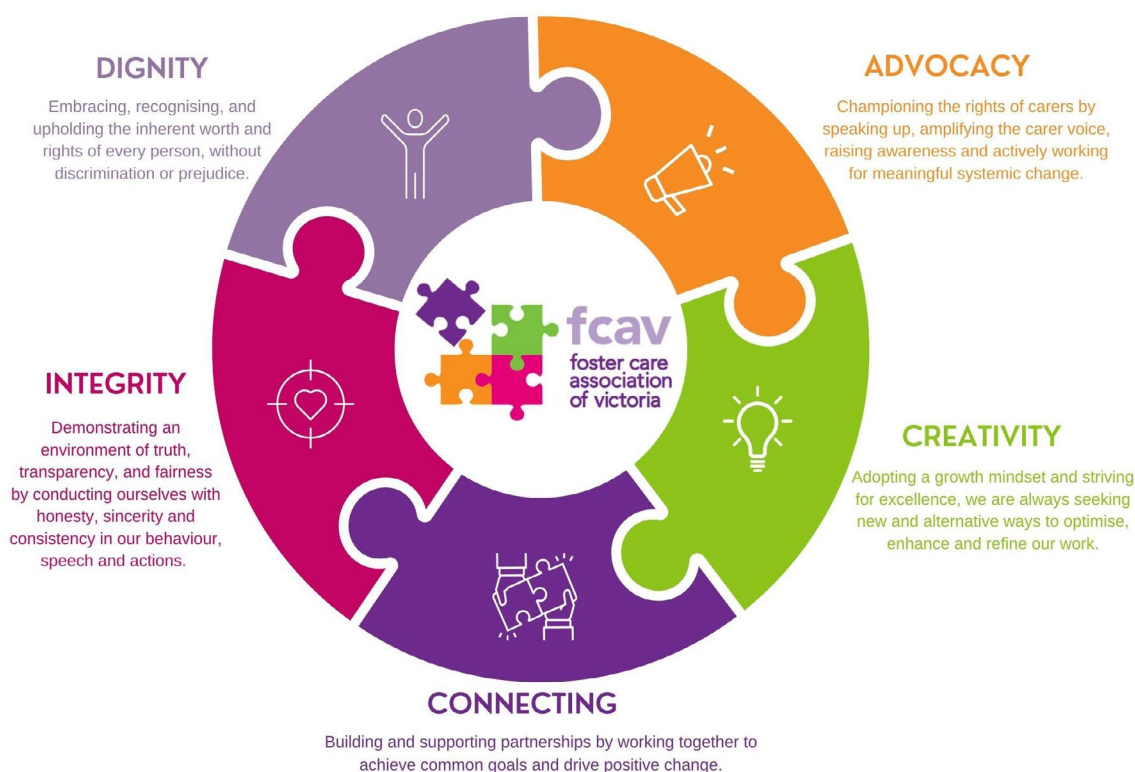


Annual Report 2022-2023

Annual Report July 2022 - June 2023

The Foster Care Association of Victoria presents a year in review. As the peak body for foster carers, the Foster Care Association of Victoria's mission is to build Victoria's recognition, respect and resources for foster carers, the volunteers who every day and night make a difference in the lives of Victoria's children and young people. Together we stand to make a difference.





Foster care is the backbone of the Victorian response to protective intervention for children and young people at risk. Foster carers are the volunteers providing a home, family life and care to children and young people who are unable to live with their birth family or kin for a variety of reasons. Many of these children have suffered traumatic events and the role of foster carers is critical and complex to provide a safe and healing environment for children and young people to reach their full potential.

The Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV) provides independent information, support and advocacy directly to all Victorian foster carers and families. Our work directly impacts the care provided to the thousands of Victorian children and young people in foster care by providing:

Carer Support Service - provides free, independent learning and development, therapeutic support, advice and phone or online advocacy and support for foster carers.

Advocating on behalf of foster carers to government, their agencies or ACCOs, and raising the profile of foster care in the community.

Programs and Events - as the only centralised body for all foster carers in the state; providing forums, peer support and carer events.

Providing **carer news** and updated **information** through our comprehensive website, regular newsletters and social media sites.

The FCAV represents all foster carers across Victoria. In tandem with the support we provide to individual foster carers, our role as a membership association is to advocate for vital improvements to the foster care system. Our member base consists of foster carers, kinship and permanent carers, and supporters from the wider sector and community.

The Foster Care Association of Victoria aims to strengthen Victoria's investment, respect and resources for home-based carers and the children and young people in their care.



