

# December 2007



**FCAV  
Committee of Management  
2007 – 2008**

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**Jackie Van De Burgt  
Gippsland Region**

Carers wishing to contact a  
Committee Member or an  
interim Helpline volunteer,  
please phone the  
FCAV Office on  
03 9 489 9770

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Julien Leith**

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MERRY  
CHRISTMAS  
FROM  
FCAV!



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NORTHCOTE  
Vic 3070

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NORTHCOTE

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**Dare to Care - Foster Care**  
ABN 30 747 010 099

## A FEW WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT



It was great to see many members attend the FCAV's AGM. A big thank you to Sylvia Davey for her strong leadership over the past year. A job well done when you consider the time and effort that is required in a National Conference year on top of the normal duties.

It was pleasing to see our new Constitution be adopted at the AGM. FCAV is in a healthy state when elections are conducted for members to represent the Association on the Committee. To the out going Committee of Management, thank you for your valuable contribution in the past. Hopefully we will be able to utilise your skills in the future. The new Committee has a balance of fresh faces, new ideas and carer support focus. The Committee is here to represent you. If you have any issues, ideas or comments in general regarding foster care don't be afraid to direct them to the Committee.

The Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care and a revised edition 2007 of the home-based care handbook were recently launched. Make sure you receive a copy from your CSOs. Over the next few months the Committee will set a Strategic Plan for FCAV. I hope to meet as many people as possible involved in the Home Based Care sector, especially carers, over the next year. I am looking forward to the challenges that lay ahead and wish to be part of a successful team in delivering positive outcomes for carers and their children.

Yours in caring,  
Peter van de Burgt

## THANKYOU

After a rather eventful six months, including a National Conference, two regional visits, and the endless variety of tasks that are a part of the everyday life at the office, I have now finished my first Social Work placement and thus my time as a student at the FCAV.

I would like to thank the FCAV for this fantastic learning opportunity. To have experienced working in a community organisation with a vision to better the situation of so many inspiring volunteers has been an invaluable experience. I believe that it has given me a perspective on Social Work that would be difficult to cultivate in many other organisations, and one that I will carry with me for the rest of my career.

I feel very privileged to have met and worked with so many carers throughout the duration of my placement, in Bendigo, Ballarat, at the conference and in the office. I have met some very hard-working, creative and truly inspirational people, all of who have enriched my time here. I have also been privileged to have worked with such knowledgeable and friendly staff. As my placement supervisor Julien has challenged and guided me, whilst Jenny has always been more than helpful and ever obliging, even as she fixed the computers and photocopiers I left smoking in my wake.

Once again, thank you to the FCAV for this valuable experience.

Regards,  
Nicole Dowling  
Student Social Worker

## CHRISTMAS MESSAGE from Christina Asquini

Dear Foster Carers

This time of year brings opportunities to spend time with friends and family. It is also a time to reflect on the past year and to think about the year ahead.



Foster carers provide care, support and love for some of the most vulnerable children and young people in Victoria and I would like to express my appreciation for your commitment and hard work over this past year.

This year has been another full year, commencing with the implementation of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* on 23 April 2007. The Act has brought a number of important reforms for children and young people in home-based care and their carers.

In October, the National Foster Care Conference was held in Melbourne at the Telstra Dome. There were over 400 participants who enjoyed a stimulating and varied program. Congratulations to the Foster Care Association of Victoria and others involved in organising the conference for the enormous effort and work that helped to make the conference an outstanding success.

At the opening of the National Foster Care Conference, the Hon Lisa Neville MP, Minister for Community Services, launched the revised Home-based care handbook for carers. I hope by now that you have a copy of the new version. The Minister also announced new guidelines to allow carers to make a decision for children in their care to sleep over at a friend's house without the friend's parents requiring a police check. These guidelines recognise the responsibility foster carers have in making day to day decisions for children entrusted to their care.

The Charter for Children in Out-of-home Care was recently launched at the Melbourne Zoo and provides an opportunity for both children and young people and foster carers to discuss what it means to feel safe and well. The Charter helps us all to ensure that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in our care always comes first.

