

# February 2007



**FCAV  
Committee of Management  
2006 – 2007**

**President  
Sylvia Davey  
Gippsland Region**

**Vice President  
John Woolcock  
South East Region**

**Secretary  
Lucie Kearney  
Gippsland Region**

**Treasurer  
Dora Kontaratos**

**Helen Brooks  
Grampians Region**

**Sandra Creaner  
North West Region**

**Bev Pumpa  
Grampians Region**

**Peter Van de Burgt  
Gippsland Region**

**Katie Hooper  
North West Metro**

**Janet Elefsiniotis  
North West Metro**

**Christine Peterson  
North West Metro**

Carers wishing to contact a  
Committee Member or an  
interim Helpline volunteer,  
please phone the  
FCAV Office on  
**03 948 99770**

**FCAV Staff**

**Executive Officer  
Julien Leith**

**Office Coordinator  
Jenny Clayfield**

## ***NATIONAL FOSTER CARE CONFERENCE 2007***

**5th - 7th October 2007**

**Telstra Dome,  
Melbourne  
Docklands**

Our theme  
**“Fostering Change”**

**IFCO - New Zealand  
11<sup>th</sup> Feb 2007 to 16th Feb 2007**

P O Box 729  
NORTHCOTE  
Vic 3070

48 HIGH ST  
NORTHCOTE

PH 03 9489 9770  
FAX 03 9489 9119  
EMAIL ADMIN@FCAV.ORG  
HTTP://WWW.FCAV.ORG

### **INSIDE THIS ISSUE:**

A few words from the President	2
2007 National Conference	3
Foster Care Communication & Recruitment Strategy	4
Welfare to Work	5
More on the 2007 National Conference	6
Relatives & Family Friends caring for Children	7
Family Fun Camp	8
Children of Prisoners	9
Committees & Working Groups	10
Membership Form	11
Newsletter Request	12

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

## A FEW WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT



Today I was wondering what I could write for this month's newsletter, when I received an email from a friend. The email told me that Julie Andrews on her 69<sup>th</sup> birthday had sung her favourite song to the American Association of Retired Persons. The "Sound of Music" song was "My Favorite Things". I thought I would share with you some of the words.

Hot tea and crumpets and corn pads for bunions,  
 No spicy hot food or food cooked with onions,  
 Bathrobes and heating pads and hot meals they bring,  
 These are a few of my favourite things,

When the joints ache,  
 When the hips break,  
 When the eyes grow dim,  
 Then I remember the great life I've had,  
 And then I don't feel so bad.

Sometimes during the emotional roller coaster of fostering we forget "the great life" we are living.

As President of FCAV I don't want to get completely submerged in our "lack of funding", the policy debates we have about Recruitment Retention and Training, or Therapeutic Foster Care and the introduction of the new legislation.

I want us to celebrate some of our achievements and the National Foster Care Conference in October will certainly be great opportunity for a creative, constructive and enjoyable learning forum (make sure you put 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> October in your diaries).

My good news story for this edition is the personal rewards I felt when I was able to track down the former foster carers for a young lady, now in her 20's, who wanted to make contact with the people she had lived with as a child - "to say thank-you and tell them how I am going & that I have never forgotten them"

Things like this make it all worthwhile.

Yours in caring  
 Sylvia Davey

# ***AFCA NATIONAL FOSTER CARE CONFERENCE 2007***

**Friday 5th - Sunday 7th October 2007**

**Telstra Dome, Melbourne  
Docklands**

This is a great opportunity for Victorian carers to attend a national conference on foster care - in your own home state! The conference is a collaborative effort by AFCA (Australian Foster Care Association), FCAV and DHS.

The theme of the conference is

## **“Fostering Change”**

The aim of the conference is to provide a creative, constructive and enjoyable learning forum. We want all involved in the foster care sector to share experiences and learning, both formally and informally. In particular, we will attempt to address the issues challenging the sector now and in the next five years.

The conference is aimed at foster, permanent, relative and kinship carers. CSO workers, departmental workers, academics and researchers and any others in the field will be warmly welcomed.