Acknowledgement of Country

The FCAV acknowledges the unceded sovereignty of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the continued connection to Country – including lands, cultural knowledges and their peoples – and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We are the united voice and advocate for all foster carers across Victoria, and we aim to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.

President & CEO Report

Megan Sadlier

President of the Board of Directors

Samantha Hauge

Chief Executive Officer



It is an honour that we are charged with providing services and advocacy to our extraordinary volunteer carers who open their hearts and homes to our state's most vulnerable children.

Whilst you would think our foster carers would be wholly recognised and fully supported for the crucial role they play in caring, nurturing and connecting with our children in care, sadly this is not always the case.

Carers are doing it tough and the FCAV remains extremely concerned about the ongoing decline in the number of available foster carers and the twin challenges of carer recruitment and retention. Yet again, Victoria has significantly higher carer exit rates compared with other states. We hear from carers that they are not feeling valued, respected, and fully supported by Government. One of the driving factors is that Victoria has the lowest care allowance of any state, so the FCAV, in conjunction with Permanent Care and Adoptive Families, launched the public **Campaign to Increase the Care Allowance** in June following the repeated failure of Government to increase the real value of the Care Allowance.

At a federal level, the FCAV has been advocating strongly that all children in home-based care be automatically eligible for the **Child Dental Benefits Scheme**, as currently eligibility for children in care is determined on our volunteer carers' income and assets, and advocating similarly regarding eligibility requirements for means testing carers' access to a range of Federal Government family welfare payments to support the children in their care.

This year we are delighted to see that our carers have reaped the benefits of the establishment of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) **Care Support Help Desk** that has already taken 2,600 enquiries since service delivery commenced in October 2022.

The FCAV advocated strongly for the establishment of this much needed service to ensure carers had a

central contact point to obtain the necessary supports for their placement and assistance to obtain essential documentation for the children in their care such as a **Medicare card** and **Birth Certificate**. The FCAV continues to advocate for even more resourcing to expand the provision of services to carers to include assisting carers with **Passport applications** and assistance navigating the **NDIS**.

We have commenced a **Roadshow** to meet with as many agency CEOs and staff as possible to let them know of the services and work undertaken by the FCAV and to listen to local agency issues. Later in the year, we will also undertake a full **Carer Survey** to capture the perspectives of carers, in order to prioritise advocacy and improve support for carers, along with collecting demographic data.

Our **Carer Support Team** has continued to deliver strong support to our carers and has this year responded to the highest number of enquiries in five years, as carers require support to manage the complexities of caring. Our **Carer Assistance Program** expanded to deliver therapeutic groups and we are seeing more couples accessing the program.

We have actively contributed towards policy changes and reviews, including case management for **Aboriginal children transitioning to Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations** as well as seeking improvements to **CIMS investigations**.

We thank all our FCAV members, our staff for their professionalism and unwavering dedication, our board who work tirelessly to provide good governance, our partners and supporters within the DFFH, Community Service Organisations, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and our sister peak bodies.

Our deepest gratitude is extended to all our foster carers who selflessly dedicate themselves to creating a brighter future for the precious children and young people in their care.

With Gratitude

By investing in the FCAV, donors and subscribers provide the organisation with the resources that are not covered by our modest core funding. According to latest data, the FCAV supported over **30%** more carers than we are funded for and added to our suite of services to support, inform and advocate on behalf of nearly **2000** foster carer households across Victoria.

This work directly impacts the care provided to the thousands of Victorian children and young people in foster care. It stands to reason that the better the carer is supported, the better the care they can provide, thus improving children's quality of life now and into the future. We are grateful for the donations and fundraising efforts that enable us to offer and expand our services and opportunities to support carers.



The Foster Care Association of Victoria is funded through the state government of Victoria, agency subscribers, foundation grants, fundraising campaign donors and the generous volunteer support of individuals and organisations. Thank you to all subscribers and donors who provided the FCAV with generous donations throughout the year.

Our Agency Subscribers

Thank you to the Community Service Organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that formed our subscription base for 2022/2023.