At the conclusion of this year I will be moving from Child Protection and Family Services to commence work in Disability Services as the Director of Community and Individual Support. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment to the children in your care. I wish you well for your future in fostering and hope that 2008 brings opportunities for further involvement to improve the care given to children and young people, and the support given to foster carers.

I know that many children and young people will not have the opportunity to spend this special time with their birth family. Foster care families provide these children and young people with warmth, love and make this a very special time.

I wish you all a very safe and happy festive season.

Christina Asquini  
Director  
Child Protection and Family Services

## BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS



### Advice received from Department of Human Services

Last summer Victoria experienced extreme bushfire conditions with large fires lasting for several weeks. In the Gippsland area health and community services agencies were directly threatened by fire and were involved in evacuations of high-dependency clients and facility protection activities. The Bureau of Meteorology is predicting a hotter than average summer this year with higher minimum and maximum temperatures, and the state's fire agencies have identified very high bushfire risks for both rural Victoria and urban forested areas.

It is timely to remind all health, community and residential care services that it is necessary to review bushfire plans or emergency plans and ensure that documented policies and procedures are current, and that relevant fire drills are undertaken. Bushfire plans should be formulated in consultation with the local area CFA Community Safety Manager and should include evacuation arrangements, where applicable to residential circumstances, and facility preparedness (e.g. fire breaks around the facility and management of vegetation on facility grounds). Plans must also take into account the health and well-being of clients in relation to both the impacts of excess heat conditions and personal support needs.

It should be noted that even when a health or community service facility is located in the centre of town it might be at risk due to ember attack during wildfire conditions. It may also be at risk of disruption to its business due to smoke exposure, air quality, heat, loss of electrical power, loss of water supply, or inability of staff or support services to access or leave the agency. Contingency plans need to account for all of these potential disruptions.

The CFA booklet "*living in the bush*" provides essential information and aids to prepare a bushfire survival plan and prepare properties. This, and other information, is available at <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/publications/homesafety.htm>

Further information about the Department's emergency management and bushfire preparedness program including community information is available at [www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency).

## LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN: Care Teams & Participation

The concept of *participation* and the work of *Care Teams* are two key components in the Looking After Children (LAC) framework.



Although the Placement Agency Case Worker has the primary responsibility for completing LAC records, the whole care team has a joint responsibility in participating and assisting in identifying needs, exchanging information and developing plans.

It is important that all staff are clear about these terms in order to produce good outcomes for children / young people in Out of Home Care and apply a consistent approach in the work they carry out.

### *What is a “Care Team”?*

The “Care Team” is made up of all those responsible for the care of children / young people in Out of Home Care placements. They include birth parents, Child Protection Workers, Placement Agency Case Workers, Carers (Home Based Carers/Residential Care Workers), Clinicians and those who fall into the category of “other”. “Other” may be, for example, an aunt or uncle, godparent, neighbour, drug and alcohol worker or a significant adult in the child/young person’s life.

The Care Team is responsible for the care and planning for the child/young person and participates in the Looking After Children (LAC) processes. The Care Team works together to gather information, exchange information, attend meetings such as the Care and Placement Plan meeting, formulate and follow up plans.

*While it is the Placement Agency Case Worker’s (PACW’s) responsibility to develop the Care and Placement Plan for the child/young person in placement, they are unable to do this without discussion with the child/young person’s family, the carer/s or key residential worker, the child protection worker, others who have been involved with the child/young person and, depending on their age, the child/young person. Those with the most knowledge of and responsibility for the child/young person need to work together to establish shared goals and ways of achieving these.*

### **Looking After Children - Care and Placement Plan Record**

As part of the planning process, the care team will need to decide who undertakes the specific tasks to ensure that the child’s needs are being met whilst in care. The care team must ensure:

- The child’s safety, well being and stability and needs are being provided for
- The child’s relationship with their family is supported where appropriate
- Ensure that communication is maintained with all relevant parties and work is undertaken in a collaborative way.
- Contribute towards the development and implementation of the best interests plan and Looking After Children (LAC) planning processes

## LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN: Care Teams & Participation

- Confidentiality and privacy is maintained and personal and confidential information that is not relevant to the provision of good care to the child is not disclosed.
- Specific tasks such as transport of children for contact visits, medical appointments, educational or therapeutic services and supervising contact visits where possible and appropriate, should be shared between care team members.