There will be workshops, panel discussions, keynote speakers and snapshot and poster presentations. The snapshots are short sessions in which carers or workers can highlight an innovative programme or project to showcase Victoria to the other states and territories. Discussions, both in workshops and informally during breaks, will be encouraged so we can share our knowledge with other carers and, in turn, obtain new ideas to try.

Planning is well underway. There will be particular focus on issues around carer retention, support, training, indigenous placements and supports, best practice and the new legislation, to name just a few. Final details on costings etc will be in the next newsletter. Meanwhile, carers can speak to their agencies about how carers can be supported to attend the conference - this could be payment of the registration fees, arranging child-care, helping with transport/accommodation costs etc. So.....

**PUT IT IN YOUR DIARIES NOW!!!!!!**



Centre for Excellence  
in Child and Family Welfare Inc

## **Introducing the Victorian Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy**

On 30 July 2006, foster carers, departmental and sector workers, children and care leavers attended a special event to announce the one-off funding of \$500,000 to develop a new *Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy* to strengthen Victoria's approach to foster care recruitment by:

- increasing the number of foster carers in Victoria and reducing the burden on current foster carers; and
- assisting in the improvement of foster care recruitment and retention practices across the Victorian sector.

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) will run this project and is supported by a reference group of FCAV, workers from foster care services and DHS regional and head office staff who are guiding the development of the *Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy* (FCCRS).

We are pleased to announce Success Works, a consulting firm specialising in our sector, has been engaged to undertake the important initial research tasks identified by the reference group.

The research will analyse the demand for foster carers in each region, explore what works in the recruitment of foster carers (for example, positive carer word of mouth, community based approaches, TV campaigns), and will point the way to how the home based care sector can better meet the needs of current foster carers, and decrease the number of caregivers who cease fostering. By conducting this initial research, our aim is to be able to develop the best possible strategy for Victoria.

The input and expertise of foster carers is critical to the success of the project and there will be opportunities to become actively involved in the development and implementation of the FCCRS.

One such opportunity will be the Victoria-wide *Best Practice Engagement Project* (BPEP). The BPEP will involve teams of workers, managers and nominated foster carers who will have the opportunity to discuss and share their knowledge and experience about best practice in recruitment and retention of caregivers and develop new ideas and processes. The project is currently being scoped and will get underway around April '07.

The Centre and the FCCRS reference group value your expertise and look forward to your input and support over the course of the *Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Project*.

For any further information or to provide feedback please contact Emily Duizend, Foster Care Recruitment Project Officer on 03 9614 1577 or email [fosterproject@cwav.asn.au](mailto:fosterproject@cwav.asn.au).

## WELFARE TO WORK - The impact on Foster Carers

### Background:

Foster carers, who are the carers of children under 16, are **exempt** from the “looking for work” provisions of Welfare to Work. They also receive a **higher** Newstart Allowance (originally called Enhanced Newstart), which is equivalent to the Parenting Payment. The carers must be active and approved/accredited by their foster care agency or relevant state government department. They must also take proof of their status to their Centrelink office when requested.



The guidelines state: "Exemptions should only be granted to **principal carer parents** who are registered and active foster carers until the expiry of their registered and active status, and for no longer than 12 months at a time."

Hence foster carers also need to qualify as a **principal** carer to get the exemption. The definition used by Centrelink is: "Principal carer parents are defined as the principal carer of a dependent child under the age of 16". This is the part which appears to be a problem for some carers.

It would seem that foster carers who do not have the physical care of a child/young person are not eligible for either the “looking for work” exemption, or the higher Newstart Allowance (NA). This is even if they are considered active and approved/accredited by their foster care agency and may be regularly providing care for foster children.

### Problem:

It seems that not receiving Family Tax Benefit for a child/young person can be a trigger to override the exemption and the higher Newstart Allowance.

This then becomes a catch 22 situation. In Victoria, carers are asked not to apply for Family Tax Benefit (FTB) for the first three weeks of a new placement in case the child returns home to the birth family or goes to a kinship placement. In other cases, the carer may not be eligible for the full FTB when the child is transitioning home or to another placement.

