



# SCOPING REPORT

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## INTERNATIONAL AND CROSS- CULTURAL SUITABILITY OF CHILD INCLUSIVE MEDIATION PRACTICE AND TRAINING

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# CHILD INCLUSIVE MEDIATION & COUNSELLING

## INTRODUCTION

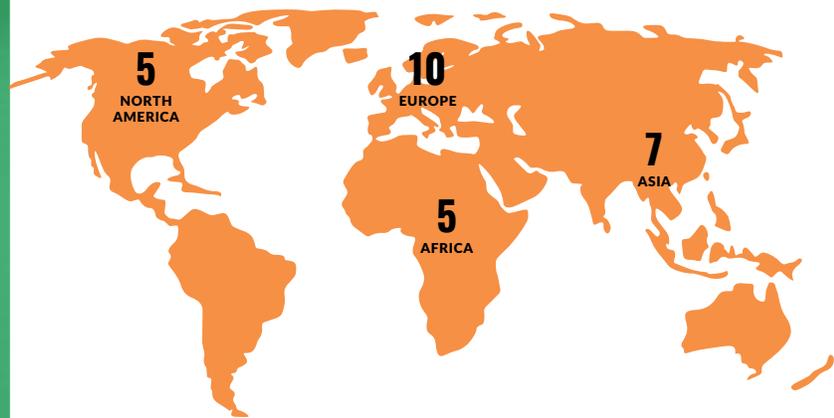
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Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling (CIMC) is a powerful, evidence-based intervention for enabling parents in dispute to align their perspectives around a shared view of their children's developmental and emotional needs from a post-separation parenting plan. CIMC was developed by Professor Jennifer McIntosh AM, a leading child psychologist in the divorce and family trauma fields, and tested in comparison trial, followed up over four years (McIntosh, Wells, Smyth & Long 2008).

Initially, all training was in-person. Since 2014, online formats of the 4-day program have been available, and are widely used through Australia, New Zealand, UK and the Asia-Pacific regions. Since its inception, more than 2000 practitioners have trained in the CIMC method.

This study sought to explore the cultural and legislative applicability of the child inclusive method and its online training formats. Expressions of interest were sought through international networks for experienced dispute resolution practitioners to complete and provide detailed feedback on the current online CIMC training formats.

This brief report outlines the findings from 27 participants from 15 countries. Implications for both the method of child inclusion and its training formats are discussed.



## ABOUT CIMC

ChildrenBeyondDispute.com is home to the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling (CIMC) online course.

The 18-hour online training program introduces the CIMC techniques, developed by Professor McIntosh over 30 years. The program is designed for family mediation practitioners, therapists, custody and allied family court practitioners.

In 2011, Professor McIntosh was recognised for this work through receipt of the AFCC Stanley Cohen Distinguished Research Award. In 2019, she was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in recognition of her lifetime work in this field.

The CIMC method is an evidence-based intervention<sup>[1]</sup>. A four-year longitudinal comparison study was conducted in three major cities in Australia which demonstrated beneficial long-term impacts of the Child Inclusive intervention on stability and durability of parenting plans, parent's ability to better manage their conflict and acrimony, and flow-on effects for children's well-being and adjustment to divorce. Findings were replicated and extended in independent studies in Indiana, USA (Ballard et al, 2013). The origins and method of CIMC are described extensively elsewhere (McIntosh, 2007; McIntosh, 2008).

[1] <https://childrenbeyonddispute.com/child-inclusive-mediation/>

## TRAINING HISTORY

In Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region, CIMC methods are now deeply embedded throughout family relationship, mediation and court-based programs.

From 2003-2013, training in this approach was in-person, via a four-day workshop. In 2014, the course was converted to an online format, with 18 hours of interactive training.

The course teaches the art and science of child consultation, and of crafting feedback conversations with separated parents, to realign co-parenting, by conveying and re-focusing on the lived experiences and developmental needs of the child.

Participants have three-month access to all materials, to consolidate knowledge, review demonstration films and extend their reading via the CIMC library.

Finally, a Graduate Program was added to enable an ongoing community of practice, to support sharing of experience between experienced CIMC practitioners, and access to new resources.