### *What is Participation?*

Participation can mean different things to different people.

### *“Active participation”*

- An empowering approach to planning and evaluation that gives the service user and his/her family power in influencing decisions that will define and shape future policies and directions ([www.disability.qld.gov.au/quality/glossary.cfm](http://www.disability.qld.gov.au/quality/glossary.cfm)).
- Child participation aims to encourage and enable children to make their views known on issues that affect them. This accords with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### *We do this by:*

- giving children freedom to express themselves
- taking their views into account
- enabling them to learn constructive ways of influencing the world around them
- encouraging adults to listen to children

### *Child participation must be:*

- authentic
- meaningful
- on their own terms
- within their own realities
- in pursuit of their own visions
- relevant to their dreams, hopes and concerns
- Participation is more than simply taking part in a process, rather it is the sharing of decisions that affect the lives of children and young people and the life of the community in which they live.

(Lansdown, G (2005), *Can you hear me: the right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them*, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague)



In Victoria, the Office of the Child Safety Commissioner has developed and implemented the **Charter for Children in Out of Home Care** which reinforces the UN Rights of the Child and interprets these as how we can best ensure the rights for children in our care. Under the Charter for Children, participation is expressed:

*As a child or young person in care I need:  
to have a say and be heard  
to be provided with information*

## LOOKING AFTER CHILDREN: Care Teams & Participation

The participation of children/young people is vital. If it is not possible for children/young people to actively participate (due to age, developmental functioning, or not being present) then their views should be represented and taken into consideration for their best interests. Participation is about involving all Care Team members, with a special emphasis on the child or young person themselves, listening to their views and opinions and respecting these. It should be an empowering process that values the knowledge and experience of all members to ultimately plan for the best possible outcomes for the child/young person in Out of Home Care. Members of the Care Team have a shared responsibility. It is essential that Care Teams participate in information gathering, information sharing and working towards meeting identified goals.

Participation is not simply showing up to a meeting. Participation is not a phone call to inform a Care Team member that a meeting is scheduled or has occurred. It should not be tokenistic in its intention.

Things to consider when developing a Care & Placement Plan:

### *Would a meeting:*

- Be the best way to encourage the participation of the child or young person?
- Demonstrate to the child/young person that those involved in their life share the responsibility for their care?
- Resolve differences and clarify roles and responsibilities?
- Be the most appropriate way to involve everyone in the child's care?
- Be too confronting for the child/young person or their family (discussing embarrassing or sensitive issues)?

If you decide a meeting is not appropriate or key people can't or won't attend:

- *How will you get their input?*

Phone calls, home visit, meeting at the school, send preparatory information/questions for their response, etc

- *How will you provide them with follow up?*

Distribute copies of completed C&PP (or other relevant) record, phone calls, home visit or other meetings

## ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE A MEMBER OF FCAV?

Did you know that although you receive the newsletter, you may not be a member of the FCAV?

There are hundreds of Victorian carers who subscribe to this newsletter but have not yet applied for membership of the FCAV.

Membership is free, entitles you to vote at the AGM, and creates a strong and healthy organisation to support YOU! All you need to do is fill out and application on page eleven.

Why not become a member today? We would love to have you!



## SUPPORTING CARERS



### **An Extract from a presentation to the Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services Carer Dinner– 2nd November 2002 by Tracey Cocks.**

For those of you who I haven't met, my name is Tracey and my partner and I have been Good Shepherd carers for 17 months. We have both a long term placement of an infant and a regular respite commitment which with our two other children keeps us quite busy. In our spare time we have been known to be convinced to take in an extra baby or toddler.

I would like to start by acknowledging and welcoming our newest carers to Good Shepherd: Aiden and Paul Thomas, David and Jocelyn Pennington, Michael Sutton and Richard and Karen Sylik.

When Janet asked me to say a few words about supporting carers, I must admit it felt more like a thank you list, an opportunity to thank workers and the agency for delivering the things we need to make our roles do-able and enjoyable.