Thus the carer is doubly penalised - s/he cannot apply for FTB for three weeks. In turn, Centrelink does not technically recognise that the child in the carer's home because FTB is being claimed by another person. Furthermore, an application for Newstart Allowance is dependent on FTB being paid to the carer.

This is also a problem for carers who are

- awaiting a placement (even if it is planned),
- providing emergency/reception care,
- caring for a young person over 15 and/or on a break.

Foster care, by its nature, is unpredictable, with children coming into and out of care without a lot of prior notice. But by being available to take on this special role, the carer makes her/himself less attractive to take on paid employment. What employer would be prepared to accept - “Sorry, I can't come in today - I have an emergency placement”?

We are very concerned that some carers are not able to get the exemptions from looking for work and higher NA that other foster carers have. This will result in carers being forced to stop fostering to look for work. We know that there is a decline in the numbers of carers and this just adds to the problem.

There will be a campaign this year to have a system in place which recognises that **all** foster carers, who are active (and therefore available for foster care placements) and approved/accredited by their foster care agencies are eligible for the “looking for work” exemption and the higher Newstart Allowance.

If you have had any problems with the Welfare to Work system, could you please contact the office (email or phone or fax) so we can collect examples of these problems to use in the campaign. We have been able to help some carers who have been affected, but it is hard going.

Helen Falconer

# ***AFCA NATIONAL FOSTER CARE CONFERENCE 2007***

**Friday 5th - Sunday 7th October 2007**

**Telstra Dome, Melbourne, Australia  
Docklands**

## **“Fostering Change”**

Those interested in speaking or presenting a workshop / concurrent session at the 2007 National Foster Care Conference are invited to supply a 250 word abstract of the topic and method of presentation, together with brief information about themselves and any co-presenters, to the Conference Organising Committee by **COB 23rd March 2007**.

Applications are encouraged from foster, permanent, relative and kinship carers, workers, researchers, consultants and others in the field.

The aim of the conference is to provide a creative, constructive and enjoyable learning forum where all involved in the out of home care sector can share experiences and learning, both formally and informally.

The conference sessions and activities should focus on achieving positive outcomes or enhancing practice and, in particular, attempt to address the issues challenging the sector now and in the next five years.

Pro-active discussion and sharing of ideas is encouraged in sessions and we invite you to think laterally and creatively in terms of session delivery. Most effective learning may come from a visit to a local organisation as well as a formal session, so please share your thoughts with us. Some suggestions for relevant content are: carer retention, training, case planning and management, indigenous placements; carer support and best practice. These suggestions have been provided by carers and workers from across Australia but should not limit your proposal.

*Further information and inquiries about the forms and guidelines for the submission of proposals and presentation of papers may be obtained by email from [conf2007@bigpond.com](mailto:conf2007@bigpond.com)*

## RELATIVES & FAMILY FRIENDS CARING FOR CHILDREN

The Placement and Support Unit within the Office for Children is reviewing policy and practice for children who have had a child protection investigation and who are placed with relatives or family friends. This 'kinship care' is now 60% of new placements and 33% of overall placements.



An Issues Paper is on [www.office-for-children.gov.au/placementandsupport](http://www.office-for-children.gov.au/placementandsupport). This sets out what we know about relatives caring for children, and details of recent research on the distinct nature, strengths, difficulties and challenges of these family situations.

An advisory group for this policy process includes government agencies, managers of services, advocates for relatives and for children, and peak bodies.

A 4 page sheet is available for those who may not wish to read a longer document. This has key points and has space to write responses. It will be posted on the website. Alternatively, ask your worker for a copy.

Questions and issues will be publicly discussed in meetings below (some have already occurred). Relatives, workers, and other interested persons are welcome. Some issues will be discussed in more depth later.

