



Flinders
University

Social Work Innovation
Research Living Space

SWIRLS

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The world is a whirlpool of information, theories, opinions and facts. We take the spin out, concentrate on research that uses evidence and lived-experience, and create innovative solutions in and around social work.

Our game plan is to progress social work, policy and research. We're doing things differently.

INTRODUCTION SWIRLS DIRECTOR

College of Education, Psychology & Social Work



Across Australia, we have an expectation that our society will be fair, supportive, and inclusive. Sadly, this is often not the case. The social challenges facing individuals, families, groups, and communities are complex and wide ranging. Nationally, we struggle with issues of child protection, domestic and family violence, housing and homelessness, the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and many other social issues.

SWIRLS is determined to make a difference, bringing together a group of academics with a deep field-based understanding of social issues, to create a leading national social work research centre.

SWIRLS aims to generate new evidence and research to understand social issues, and to support the development of practice and policy across the fields of social and human service work and, where research and evidence already exist, to translate this work to benefit society.

SWIRLS approach is co-designed with key stakeholders, reflecting our mission of advancing social work, policy and practice through innovation, collaboration and partnerships.

We value conversations of social justice and coming together with others to improve lives and create safer societies.

Professor Sarah Wendt

Matthew Flinders Fellow and Professor in Social Work
Director, Social Work Innovation Research Living Space (SWIRLS)
College of Education, Psychology and Social Work Flinders University



KEY FEATURES

We're developing a formidable reputation for producing theoretically driven research to examine social issues and social work practice in our ever-evolving world.



Social workers seek out knowledge by understanding their clients' personal meanings and problems, as well as the social and institutional issues that cause and contribute to inequality and oppression.

We deal with complex problems that need nuanced, evidence-based responses. In doing so, we embrace innovation, creativity, risk-taking, collaboration, and fresh perspectives. The evidence we produce—when put into action—will help social workers to work more effectively with our communities.

PROFESSOR SARAH WENDT

...is a champion of listening.

Whether she's interviewing a survivor of domestic violence or leading her team of SWIRLS researchers, Sarah believes in the importance of listening to diverse voices.

She values the experiences of people around her.

...is comfortable with being uncomfortable.

She's both a collaborator and a leader. She was rural-born and the first in her family to go to university. Domestic violence, child abuse and racism are just a few of the difficult social problems she tackles every day. It is her job and her passion.

...is an expert in design.

She's savvy and skillful when it comes to designing research. That means she's the first person to ask if you're developing qualitative and mixed-methods evaluation and research, development of interview schedules, ethics requirements, recruitment protocols and data analysis.

...is a driver of change.

She is a doer, a go-getter, a trailblazer. She is leading SWIRLS in a push for social change, development and cohesion.



Professor Sarah Wendt
Director, Social Work Innovation
Research Living Space (SWIRLS)

BACKGROUND SWIRLS

SWIRLS was established as a Flinders University Research Centre in March 2019.

SWIRLS aims to be a national leader in social work research that results in evidence-based contributions to practice, and therefore benefits the profession and the community.

SWIRLS is committed to 'speaking with' rather than 'speaking at' industry partners. SWIRLS projects prioritise co-design and knowledge translation, with researchers and stakeholders learning from each other through continuous collaboration, to build practice evidence bases. It is a research environment informed by appreciative inquiry and participatory action research. Such an environment allows for teams (including researchers, managers, policy makers, practitioners, and clients) to engage directly with and learn from each other. This encourages shared learnings across the life of the project and maximises the pertinent impact of all research outputs.

Since SWIRLS was launched, it has been highly successful. The SWIRLS approach is valued by government and practice communities, with SWIRLS attracting significant research funding and working with multiple human service agencies to build an evidence base for practice and policy, particularly in the fields of family and domestic violence and child protection.

Our research partnerships and funding have enabled PhD scholarships, and the employment of postdoctoral researchers, research assistants, and engagement with First Nations leaders and communities.





KEY FEATURES

- **SWIRLS is not a building. It is an ever-changing space defined by the people who create it.**
- **We tackle the big issues, and we're not afraid to question the status quo.**
- **Collaboration and open innovation are at the heart of what we do.**

Our research tackles many of the challenges that social workers face, including:

- Child protection
- Domestic and family violence
- Decolonisation
- Children and young people
- Family wellbeing
- Disability





THE SWIRLS APPROACH

A unique and innovative concept, driven by practice-led social work researchers based at Flinders University. We work alongside industry to influence policy and practice. We educate and mentor future social workers. And we are driven by social work justice values to uplift individuals, families and communities.

