YOUNG & RESILIENT RESEARCH CENTRE

Y&R 2025 SEMINAR SERIES

14 May: Dr Milissa Deitz

School of Humanities and Communication Arts
Member of Young & Resilient Research Centre and the Writing & Society Research Centre

Pants On Fire: Stigma and Public Misconceptions about Foster Care



Foster care is often misrepresented in public discourse, perpetuating stigma and misconceptions that impact the lived experiences of children and young people, foster carers and birth families. This paper examines the intersection of stigma, public misconceptions, and the phenomenon of "trauma porn" in narratives surrounding foster care. Media portrayals frequently sensationalise trauma, reinforcing harmful stereotypes of foster youth as inherently damaged or delinquent, while minimising structural contributors such as poverty, systemic racism, and inadequate social support. Recognising storytelling as a critical tool for social change, we believe visual storytelling can highlight the transformative role of Life Story Work (LSW), a narrative-building tool that helps foster youth understand their past.
Grounding our work in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 8, which affirms every child's right to identity, our work highlights why LSW must be urgently prioritised as an essential component of child welfare practices. As our research demonstrates, there is significant work to do to re-position and promote LSW as a critical mental health tool. This position, coupled with our extensive research, is also the basis for our documentary, which advocates for an urgent prioritisation of LSW in Australia's foster care system as part of a larger research project.

Biography

Dr Milissa Deitz is a senior lecturer in Communication and Creative Industries. Her scholarly interests include grief, identity and family; voice and the marginalised within digital storytelling; and young people, wellbeing and technology. Her latest work includes her fifth book, Foster Youth in the Mediasphere: Lived Experience and Digital Lives in the Australian Out-of-Home Care System (2022) and the documentary Belonging: The Search for Identity in the Australian Foster Care System (2024).

14 May, 12:00 to 1:00 PM

Parramatta South EZ.1.57 & online

Lunch will be provided