- **Anchor Community Care Ltd.**
- **Anglicare Victoria**
- **Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative**
- **Bendigo District Aboriginal Cooperative**
- **Baptcare**
- **Berry Street**
- **Brophy Family and Youth Services**
- **CAFS Child and Family Services Ballarat**
- **GEGAC Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative Ltd.**
- **Key Assets**
- **Life Without Barriers**
- **Lighthouse Foundation**
- **MacKillop Family Services**
- **Mallee Family Care**
- **Mallee Accommodation and Support Program**
- **Mallee District Aboriginal Services**
- **Meli**
- **Njernda Aboriginal Corporation**
- **OzChild**
- **Quantum Support Services**
- **Rumbarala Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd.**
- **Settlement Services International – foster care program**
- **Uniting**
- **Upper Murray Family Care**
- **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**
- **Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative Family Services**

Our Donors

Thank you to these supporters who made significant monetary donations to the FCAV throughout the financial year:

- **Australian Red Cross, Trauma Teddies**
- **Big Group Hug**
- **BOUNCE Inc.**
- **Commonwealth Bank, Abbotsford Branch**
- **Eddie O'Shaughnessy - cake stall fundraiser**
- **Fringe Festival - tickets for carers**
- **Immune Deficiencies Foundation Australia**
- **Kelly Mini Sports – sports vouchers**
- **The Australian Quilters Association Inc.**
- **Kangaroo Ground Primary School Fundraiser**
- **Nadia Rocca Chocolates**
- **Parade College – Backpacks**
- **Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School - Eddie's Backpacks**
- **Sovereign Hill Museums Association Limited**
- **Simone Maric**
- **World Festival of Magic, Lions Club of Melbourne Markets Inc**

Find out about making a donation on the FCAV website:

www.fcav.org.au/get-involved/donate-now

Probono and Volunteer Support



Kate Gray
Proof reading

2022-2023 Team



From left: Biba Dickson, Tessa Hughes, Anna Viola, Rowan Pulford, Sarah Wauters, Bronwyn Hume, Samantha Hauge, Tonya Bavaro, Leigh Hillmann and Deb Collard

Our Board of Directors



Megan Sadlier, President
Tori Smith, President (exit September 2022)



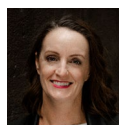
Luke Sapwell, Vice President



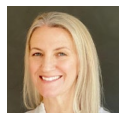
Mathew Fredericks, Secretary
Sue Segar, Secretary (exit September 2022)



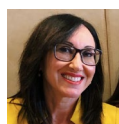
Kym Philips, Director



Sarah Witty, Director
(appointed September 2022)



Natalie Pryor, Director
(appointed October 2022)



Zoe Sredovic, Treasurer
(Co-opted)



Alexis King, HR Consultant
(Co-opted)



Morgan Smithe, Lawyer
(Co-opted)

Our Staff

Chief Executive Officer - Samantha Hauge
Office Manager - Bronwyn Hume
Finance Manager – Bhavna Joshi
Finance Officer – Rebecca Butterworth

Carer Support Team

Carer Support Manager – Tessa Hughes
Carer Advocate - Leigh Hillman
Carer Advocate – Biba Dickson
Carer Advocate – Kay Law (exit March 2023)
Learning and Development Project Coordinator – Deb Collard
Carer Assistance Program – Tonya Bavaro
Carer Assistance Program (PCAF) – Nic Masuku

Engagement and Advocacy Team

Communications Manager - Anna Viola
Policy Advisor - Rowan Pulford
Member Relations Coordinator - Sarah Wauters
Member Relations Coordinator – Claire Mance (exit February 2023)

Carer KaFÉ Team

Carer KaFÉ Program Manager – Paula White
Carer KaFÉ Project Officer – Laura Hunter
Carer KaFÉ Project Administrator – Loretta Iorardo (exit March 2023)
Carer KaFÉ Program Officer - Keith Pereira (exit March 2023)
Carer KaFÉ Administrative Assistant – Andrea Craig

A year at a glance

FACTS & FIGURES

FCAV 2022-2023

During this year carer engagement, advocacy and support reached record numbers

876 enquiries over 1491 hours of service to carers through the carer support team

12

FCAV attended all 12 Carer Advisory Group meetings

124

carers attended the FCAV carer celebration and AGM

180

carers attended FCAV learning & development sessions

4

major policy and process changes following FCAV advocacy

birth registrations, care support help desk, renaming & expansion of the grandparent help line and refunding & expansion of the CAP program to support permanent & foster carers

451

new followers on the FCAV facebook page

11

carer interviews featured in FCAV media and online

1600

submissions to the care allowance campaign

40

nominations to the FCAV Commitment to Carer awards

1491

hours of service delivered to support carers through the care support team

6

CEO chat sessions held with an average of 11 participants each

250

new FCAV members contacted to ensure they know about services

170

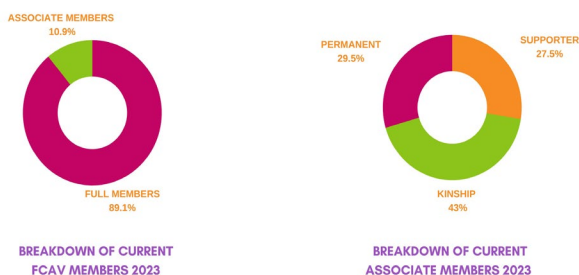
engaged in FCAV/university affiliated research, surveys and forums