### **Aims of the current study**

With wide uptake throughout Australia, New Zealand, UK and the Asia-Pacific regions, Children Beyond Dispute sought to test the applicability of the CIMC method and training format with a broader international community of practitioners. Core questions concerned the cultural fit of the training, and practice/legislative applicability of the CIMC approach.

## METHOD

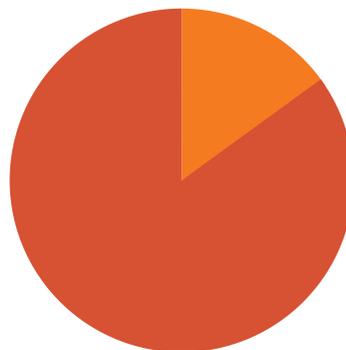
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In September 2020, expressions of interest were sought through family law dispute resolution networks, for mediation and allied practitioners to complete and provide detailed feedback on the CIMC model and online training format. Twenty-seven participants completed the training and responded to the feedback questionnaire. Participants were from Canada (2), France (1), Hong Kong (2), Ireland (1), Japan (1), Malaysia (1), Netherlands (2), Nigeria (1), Senegal (1), Singapore (3), South Africa (1), Switzerland (1), Uganda (1), UK (5), USA (3) and Zimbabwe (1).

## SUITABILITY OF METHOD

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Responses unanimously indicated the suitability of the CIMC method across all participant settings. 85% of respondents reported Child Inclusive Mediation was extremely or very likely to improve client outcomes in their target population. No-one considered it might be unhelpful. The majority of participants stated the course content was extremely (48%) or very (37%) relevant to their work role in family law or mediation. The legislative and practice fit of the intervention was also supported across all jurisdictions with 85% of respondents reporting that in its current form, the CIMC course was very or extremely suitable in their setting. Lower suitability was associated with systems limitations, such as funding constraints.



85% of respondents reported Child Inclusive Mediation was *extremely or very likely* to improve client outcomes in their target population

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# FINDINGS

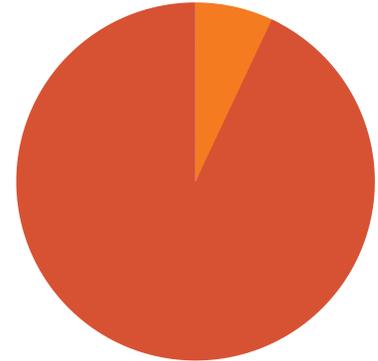
## THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

89% of participants were extremely or very satisfied with the learning experience. 93% of participants are extremely or very likely to recommend the CIMC online training to their colleagues.

Respondents indicated they found online learning particularly useful as it allowed them to pause and go back to review certain topics or points of interest. Participants noted the video resources and child interview techniques were the most useful part of the training. The “interplay between Jenn going through notes and watching videos was thoroughly conducive to learning” and “clear examples and sample questions were particularly useful in providing the scaffold for practice”.

On completion of the 18-hour program, participants reported feeling moderately (37%), very (37%) or extremely (26%) ready to use the thinking and practices taught in the course in their own work. No respondent indicated that they did not feel ready, and most acknowledged the time needed to hone the relevant skills. Several participants suggested a forum in which graduates of the training could offer ongoing support to each other in implementation of the CIMC method would be useful following completion of the training.

Additional mentoring, coaching and supervision were also highlighted in allowing graduates to use the thinking and practices taught in the CIMC course in their own work. A small number of participants requested additional theory on child psychology and child development, as well as an expansion of the literature and other research.



93% of participants are *extremely or very likely* to recommend the CIMC online training to their colleagues

“ It is the most rigorous and impressive course and frankly think it should be the basis of the teaching here. (London, United Kingdom) ”

“ Prof McIntosh's own passion and commitment [is] so clear in her albeit gentle and paced way... (London, United Kingdom) ”

## FINDINGS

“ The idea of introducing the child's voice safely into mediation between separated or separating parents is something which, whilst entirely sensible, feels innovative. (Glasgow, United Kingdom) ”

## CROSS-CULTURAL TRANSLATION OF THE CIMC MODEL

Participants were asked to contribute any essential adaptations that would enhance cultural safety and suitability of the training program within their jurisdiction and organisational setting. No participants believed content or structural changes were needed. Some suggested local examples and language translations would support greater uptake of the CIMC training in their jurisdiction.