My first thought was to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the tireless and attentive work of Janet herself. Janet is the strongest advocate for not only our children but Good Shepherd and Foster Care itself. Her voluntary work with FCAV attests to her commitment to us as foster carers and I know from experience that our role as carers is much relieved when you have Janet batting for you. She has an uncanny ability to be able to read carers minds from as far away as Collingwood and doing whatever you might need before we have a chance to ask!

As carers we recognise that the roles of the case workers and support team are extremely complex and often challenging. We recognise that you can't always deliver what you hope to because of competing priorities and resource limitations. We recognise that like us you start your days with a sincere passion to contribute something valuable to not only the children but also the system that supports them.

So this is a thank you, to our workers, for the things they have done that have made us feel supported:

- Thank you for recognising that you have two equally important functions, one to ensure the children's needs are met and the other to nurture and support the carers
- Thank you for returning our phone calls and emails
- For making us feel like we have all your attention and concern when we have a problem
- Thank you for finding us resources when it appears there are none to be found
- For remembering our important dates and reminding us when we forget
- We thank you for giving us good quality information you have when referring us a child and for trusting us to share your assessments

## SUPPORTING CARERS - continued

- Thank you for the training sessions, conferences and supervision which has helped us develop as carers
- Thank you for establishing an infant support group for carers of babies and for organising an audience with Bernie Geary, The Children's Services Commissioner.
- Thank you for knowing when to keep us talking just that moment longer and knowing when we really need to go
- For popping in for a visit when you sense we need to see you and for taking the kids for a walk or reading a story when you can see we are over whelmed.
- Thank you for letting us know when you're going to be late and for respecting our homes and our privacy
- Thank you for following up ideas and locating resources and knowing just how much help we need to complete paper work
- For paying for our new born nappies and baby formula and recognising that the allowance doesn't always cover the essentials
- For involving us in all the processes to make decisions about the children in our care
- For advocating for our children and on occasion us, when things don't quite seem the way they should be
- For coming to our homes and baby sitting our children when we are in training and for holding our babies and entertaining our big kids.
- For sending us information about holiday ideas and tickets to fun activities we can take the kids to
- Thank you for recognising the important role carers own children have in making placements work. Thank you for including them and allowing them to feel special.
- For recognition – of the emotional pain that this work can cause and the great job that we all are doing
- Thank you for recruiting us, for giving us the hook we needed to make the first step required to become carers. For your almost painless assessments and your kindness and discretion. For maintaining our privacy and challenging our views. For leading and not pushing. For your follow up and connection – Thank you Bec Jones, you will be missed
- For Certificates and prizes and social functions where we truly can see that we are prioritised, appreciated and valued



But most of all we thank you for giving us the children. The precious souls who are with us for a short time or forever who remind us about all that is truly important in this world. We thank you for the opportunity to give!

## MEET OUR VOLUNTEERS



Seen here at Christmas lunch as a thank-you for all their hard work: (from back left) Bill, Graeme and Ron, and Joe (front) (with Jenny (staff), Nicole (student), Julien (staff), and Susan (student)) are our invaluable volunteers at the FCAV office.

Hard working, dedicated, and patient, these gentlemen will always turn up, even at short notice, to keep the office running smoothly. It's been a huge year too, with newsletters and Constitutions in the mail and a National Conference with bags to be filled. So from the team at the FCAV:

**THANK-YOU AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR!**

## CARERS CHARTER - Carers' views wanted

Work has commenced on the development of a charter for carers entitled Supporting Care Relationships – a Victorian Charter. The charter is intended for a range of carers across Victoria, including: carers of people with a disability, carers of frail older people and people with dementia, and carers of people with a mental illness as well as foster carers, kinship carers and permanent carers. The majority of carers targeted by the charter are caring for loved ones in their own homes. It is estimated there are more than 270,000 carers in Victoria, around 5,000 of which care for children through foster care, kinship care and permanent care.