Membership Report

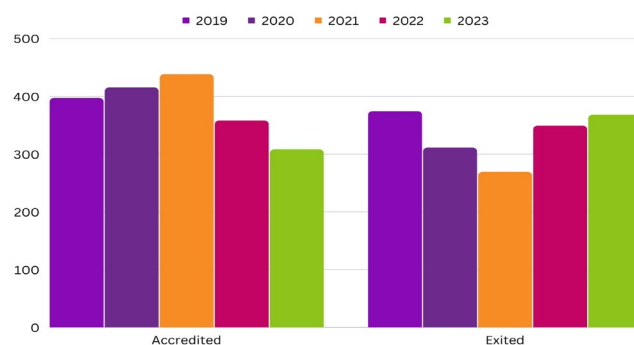
This past year, the Foster Care Association of Victoria welcomed **284** new full members and **73** associate members to the organisation, bringing our total membership to **4969** full members and **610** associate members.

FCAV staff conducted an Outreach Campaign, including calls and emails, to our newest FCAV members. The goal of this campaign was to learn more about our members' carer experience and remind them about the access to free support, advocacy information and online therapeutic counselling available to them as a valued FCAV member.

After speaking with over **250** members, we learned that carers are familiar with FCAV services and member benefits and around a third had participated in a Carer KaFÉ training session. Carers also shared their positive experience working with our Carer Support Team. Other carers we spoke to were taking a break, many stating a difficult experience with a placement as the reason.



Accredited vs Exited Households 19-23



Carer Snapshot Report 2023

The Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV) conducts an annual review of foster care households in Victoria to keep track of trends of foster carers entering, remaining, and exiting the sector. The FCAV gathers this data from Community Service Organisations (CSOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) who provide us with foster carer information based on the households affiliated with each of its offices.

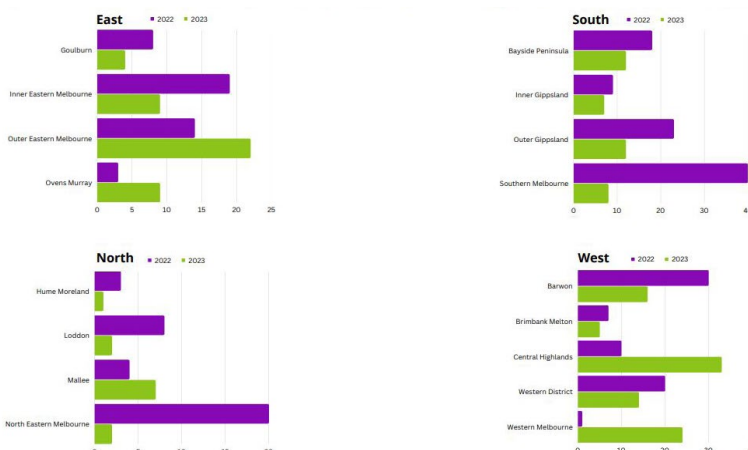
The 2023 Snapshot Report reflects a 26% drop in interested carers going through the accreditation process. The decrease in accreditations, combined with an increase in exiting carers, shows a concerning decline in foster carer households available to provide care of children and young people where reunification with family or kinship care options are not possible.

It's important for the FCAV to gather this data, not just to share the current trends with the CSOs and ACCOs that we work with, but to use this data to create the best programmatic services to offer our members.

Read the full membership report:

fcav.org.au/images/Carer_Snapshot_Data_2023.pdf

Accredited by Region 2022 vs 2023



2023 FOSTER CARER SNAPSHOT REPORT



The 2023 figures show 50 fewer carers have been accredited than the previous year

308

New Foster Carers were Accredited

14%

Decrease on previous year

Carer Support Team Report

Full CST Report available on the website; [www.fcav.org.au/policies & publications](http://www.fcav.org.au/policies&publications)

The former Carer Information and Support Service (CISS) is now the **Carer Support Team**, reflecting the growth of the three service streams offered to carers at the FCAV.

Carer Advocates (Foster care enquiries)

- Provides information and advice to foster carers about navigating the home-based care system.
- Provides support and advocacy for foster carers involved in a Client Incident Management System (CIMS) investigation.
- Liaison with foster carer's agency, when necessary, to advocate for foster carers.
- Liaison with DFFH and other key stakeholders for individual advocacy.

