



# CIMC INTERNATIONAL TRAINEE FOLLOW UP

---

## Tracking implementation, 18-months after completing Child Inclusive Practices Training

---

Jennifer McIntosh, Ethan Katz and Ellen Welsh  
March 2023

## BACKGROUND

ChildrenBeyondDispute.com is home to the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling (CIMC) online course. The 18-hour program introduces the Child Inclusive Mediation (CIM) techniques developed over 30-years by Professor Jennifer McIntosh AM, a leading child psychologist in the divorce and family trauma fields.

The CIM method is an evidence-based intervention. A four-year longitudinal comparison study was conducted in three major cities in Australia. The research 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 CIM are described extensively, here (McIntosh et al, 2007; McIntosh et al, 2008).

In Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific region, Child Inclusive Mediation 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.

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

## INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION

We sought to understand the relevance of the method and utility of the online training format for countries beyond Australia, with a focus on cross-cultural fitness for purpose.

In 2020, we reported on a cohort of 27 family law dispute resolution practitioners, who completed and provided detailed feedback on the CIMC model and online training format. Participants were from Canada, France, Hong Kong, Ireland, Japan, Malaysia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Senegal, Singapore, South Africa, Switzerland, Uganda, UK, USA and Zimbabwe.

### THE FOLLOW UP STUDY

*What we wanted to know:* We followed this group up again in 2022, 18 months after completion of the online course. We were interested in the extent to which the training had bedded down into their dispute resolution practices, and in the confidence and capacity they now felt in applying the skills taught in the course.

*How we studied it:* A survey was designed, informed by the workforce evaluation datapool project at the Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University (Hameed et al, 2023), containing evidence based indices of professional growth through short course participation.

1. What stays with you most about the training program?
2. In appropriate cases, to what extent have you used CIMC methods in practice?
3. To what degree did you maintain knowledge of the core principles taught in the course?
4. To what degree did you further develop the skills taught in the course?
5. Relative to your confidence before starting the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling course, how confident do you now feel to:
  - a. Recognise when this approach to dispute resolution is indicated and not indicated
  - b. Manage a children's session within the CIMC framework related to this course
  - c. Manage a parent feedback session within the CIMC framework related to this course
  - d. Understand and manage difficult interactions in a parent feedback session
6. To what extent has your workplace context been supportive and enabling of you to apply the CIMC principles and approach?
7. To what extent do you believe your use of CIMC methods improved PARENT outcomes in the population you work with?
8. To what extent do you believe your use of CIMC methods improved CHILD outcomes in the population you work with?
9. What additional training or resources would support your implementation of child inclusive skills?
10. What suggestions do you have for improving the application of CIMC methods in your jurisdiction?
11. Do you have any other comments on your experiences with child inclusive mediation/counselling since you took the training course?

## WHO WERE THE RESPONDENTS

A survey link was emailed to all original participants, with two reminders. Participants were offered access to website resources in return for their time.

17 responded to the survey (63%). Participants were from Great Britain (4), Canada (3), USA (2), Zimbabwe (2), Japan (1), Netherlands (1), Senegal (1), Singapore (1), South Africa (1) and Uganda (1). Primary professional occupations were: Family Mediator (8); Counsellor (4); Lawyer (4); and International law negotiator (1).

---

# WHAT WE ASKED

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

18 months later, what stays with you most about the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling training program?

- How to include the child in the process in a non-threatening manner.
- Watching Jennifer talk with the children. The videos were transformative. The importance of considering the impact on children.
- The need to consider multiple factors before engaging children in mediation.
- How to approach the children without adding pressure to their load.
- Including the child and considering their future beyond the dispute.
- The approach to handle listening, not putting parents and children in the same place.
- Including the voice of the child into the work with the parents.
- Caregivers state of mind - bigger, stronger, wiser, kind and the “McIntosh principle” of managing feedback in a way that is conducive to hearing and not reacting.
- The tools: the developmental apology, who is banging the tribal drum? Not exposing children to emotional toxins; capture parents’ intent in the plan; 3 wishes about their family - hopes and dreams.
- Every aspect was informative and a true insight into the countless ways that families live through separation.
- The clear understanding of why and how to involve children in mediation.
- The skills and developmental knowledge required to do the work with the children. The application of the principles of CIM to various areas of my practice including mediation, collaborative family law and parenting coordination.
- The role of neutrality, and taking care of child's interest.
- The preparation for (i) eliciting information for and (ii) delivering the feedback sessions.
- Entire experience of helping families at crossroads.
- I think the model of seeing people for several sessions over a longer period has stuck with me. Typically, I only get to see them for 2 maybe 3 sessions over a couple of months and I have tried to extend this. It is a matter of funding in my country.
- Handling a very complex mediation context while holding the children’s needs centrally.



# FINDINGS

## WHAT DID WE FIND?

In appropriate cases, to what extent have you used CIMC methods in practice?