Challenges to adoption internationally lie in broad awareness and resourcing for this approach amongst family law courts and practitioners. Many participants supported contacting their local governing body to create conversation about the possibilities of implementing a child inclusive approach in their jurisdiction, and encouraging local family court judges and lawyers to complete the course.

Participants observed that parents can be reluctant to engage in CIMC through misapprehension of what may be involved, for example fear their child would be burdened with decision making, or pressured to align with one parent's view. In this light, respondents suggested education for parents on the safe place for - and importance of - the child's voice in mediation was an important component of wider adoption of the CIMC method.

Setting the stage for safe inclusion is core to the CIMC training, and the role of mediators was emphasised in playing a necessary pedagogical part with parents, and creating a context for mutual consent and a shared approach to working in a child inclusive format.

“ Very helpful resources and highly recommended for professionals involved in family work!  
(Singapore) ”

“ It has been an awesome journey, I would highly recommend it for anyone in the family law field, and has expanded my thinking and skills as a clinician working in such cases.  
(Singapore) ”

“ I loved this course both for the richness of content and Dr. McIntosh's teaching/lecturing style. It really resonated with me.  
(Ontario, Canada) ”



# FINDINGS

# IMPLICATIONS

These survey findings from 27 dispute resolution practitioners working in 15 countries engender confidence that the current CIMC online training is appropriate for international contexts, beyond its Australian origins.

In this light, the Children Beyond Dispute team has commenced working with our survey respondents and other international colleagues to offer Child Inclusive Mediation support via the methods taught in the CIMC online course.

In response to survey findings, a Graduate Program was launched in 2020 for those who have completed the full CIMC course, designed to assist connection between Child Inclusive Practitioners, enable sharing of experiences using the CIM model, and offer monthly case based webinar discussion with Prof. McIntosh. These webinars will focus on supporting the implementation of the CIMC method in complex scenarios. The graduate community is rapidly growing.

Where the Child Inclusive Mediation and Counselling course provides skills for working with children of school age, the graduate program seeks to support skills in working with separated parents of very young children. Here, our Young Children in Divorce and Separation (YCIDS – pronounced “why-kids”) program for parents will provide a basis for enabling mediators, counsellors, lawyers, or others to assist parents in making complex decisions about the care of infants and pre-schoolers.

**27** DISPUTE RESOLUTION  
PRACTITIONERS  
WORKING ACROSS

**15**

DIFFERENT  
COUNTRIES

support the international  
suitability of the CIMC  
method and training  
program.

Child Inclusive Mediation methods are deeply embedded throughout family relationship, mediation and court-based programs in Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region. This study sought to explore the wider cultural and legislative applicability of Professor McIntosh's child inclusive method and its current online training format.

Overwhelmingly, participants from each of the 15 countries represented found the CIMC approach deeply motivating, and the online learning experience engaging and highly relevant.

Where we had anticipated the study would inform key content changes required to ensure a cultural fit in international jurisdictions, none were identified. Instead, respondents identified awareness and resourcing for the approach as the key barriers to introduction of a Child Inclusive Mediation. In 2021, Children Beyond Dispute will work closely with study participants and international colleagues to build awareness and support for an international community of practice in CIMC methods.

We thank participants of this study for completing the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling Course and for providing detailed feedback.

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Ballard, R.H., Holtzworth-Munroe, A., Applegate, A.G., D'Onofrio, B.M., and Bates J.E. (2013). A Randomized Controlled Trial of Child-Informed Mediation Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, Vol. 19, No. 3, 271–281

McIntosh, J.E., Wells, Y.D., Smyth, B.M. & Long, C.M. (2008). Child-focused and child-inclusive divorce mediation: comparative outcomes from a prospective study of postseparation adjustment. *Family Court Review*, 46(1), 105-124. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-1617.2007.00186.x>

McIntosh, J.E., Wells, Y.D., & Long, C.M. (2007). Child Focused and Child Inclusive Family Law Dispute Resolution. One year findings from a prospective study of outcomes. *Journal of Family Studies*, 13(1), 8-25. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/jfs.327.13.1.8>

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# CONCLUSION