Carer Assistance Program (CAP)

This program provides an additional service of therapeutic support, aimed at improving the mental health and wellbeing of foster carers, permanent carers and adoptive parents. Delivered one-to-one, as couples or in group therapeutic settings, on issues such as:

- Anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation
- Grief and loss
- Emotional support during a CIMS investigation
- System stress and placement breakdown
- Thoughts of exiting the system
- Relationship conflict
- Parenting challenges
- Relinquishment of child

Learning and Development

The Learning and Development stream offers a range of forums with a focus on helping carers to meet the complex needs of the children in their care but also ensuring their own self-care is prioritised. Forums include webinars, cultural days, art therapy and Chats with the CEO.

"I felt valued and respected as a carer and the advocate was prompt with follow up and knowledgeable."

"To feel heard and have experiences acknowledged and validated by those who know what we are dealing with and are there solely for us as carers is very comforting. (Staff) were professional, respectful and empathetic. I valued and appreciated my time with them."

Carer Advocates

From 1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023, the Carer Advocates responded to and closed 531 foster care enquiries, delivering 863 hours of service. Advocacy is a significant component of the work provided to carers. Often relationships with professionals are broken and the FCAV is mediating on behalf of carers and advising them of their rights in the home-based care system.

A significant component of the work is supporting carers through the Client Incident Management (CIMS) process and advocating for carers' rights during a difficult process. We support carers in their investigation interviews, prepare them for suitability panel and provide advice in relation to reviews and appeals of decisions.

Client Incident Management System (CIMS)

There were 96 CIMS enquiries, accounting for 311 hours of service in the year. Support to carers throughout the CIMS investigation process constitutes most of our work, suggesting that agencies are perhaps not best placed to provide adequate support throughout a carer's investigation.

The multiple layers of CIMS (Investigation, Reportable Conduct Scheme, S81 investigations) result in confusion and repeated carer enquiries for clarity of these processes, with each enquiry averaging approximately 3 hours of support. More complex cases have required 6 to 25 hours of support.

The removal of foster child/ren following reporting of allegations has had a significant impact on retaining carers in the system. Support has been provided to carers concurrently from the Carer Advocates and the CAP service.

The FCAV engaged with the DFFH CIMS review team, providing information to highlight the intense stress for carers and suggesting areas for process improvement.



Above: Figure 1 shows the number of enquiries (including CAP referrals) is the highest in the past 5 years.



Carer Assistance Program (CAP)

In July 2022, FCAV and Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCA Families) partnered to expand the existing CAP service to permanent care, adoptive families and Family Law Court ordered carers.

Carers and parents who have accessed this service have found it to be beneficial. Carers feel validated and have a space to clarify their purpose and intentions. Carers share personal stories in relation to their carer journey, and often significant trauma and loss are identified for the carer.

"I like that the counselling combines a discussion about processing emotions as well as practical advice about working with agencies to ensure my needs are being met."

Several couples have accessed the program, often with different expectations and experiences of the care journey. Carer mental health is a significant issue identified through the service. Common issues for carers accessing CAP:

- Impact on mental health of violence/aggression towards carers (particularly by older teenagers)
- Being fearful in your own home
- Increased vulnerability and distress
- Real injury risk/assault
- Damage to property (out of pocket costs)
- Little direct support to assist carers during a CIMS investigation

The CAP is exceptional as a service in Victoria and is the first and only such service of its kind available for carers. As well as being tailored to carers with the benefit of therapeutic support from a practitioner who is knowledgeable about the specific issues facing home-based carers, another outstanding feature is that there are no waiting times, unlike other mental health providers. The CAP has proven especially important for male carers and carers who experience increased isolation such as rural and regional carers.

The FCAV has a further 12 months of funding for CAP and we hope to continue to develop and expand the CAP offerings to carers. FCAV seeks to secure ongoing funding for the service as a unique, invaluable support to carer cohorts.



Learning & Development

All feedback shows the FCAV Learning and Development offerings have been very positive for carers, providing opportunities to connect with peers, share advice, practise self-care and gain knowledge.

During the financial year, the FCAV ran two very popular carer retreats: one for 36 permanent care and adoptive carers and one for 24 foster and kinship carers.

The FCAV co-hosted several Cultural Days in partnership with ACCOs and local Elders across the state who share knowledge about lands, waters and custodianship of country. The first in Geelong - Wathaurong, Gulidjan and Gadabanud country in September 2022 in partnership with Wathaurong, MacKillop & BCYF (60 carers attended). We were in Mount Martha - Bunurong/Boon Wurrung country in January 2023, in partnership with VACCA South (23 carers and 22 children attended). In collaboration with VACCA in Werribee - Bunurong and Wadawurrung country in March 2023, we had 18 carers and 27 children attend. These events begin with a Welcome to Country, and include smoking ceremonies and interactive knowledge-sharing and engagement through traditional arts, food, weaving, damper making, ceremony, music and dance.