### Confirmed Meetings

Swan Hill	Placement and Support Forum	24 January	Sharon Green 5434 5784
Geelong	Relatives	7 Feb (am)	Lauren Wilding 5226 4517
Geelong	Workers	7 Feb (pm)	Lyn Edwards 5222 6911
Sunshine	Relatives	9 Feb (lunch)	Chris Jones 9312 3544
Sunshine	Workers	9 Feb (pm)	Chris Jones
Heidelberg	Relatives	12 Feb (pm)	Jan Roberts 9458 3566
Wangaratta	Workers	19 Feb	Kate O'Brien 02 6055 7754
50 Lonsdale St	Child Protection Managers	23 Feb	
Centre for Excellence in Child & Family Welfare CSOs		5 Mar	Sunitha Raman 9614 1577
Sale	Workers and relatives	23 Mar (am)	Ruth Payne 5136 2530
Morwell	young people (tbc)	23 Mar	Ruth Payne
Morwell	Workers and relatives	23 Mar (pm)	Ruth Payne

*Dates pending (25/1/07):*

Dandenong

Youth Ambassadors (young people)

Ballarat

Aboriginal organisations and community representatives

Contact the person listed above or Sue Kirkegard on [sue.kirkegard@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:sue.kirkegard@dhs.vic.gov.au) if you would like to come to a meeting.

## NORVAL CONFERENCE CENTRE - Family fun camp



### PRESS RELEASE

Kath Norton

Archery anyone? How about the Hot Lava Challenge? Or the Spider Web initiative? Maybe learning how to relax using Tai Chi is more your speed? Welcome to the Family Fun Camp. These and many more activities were available during this special camp which catered for families with a foster child living in their home.

From Monday 25th September to Thursday 28<sup>th</sup>, Norval Conference Centre in Halls Gap hosted this year's Family Fun Camp, for carers of 'out of home care' children aged 0 to 18. The camp was organized for Wimmera carer families by Wimmera Uniting Care, in conjunction with Norval and in consultation with some representative carers and children in out of home care. The camp focused on providing an opportunity for people in similar circumstances to come together – both carers and the children had the chance to talk to each other about shared experiences.

The emphasis was on fun. Twelve families enjoyed a range of activities organized by Norval and the planning committee to suit the camp. Physical challenges were set for all family members, including those who may have had a toddler and grandma on board! Many regular Norval activities were included in the program, such as the 'high ropes challenge' – a thick metal wire suspended between two tall gums and traversed (carefully!) with team members controlling the safety support ropes. These activities, which are usually incorporated into itineraries belonging to school and corporate groups', are tailored to suit the age differences and circumstances of the family fun camp.

Information sessions form part of the agenda, with carers learning about Attachment Disorder, awareness from the Foster Care Association of Victoria and alternative ways of relaxing with Tai Chi. A highlight were the games promoting self-esteem, devised and run by an organization from Melbourne called Create – who would have thought that chicken suits and mohawks could be so much fun!

The camp was free for the families, with Wimmera Uniting Care securing some funding through the Share Appeal and Norval subsidizing accommodation and meals. Families made their own way to the camp or joined the bus provided, from Horsham. Norval staff and five Wimmera Uniting Care colleagues put on their 'team leader' hats in rotation over the four days, organizing and directing activities and ensuring that fun was being had at all times!

The Family Fun Camp shared its time at Norval with two walking groups and a U3A group, but was able to utilize their own space at Norval Lodge, which accommodates ninety people in fourteen 6-bed units, with two 3-bedroom units. Having their own meeting, dining and recreational facilities meant that the families could be comfortable in the knowledge they were spending time exclusively with people who could relate to their own situations.

This camp for remarkable families is a way of saying thank you for the important responsibilities they take on. There is no clear definition of what 'family' means. Couples with or without children, older, younger and single people can all come under the 'carer family' banner. One thing however, is certain - they are all special and most deserving of some support, time away and... fun!

## CHILDREN OF PRISONERS – the policy victims of crime

By Terry Hammond, Senior Researcher, *Children: Unintended victims of Legal Process*  
VACRO (Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)

In Australia today approximately 35,000 children have a parent in prison, and approximately 145,000 children now under 16 years have experienced this trauma at some time. Over the next four newsletters VACRO will be providing a series of articles exploring the issues, needs and policies associated with these children and the people who care for them while parental prison terms are served.