It's not your usual academia. We're transgressing the lines drawn between us to bring a fresh perspective to complex problems and the solutions they need.

This way, we know what's happening 'on the ground.' We know what social workers think will work, and what policies our governments might enact. We are adaptable and responsive. Our work is inter-disciplinary.

Our research environment is informed by appreciative inquiry and participatory action research. We offer evidence that has the power to promote social justice values and shape our future workforce through knowledge, education, and professional development.

Our vision is of a world where social justice values – access, equity, human rights and participation – are front and centre.

Our mission is to advance social work, policy and research through innovation, collaboration and partnerships.





COLLABORATION/CO-DESIGN

Co-design is a way of living, working and being in the world. At its heart, it is the shared goal of making the world a better place.

SWIRLS is formed around the goals of collaboration, partnerships, and open innovation to tackle complex social problems.

Our partnerships with industry, community groups and government bring together applied research excellence, the practice wisdom and field-based knowledge of social and human service workers, and the lived experiences and knowledge of individuals, families, groups and communities.

Our research is supported through competitive external funding schemes and partnerships with community organisations and government stakeholders. All of our work is co-designed, theoretically driven and prioritises knowledge translation. We bring together researchers, practitioners, policy people, and anyone who engages with social work and related professions, to share in the excitement of research that makes people's lives better.

Collaborate with us

Contact SWIRLS today to see how we can build a powerful research partnership with your organisation.

[Flinders.edu.au/SWIRLS](https://flinders.edu.au/SWIRLS)



MEET THE TEAM



DR CARMELA BASTIAN
is committed to child protection and family wellbeing and social work practice excellence.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR KRIS NATALIER
is a highly skilled interviewer with extensive experience in interviewing vulnerable children and young people, survivors of domestic and family violence and women living in poverty.



PROFESSOR DEBRA BATEMAN
is an advocate for young people who experience hardship or disadvantage. She explores the education of practitioners charged with the responsibility of social care, welfare, and human services reform.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LANA ZANNETTINO
is concerned with gender and family relationships across the life course with a particular focus on domestic and family violence and elder abuse.



DR KATE SEYMOUR
is known for her scholarship on masculinities, building her expertise in gender and violence.



LUKE CANTLEY
has family connections to the Gunditjmara nation of Victoria. He seeks to understand the nuances between child safety and cultural safety and culturally appropriate ways of engaging with community members.



DR BEN LOHMEYER
reveals the hidden forms of violence in young people's lives that follow the patterns of violation deeply embedded in our societies and our stories.



DR ALHASSAN ABDULLA
brings theoretical and methodological rigor to the study of child maltreatment and family violence.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR LORNA HALLAHAN
is strategically pushing for change across disability policy, adoption law, and workers' rights across human and health services.



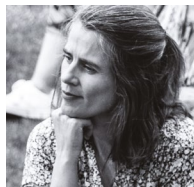
PROFESSOR GERRY REDMOND
is concerned with inequalities between young people, and the societal and policy factors that influence these inequalities.



PROFESSOR SALLY ROBINSON
is focusing on the participation of people with disability and draws together conceptual interests around inclusion, belonging and safety.



HAYLEY ANDERSON
is an effortless organiser. She uses her commitment to customer experience and innovation to support SWIRLS in the delivery of its strategic and operational outcomes in research and impact.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CATHERINE KEVIN
is focused on the histories of reproductive and maternal health in a range of contexts in Australian history.

Learn more and meet our Associate and Student Members





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STAY UPDATED



For more information about our world-class facilities, services and engagement opportunities, visit our website at: **Flinders.edu/SWIRLS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional owners and custodians of the lands on which we work and pay our respects to First Nations Elders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty has never been ceded. It always was and always will be, Aboriginal land. We recognise the past atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this land and that Australia was founded on the genocide and dispossession of First Nations people. We acknowledge that colonial structures and policies remain in place today and recognise the ongoing struggles of First Nations people in dismantling those structures. We acknowledge the intellectual property of our First Nations partners and recognise that our research would not be possible without their cultural authority and leadership.