The FCAV partnered with Gail Walton, a private consultant to facilitate 'Hold My Hand' workshops for carers and their biological children in Dandenong, September 2022, and Caroline Springs, January 2023. The aim of the group is to support the carer's own children to identify their place in the family, explore the impact that a child in care could have on their family and address the practicalities associated with providing care to children and young people. Each group consisted of 10 foster carers, and 12 children and young people, and agency staff who wanted to learn more about the program.

The FCAV hosted 6 'Chat with the CEO' sessions for foster carers and Agency staff. These sessions have been a valuable avenue for carers to raise issues in a group setting. It is validating for carers to understand they are not alone in the process and have expressed that they appreciate the FCAV advocating on their behalf to improve the system. Common issues have been respite, the care allowance and NDIS.

The FCAV ran the 'Caring Thru Art' program in December 2022 consisting of 6 online sessions at night with 24 carers participating weekly, to help carers overcome compassion fatigue or burnout by taking time out to focus on their own self-care.

Engagement

Research

The FCAV is pleased to partner with leading researchers in the field of child protection and home-based care research. This year, we facilitated carer involvement in:

- October 2022 - Western Sydney University: **"Babies and Young Children in the Black Summer (BiBS) Study."** Study on assistance to foster and kinship carers with young children for support in emergencies.
- November 2022 - Solutions Together - Power Up project with eSafety: **"Children and young people who may not feel safe at home or in their intimate relationships due to technology abuse."** Research to promote online safety.
- May 2023 - Monash University: **"Trauma-informed Practice in Out-of-home Care."** Study on trauma-informed practice in the out-of-home care sector, specifically foster carers' understanding of trauma informed practice and how they, supported by their agency, implement this in caring for foster children.
- May-June 2023 - Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence (CERE): **"Better Futures and Home Stretch program Evaluation."** CERE is the independent evaluator analysing the establishment, operations and outcomes of this new leaving care program, and partnered with FCAV to hear from carers about how the program is working for them and their young people.
- June - Association for Children with a Disability: **"Help make the NDIS better for children in out-of-home care."** Facilitate carer engagement.

Sector Partnerships

We have been honoured to work closely with allies and counterparts across the sector on several important projects in the past 12 months:

- National Foster and Kinship Care Peak Body Collective for foster and kinship care organisations around Australia - Federal advocacy.
- Association for Children with a Disability - Forums, workshops and training
- Permanent Care and Adoptive Families: Programs and advocacy.
- Victorian Council of Community Services (VCOSS) Education Equity Coalition: Research, case studies and advocacy.
- VACCA and Wautharong: Cultural days.
- Foster Dreamz - Sports and extra-curricular activity scholarships
- Kelly Sports - Vouchers - Sports and activities.
- CREATE Foundation - Peak body for young people with a care experience. Carer support to young people.
- Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP): Research, working groups and advocacy eg. inquiry into educational experiences.



www.linkedin.com/company/foster-care-association-of-victoria



twitter.com/vicfostercare



www.instagram.com/fostercarevic



www.facebook.com/fostercarevictoria

Social Media

Traction on social media has been impacted by preferences implemented by providers such as Meta and X which have significantly limited the algorithm for non-advertising pages, however, online forums have continued to be an important engagement mechanism post-COVID. We have continued to implement online options as the preference of some carers. The FCAV provides hybrid or online forums, meetings, training and digital options across the board, that increase accessibility to FCAV outputs, especially for rural and remote carers, full-time working carers and those with babies and very young children at home.

Our Facebook page gained over **400** new followers to hit over **7500** followers.

The activity of social media sites has remained an important information and feedback portal for our stakeholders, particularly in relation to information-sharing and the advocacy voice as evidenced by the Care Allowance Campaign.

Newsletters

The FCAV produced and distributed 10 newsletters and several supplementary communications, comprising foster care news, updates, legislation changes, events, training and carer giveaways in the 12 months. Back issues are available here: www.fcav.org.au/newsletter

Carer Gifts and Giveaways

- | | |
|------------|--|
| • November | 2 x Christmas Santa Sack to the value of \$100
2 x Calendar of significant Indigenous dates - Saretta Fielding has partnered with Evolve Communities to create a calendar of significant Indigenous dates for 2023. |
| • October | Quilts and Teddies from Australian Quilters Association and cuddly little teddies hand knitted by volunteers for Australian Red Cross.
1 x Zoo Membership |
| • February | 4 x Tickets to Bounce
2 x High Tea at the Grand Hyatt |
| • March | Art Competition \$100 Melbourne Art Supplies
Runner up \$50 Dean's Art Voucher |
| • May | Map of Indigenous Australia |
| • June | Luxury Linen Package |

Foster Care Week - September 2022

Foster Care Week is a sector-wide, annual event celebrating and raising awareness within the wider community about foster care, the carer's role, the issues facing foster carers and the children and young people in care. The events and celebrations held during FCW aim to highlight and appreciate our valuable pool of foster carers and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people in care in our community.