A Discussion Paper titled *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process*, providing detailed findings from a two year research project is available at [www.vacro.org.au](http://www.vacro.org.au) [Children Unintended Victims](#). The project commenced with a review of legislation and policies affecting the children of prisoners from the time of parental arrest through to post-release. In brief, it was found that:

- The Victoria Police have no guidelines for officers, or policies covering the apprehension, arrest, charging or detention of primary carers with dependent children; nor does it appear that various issues related to prisoners' children, such as their care, holding, transference of legal responsibility, or the trauma children may experience are given adequate consideration. Similarly, the report suggests that reconsideration of the planning and execution of property search warrants may be due where dependent children are present or returning to the family.
- DHS has no protocols with Victoria Police concerning this group of children.
- Court search and arrest warrants make no reference to the special circumstances and legal protective requirements primary carers may have for their dependent children.
- Bail laws make no reference to the needs of this group in terms of the above point. When mothers are unable to obtain bail and are remanded in custody, there are no laws, policies, or guidelines, with the courts, the police, the prisons, or DHS regarding who takes responsibility for the children, or how this responsibility is transferred from the mother. Nor are there any protocols alerting any department that a potentially neglected child may be unidentified.
- At sentencing there are no laws, policies, or guidelines with the courts, the Victoria Police, Corrections, or DHS regarding who takes responsibility for the children when their primary carers receive prison sentences, or how this responsibility is transferred from the primary carer.
- DHS has no protocols with Corrections Victoria regarding the children of primary carers who are entering prison. Policies concerning the comparatively small number of children who are eligible to reside with their mothers in custody are a clear exception.
- Many children will start school, change schools, move to high school, or drop out of school during their primary carer's prison sentence. Many of these children will also bring their trauma symptoms to school, including declines in academic performance, truancy, anti-authoritarianism and bullying. However, there are no protocols between the Department of Education and Corrections regarding either the imprisoned primary carers or their children.
- Corrections have no policy covering the release of primary carers in terms of the needs of the primary carers, their children or the interim carers.
- Interim carers are not informed of a primary carer's imminent release. Provisions are not often made for interim and primary carers to plan together for the handover of children.

The next article will explore the impact of this policy vacuum on mothers in prison, their children, arresting police officers, solicitors, judges, and 'interim carers'. VACRO has been working towards addressing the identified policy and service gaps – the achievements so far and what still needs tackling will be covered in the final two articles.

## FCAV SUB COMMITTEES

Finance Subcommittee	Peter Van de Burgt, Dora Kontaratos, Adam McCann & Julien Leith
Policy & Procedures	Sylvia Davey, John Woolcock, Helen Falconer, John Hulskamp, Julien Leith - <b>Offers Invited</b>

## WORKING GROUPS – FCAV REPRESENTATIVES

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner	Helen Falconer & Julien Leith
AFCA	Bev Pumpa & Lucie Kearney
Child Protection & Family Services Advisory Group	Sylvia Davey & Julien Leith
DHS Liaison	Sylvia Davey, John Woolcock, Helen Falconer, Lucie Kearney & Julien Leith
Face-to-Face	Claire Brunner
Foster Care Advisory Group	John Woolcock
North West Region Home Based Committee	Chris Peterson
Interim Help Line	Helen Falconer, Lyn Bicknell & Committee Members
Kinship Care State Wide Network & Advisory Group	Chris Peterson
Leaving Care	Ian Seal
Looking after Children	Sylvia Davey
Carer Reimbursement Group	Sandra Creaner
National Conference	Bev Orr, Catherine Burnett, Cas O'Neil, Emily Duizend, Helen Brain, Katie Hooper, Sylvia Davey, Lucie Kearney & Julien Leith
Email Response Group	Claire Brunner, Sylvia Davey, Helen Falconer & Cheryl Whitehead
Therapeutic Foster Care Program Development Advisory Group	Claire Brunner & Sylvia Davey
Including Children Advisory Committee	Julien Leith



## **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 \$10 per annum

Interested in making a donation

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

Organisation/Agency \$55 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**