



Keynote Speaker Promotional Form

Speaker Name: Sigrid James

Bio:

SIGRID JAMES, PhD, MSW is professor in the Department of Social Work and Social Welfare at the University of Kassel in Germany. She received her social work education in the United States (PhD University of Southern California, 2003; MSW UCLA, 1990) and was tenured at Loma Linda University, Department of Social Work and Social Ecology, in California, USA (2004-2016). She has completed a Fellowship in Dissemination and Implementation Research at Washington University (2010-12) and received multiple research grants in the US and in Europe. She also was the Editor-in-Chief for the peer-reviewed journal *Residential Treatment for Children and Youth* (2015-2018) and was counted among the top 100 contributors to social work journal scholarship in 2023. Dr. James has been writing and researching in the area of residential care for over two decades and is part of the International Workgroup on Therapeutic Residential Care as well as other expert groups dedicated to studying and improving residential care for children, youth, and their families. Presently, her projects are focused on cross-national comparisons of residential care.

Presentation Title: Lessons learned from cross-national comparisons of child residential care

Presentation Abstract:

Cross-national comparisons of child residential care provide a powerful lens through which to understand how societies respond to the needs of vulnerable children. This keynote draws on comparative research and practice examples from multiple countries to explore how historical, cultural, legal, and policy contexts shape the organization, quality, and outcomes of residential care. While national systems vary widely in their use of residential care, target populations, professional roles, and regulatory frameworks, common challenges emerge across borders, including balancing protection and participation, ensuring relational continuity, and supporting young people's transitions into adulthood.

The keynote highlights key lessons learned from cross-national comparison, focusing on what can—and cannot—be transferred between contexts. It examines the risks of simplistic policy borrowing, while demonstrating how comparative insights can stimulate critical reflection, innovation, and system improvement. Particular attention is given to the voices and lived experiences of children and young people, and to the ways in which workforce development and organizational culture influence everyday practice.

By moving beyond rankings and “best practice” claims, this keynote argues for a nuanced, reflexive approach to comparison that values diversity while identifying shared principles. Ultimately, cross-

national learning offers not ready-made solutions, but a deeper understanding of how residential care can better support children's rights, wellbeing, and life chances.

Get to know our speaker:

1. What key messages will you have for the audience?

- Residential care systems differ widely, but many core challenges are shared across countries.
- Context matters: history, culture, law, and policy shape what works—and what doesn't.
- Cross-national comparison is most valuable for learning and reflection, not copying "best practice."
- Children's and young people's lived experiences must be central to evaluation and reform.
- Workforce development and organizational culture are critical to quality care.
- International learning offers principles and insight, not simple solutions, to strengthen children's rights and wellbeing.

2. What makes congresses such as this important?

International congresses like IPSCAN are important because they bring the world's expertise into one room—connecting ideas, cultures, and disciplines to tackle shared challenges. They turn isolated knowledge into collective action and inspire solutions that are stronger precisely because they are global.

3. What is the best piece of advice you could give a student or early career researcher who is attending their first big congress?

Don't try to know everything or meet everyone—focus on being curious and present. Ask questions, start small conversations, and remember that everyone there was once attending their first congress too. One meaningful interaction or idea can shape your confidence and your career far more than a packed schedule ever could.

4. What are you most looking forward to at the ISPCAN 2026 congress?

To finally connect with my Australian colleagues on their side of the globe!

5. What are you looking forward to exploring during your time in Melbourne/Australia?

As a 1st-timer to Australia, just about everything – sights, food, and vibes!