2022 Theme: Commitment to Carers

The Foster Care Week 2022 theme celebrated foster carers and their dedication to the children and young people in their care and recognised that carers can't provide care day to day without the support of the dedicated services that support them, so we honoured a "Commitment to Carers."

Sector engagement

Many carers were able to join an agency celebration or attend the FCAV Carer Celebration & AGM at the Grand Hyatt. This year, we proudly promoted over 25 different events and FCAV staff attended five events hosted by agencies to celebrate their carers.

The FCAV shared activities across the sector and Victoria-wide as a part of the week including:

- Minister's address to Carers for Foster Care Week
- Carer appreciation events and gifts
- Media and community awareness raising
- Advocacy promotion
- Carer Profiles
- Commitment to Carer Awards
- Becoming a foster carer sessions
- CREATE Connection event for children, young people, families and carers.

#Commitment2carers #fostercareweek22 #FCW22

Over 130 foster carers, and another 70 professionals in the sector and guest speakers joined us for the FCAV Carer Celebration and AGM this year. A special thanks goes again to the students of Parade College and Penleigh & Essendon Grammar and their teachers - Darrel Cruse and Digby Morrell. Each year students from both schools' Community Service teams dedicate their time to learning more about foster care and assisting with the running of the Carer Celebration as well as supplying Eddie's Backpacks to give to carer households for children and young people in care to take home.

Listen to Minister Brooks's speech - <https://youtu.be/c4SzXA8GOlg>



Feedback

"It was so great to hear from Sam and Tori and hear their ongoing commitment to carers and kids in our system but also to hear their passion to see the system work better and respect all carers. So proud of all the FCAV have put into improving the documentation system ...what a fantastic success.... I was so blessed to meet and talk to a new carer from another agency and really valued that opportunity of learning about her journey into foster caring."

"It felt so nice to be with people that work in the sector and people like us that fostering a child is our family's life!"

Carer Voices ~ Commitment Awards

The FCAV conducted the Commitment to Supporting Carers Awards again in 2022, following the success of the inaugural awards in 2021. The awards promote the positive difference a commitment to supporting carers has on placements and the lives of carer households by proactively highlighting what great worker support is and what it means, from the carer perspective.

Instances of great carer support are golden in a complex system. They can make or break a placement for foster carers and the children and young people in their homes. Therefore, we gave carers the opportunity to acknowledge a time when they've received exceptional support.

We asked carers to nominate an instance of great support from an agency worker. We received over 40 nominations.

The Carer Support Team coordinate as a judging panel, cross checking the nominations and ringing managers to ensure due diligence on all nominations.

Congratulations to the 6 finalists announced in the week before FCW and the two winners announced at our Carer Celebration & AGM.

Winner of the Exemplary support reflecting consistently high-level commitment to carers award went to Madison Kelly – MacKillop Family Services.

Winner of the Outstanding support in exceptional circumstances award went to Tamara Bellamy – Anglicare Victoria.



Being Heard FCAV's Advocacy Program



The FCAV advocacy program advances carer experience and carer wellbeing by identifying systemic problems and proposing reforms across a range of personal and financial domains. Key programs and projects include the following:

Care Support Help Desk Implementation and Review

The FCAV developed the proposal for the Care Help Desk because many administrative tasks are more efficiently and effectively done by administrative staff rather than Child Protection case officers. Providing a dedicated contact point for key placement supports such as obtaining Medicare numbers and birth certificates makes the care system more responsive and improves carer satisfaction and morale.

The FCAV successfully advocated for the funding of the Care Support Help Desk in 2022 and has since worked with DFFH to assist with service roll-out and establishment. The FCAV has also provided input into the DFFH review of the service and has advocated for the expansion of the service to include passport and NDIS application advice and support.

Medicare Dental Submission

The FCAV lodged a submission through National Foster and Kinship Care Collective on the review of the Dental Benefits Act 2008 (Medicare Dental).

Children in care have significantly poorer oral health than children in the general population and carers frequently pay for ancillary medical services out of their own pocket. Presently, access to the Medicare dental scheme is means tested on a volunteer carer's income via eligibility for Family Tax Benefit A.