- 9 participants reported frequently or always using CIMC methods in their work, five often, three sometimes. No-one reported not using the methods learned.

To what degree did you maintain knowledge of or further develop the core principles taught in the course?

- 8 reported retaining their baseline knowledge and 9 reported further expanding it since the training.

To what degree did you further develop the skills taught in the course?

- 8 reported retaining their baseline skills and 9 reported further expanding them since the training.

Relative to your confidence before starting the Child Inclusive Mediation & Counselling course, how confident do you now feel to: *(5 point scale, from high to none)*

a. Recognise when this approach to dispute resolution is indicated and not indicated

- 16/17 (94%) reported more confidence and 1 person reported the same level of confidence.

b. Manage a children's session within the CIMC framework related to this course

- 16/17 (94%) reported feeling very confident and 1 person reported low confidence.

c. Manage a parent feedback session within the CIMC framework related to this course

- All participants reported feeling confident to do this.

d. Understand and manage difficult interactions in a parent feedback session

- All participants reported feeling confident to do this.



## WHAT DID WE FIND?

**To what extent has your workplace context been supportive and enabling of you to apply the CIMC principles and approach?**

- 10 reported a high degree of workplace support, and 7 reported mixed support.

**To what extent do you believe your use of CIMC methods improved PARENT outcomes in the population you work with?** (5 point scale from significantly improved outcomes for both parents, one parent, made no difference, made it a bit worse, made things significantly worse)

- All participants reported improvement (94% for both parents, 6% for 1 parent)

**To what extent do you believe your use of CIMC methods improved CHILD outcomes in the population you work with?** (5 point scale from significantly improved outcomes, improved outcomes, made no difference, made it a bit worse, made things significantly worse)

- All participants reported improvement (71% improved, 20% significantly improved)

**What additional training or resources would support your implementation of child inclusive skills?**

*Response themes were:*

- Refresher skills; advanced courses, with topics including how to use child inclusive skills with different styles of mediation; knowledge in child psychology
- Community of practice to continue the conversations and keep up to date
- Incorporate the study of COVID into our skills
- More helping aids to use during sessions
- Observing live sessions using Child Inclusive Mediation and practice opportunities
- Embracing the therapeutic justice potential of this work

**What suggestions do you have for improving the application of CIMC methods in your jurisdiction?**

*Response themes were:*

- The court personnel and Judiciary needs to see this work in action, and understand its efficacy to buy in
- We need national recognition that CIMC makes a big difference and the political will to support it, financially and otherwise
- It is important for parents to be able to understand why children have to be included because quite often they are not, and each parent wants to use them as a weapon against the other
- Probably group work to interact with other practitioners in order to share experiences
- For the course to be translated into different languages
- Proposing this course as a legal requirement for family mediators working especially in court connected mediations

**Do you have any other comments on your experiences with child inclusive mediation/counselling since you took the training course?**

*Comments included:*

- I was reluctant to offer child inclusive work before undertaking your course. I was trained and 'qualified', but your course was a game changer for me. I am now passionate about it and find myself increasingly approached to offer this service
- I continue to be impressed with the rigor of the research. Thank you for the work you do
- I feel better equipped to help families
- Unfortunately, as a result of lock down, I have not had many opportunities to engage in the usual amount of CIM. I am hoping this will change in the near future and I feel much more confident in this work as a result of the training
- The Grad Chats when I can attend them have definitely made me think deeply about how I practice, what I still need to learn and frankly, how new I still feel to the model. And yet, when I have had cases I have felt greater confidence in my skills, in particular in the parental feedback sessions
- Hugely valuable training which has enhanced my work with parents
- I feel braver and more confident in challenging parents when their children have given specific feedback about how they are affected by the conflict. Sometimes as mediators we feel we should not be direct, but I have found it helpful (obviously alongside empathy and sensitivity). I have had some parents who have really appreciated that approach



This follow up study has shown an impressive level of application of the Child Inclusive methods learned by this group of international practitioners, 18 months ago. The retention and advancement of knowledge and skills was notable, despite 41% experiencing mixed or neutral support from their workplaces for implementation of the methods. The training universally provided a basis for growing confidence in engaging parents, in conducting safe and supportive meetings with children and in the safe conduct of tough conversations during the course of giving feedback. Across the ten countries and multiple cultures represented in this group of 17 practitioners, there was remarkably little difference in reporting.

Support for an international community of practice in Child Inclusive Mediation methods remains high. This early evidence of long term training impacts of the Child Inclusive course for cross country application is encouraging.

We thank participants for their involvement in this study.

---

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

Hameed, M.A., McIntosh, J.E., McLean, S., Vuong, A., Welsh, E., O'Hanlon, B. [Manuscript submitted for publication]. Workforce Training in Family Therapy and Systemic Practices: An Evaluation Framework and Case Study. The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University.

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>

---

# CONCLUSION