior

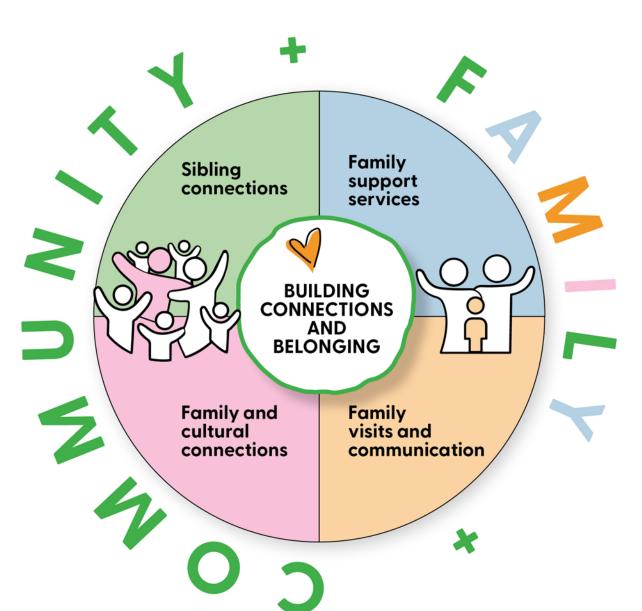
Therapeutic

**Specialist** 

• Service Manager



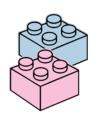
# How Jo's work with Family

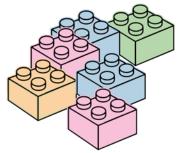


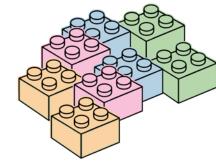


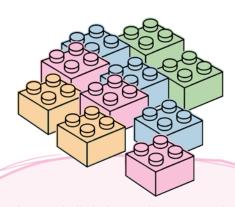
# Sam's story

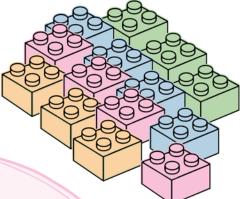


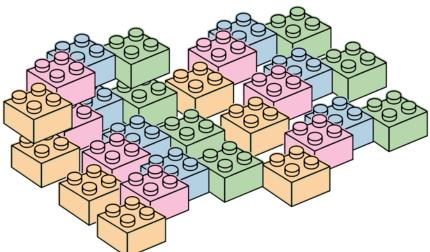












"I can tell Jo's really care about Sam and have done a lot for him over the years, I am grateful for all the advocacy for Sam to have for more time with us – his family."

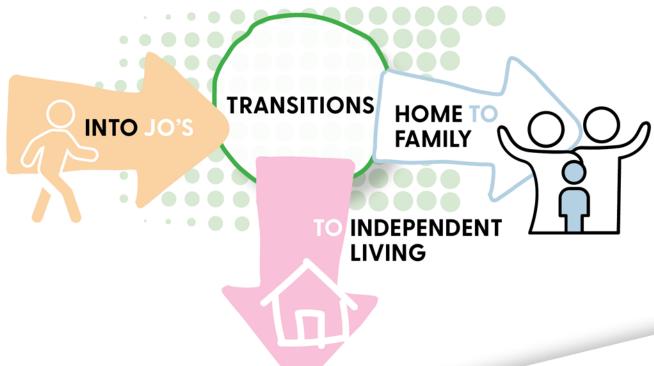
- Lucy, Sam's mum



One block = one family visit per month

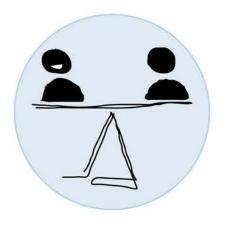


# Transitions in care

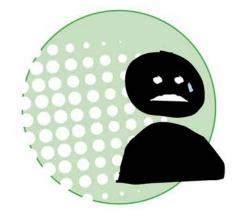




# What does the research say about transitions?



Stability of relationships reduces trauma



Poorly managed transitions increase emotional harm



Young people need agency and support when exiting care





# Jo's approach to transitions

- Planned, child-focused transitions
- Emotional and relational continuity
- Young person's involvement in decision-making (voice and choice)
- Gradual preparation for independent living











"I liked the organisation in the house and the routines, I felt like I knew what was happening.

I liked my how smooth my transition was."

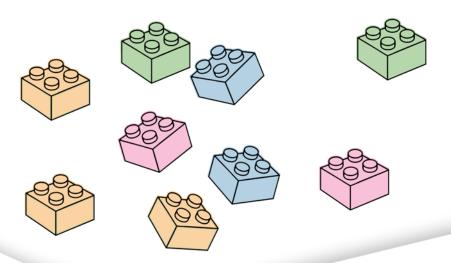
- Fatima, care leaver



# Challenges and lessons learned

#### Common barriers:

- Safety concerns
- Resource constraints
- Limited family capacity



#### Strategies to overcome them:

- Risk-managed family engagement
- Partnerships with DCP
- Emphasise learning and adaptation