The Charter contains the principles and standards for services that provide support to carers and those they care for. Please note that the charter is general in nature and intended to apply to numerous carer groups. It is not and cannot be a charter that is predominantly for one type of carer group- for example carers of aged people or foster cares. For this reason it is unlikely that the charter will specifically address every detailed issue relevant to foster care or other types of care. It is a general framework of principles. Not a practice handbook or set of standards.

I have attached a copy of the draft of the Carer's Charter for distribution to your membership and invite you to participate in providing feedback. There are questions on the back of the charter to enable foster and kinship carers to send feedback directly to the Department.

Comment on the draft charter is being sought from all carers across Victoria. I encourage you to participate in this opportunity. Please provide your comments to Claire-Anne Willis (Claire-anne.willis@dhs.vic.gov.au or on 9096 8622) by the end of January 2008.

Regards,  
David Clements  
Assistant Director  
Placement and Support

(For more information about this please see the enclosed insert)

## **FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC**

### ***Vision***

***“For all children in care to be cherished, connected and treated with compassion”***

### ***Mission***

***“To strengthen foster families and enhance the wellbeing of the children in their care”.***

## **MEMBERSHIP FORM FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC**

The FCAV Committee of Management encourage you to become a FCAV Member. **In order to advocate for optimum care of children in the out of home care system and improved support for carers, we need your support.** By joining the FCAV you strengthen us as a representative body of carers which increases our effectiveness in pursuing our vision and mission. Membership also enables you allow you to vote at the AGM and at any Special Meetings.

As a FCAV Member you will automatically receive the bimonthly newsletter.

I, (name) \_\_\_\_\_

Post Code

of (address) \_\_\_\_\_

desire to formally become a Member of the Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc.

I am a (please circle)

FOSTER

PERMANENT

KINSHIP CARER

OTHER (please state interest in joining) \_\_\_\_\_

with (name of agency) \_\_\_\_\_

I have been an accredited Carer since (date) \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to be bound by the Rules of the Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc as in force from time to time.

Signature of Applicant \_\_\_\_\_ Date / /

Please return to: **FCAV Inc** or by fax to **9489 9119**  
**PO Box 729**  
**Northcote, 3070**

The FCAV advises that all the above details will be treated with confidentiality and, as promised in the past, none of the above information will be passed on to a third party.

**Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc.  
RENEWED VISION, MISSION AND PURPOSE**

The FCAV has identified four core values that underpin its existence and operations now and into the future. The four values were enunciated by Adjunct Professor Jan Carter at the FCAV 2003 State Conference and strongly resonated with the organisation and its members. They are "*cherishment*", "*connectedness*", "*community*" and "*civility*". These values articulate a vision for the children in home-based care, the system to which they have entered and in which the FCAV and others operate.

**Vision :** *For all children in care to be cherished, connected and treated with compassion.*

**Mission:** *To strengthen foster families and enhance the wellbeing of the children in their care.*

**Statement of purposes**

*To advance a compassionate and effective foster care system that ensures the nurturing and protection of foster children; supports the needs of foster families and acknowledges the role of the biological family.*

*To promote a foster care system in which foster carers and their families can effectively help, nurture and care for foster children.*

*To promote a foster care system that prevents any on-going abuse to, or by, the children and protects the foster family unit.*

*FCAV seeks to achieve these purposes by, but not limited to*

- (a) providing and facilitating information and support networks, counselling, advice, referrals, and any other means of support and assistance for the foster carers*
- (b) research, collection and dissemination of information on or relating to foster care for carers, agencies, and other interested participants*
- (c) promoting and encouraging foster carers and the recognition of the important role they and their families play in the foster care system*
- (d) assisting all participants in the foster care system to develop policies and guidelines to enhance the nurturing and protection of the foster children and that support the needs of the foster families*
- (e) promoting and facilitating effective training and on-going development for foster carers.*

**FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA INC  
NEWSLETTER RENEWAL**

**(Please tick appropriate box)**

Approved Foster Carer

Donation of \$15 per annum

Interested in making a donation

(Nominate amount) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation/Agency \$60 per annum to receive newsletter (inc GST)

Name of Foster Care Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Foster Family \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_

Please make cheques payable to FCAV Inc and mail to: **FCAV**

**PO Box 729  
Northcote  
VIC 3070**