The FCAV has advocated that all children in care should be automatically eligible for Medicare Dental funding. Access to the Medicare Dental would significantly enhance carer capacity to access dental services with \$500 per year for two years with the funding following the child.

Commonwealth Family Payments Access

The FCAV is working with the Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) to better understand carer eligibility for family support payments including Family Tax Benefit A and B and supplementary childcare allowance. A detailed assessment of Child Protection orders and how they interact with DSS means test requirements to determine carer eligibility for family support payments has been undertaken.

Next steps are likely to include the development of clearer information for carers and DSS staff to assist carers to access payments.

Passports

Carers are seeking to travel in increasing numbers following the relaxation of COVID travelling restrictions both within Australia and overseas. As a result, there has been an increase in carer passport applications, queries and complaints.

The passport application process is confusing and difficult for carers to navigate because of documentary requirements to prove child citizenship and parental consent. Carers report that applications can take more than 12 months which makes planning for travel very difficult.

DFFH has worked with the FCAV to review cases where there has been a lack of progress with applications. The FCAV has also advocated for a passport application assistance as part of the Care Support Help Desk review.

Centrelink - Grandparent, Foster and Kinship Carer Advisor Line

Following FCAV advocacy with Centrelink, the Grandparent Advisor Line has been reviewed and relaunched to make it clear that it includes a range of carer types including foster, kinship and informal carers. The new service has been launched under the new name of the Grandparents, Foster and Kinship Carer Advisor Line together with explanatory material that explains the new service. The new Grandparent, Foster and Kinship Carer Adviser Line went live on 1 July 2022 at Services Australia and can be accessed by phoning 1800 245 965.

Sector Working Groups and networks

- Transfer of Aboriginal children placed in Foster Care and their carers from CSOs to ACCOs Working Group
- Home-Based Care Learning & Development Program (Carer KaFE) Transition Working Group
- DFFH CIMS Community of Practice Forums – Client Incident Management System (CIMS)
- Carer KaFE Governance Reference Group meetings
- National Foster and Kinship Care Collective meetings
- Foster Care Practice Network Meetings
- VCOSS Peaks and Statewide Networks Forums
- DFFH Care Support Help Desk workshop
- PCAF Alliance Meetings

Practice advocacy

The FCAV advocacy program extends across three platforms. The one-to-one advocacy for individual carers who call the Carer Support Team requiring an independent advocate; a broad overarching mandate for system improvement as discussed on previous page; and, practice advocacy that involves working with the professionals in the sector, agencies and allies to build communication with, and between, workers and carers. This year we have embedded that branch of FCAV advocacy by initiating:

- Producing the Foster Care Principle (below) in line with carers' stated needs at care team level.
- Commitment to Supporting Carers Awards, September 2022 – foster carers nominate workers from Agency or the DFFH to acknowledge exceptional support to carers.
- Facilitating working groups and Chat with CEO sessions for both agency staff and for carers.



Campaign to Increase the Care Allowance

Victoria has the lowest level 1 Care Allowance of any State in Australia. High household inflation together with an indexation rate of only 2% in 2022 has meant that the Allowance has significantly declined in real value in recent years.

The declining real value of the Care Allowance together with significant cost of living price rises has increased the financial pressure on carers. Carers report that financial pressures are a key factor in their decision to leave the carer system.

Following the failure of the Government to increase Care Allowance rates in the State Budget, the FCAV launched the Campaign to Increase the Care Allowance with Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (PCAF) on 9 June 2023. The campaign gained over **1600** submissions to its petition in the period, each articulating the real life strains on carer households from the perspective of carers, those who work with carers, young people in care and the children and families of foster carers who experience the shortfall.

The FCAV and PCAF pay special thanks to the large Agencies, CSOs, sector allies and leaders who have together given support to the campaign. The campaign will continue until December 2023.



Foster Care Principle

FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

C

- Care
- Constructive Communication
- Compassion
- Connection
- Cultural lens

A

- Awareness
- Acknowledgement
- Appreciation
- Advocacy

R

- Responsiveness
- Recognition
- Respect
- Reflective Practice

E

- Engagement
- Empathy
- Empowerment

The number of foster carers is rapidly decreasing and without change to the foster care model soon, Foster care will be no longer. DFFH are having to endorse less than ideal kinship placement due to there being no appropriate foster care placements. Children who are more than suitable for a Home Based Care placement are ending up in our residential care system, being exposed to further trauma. Our carers are doing their best to provide great care to our most vulnerable children but we must do more for them!

I won't be able to continue being a foster carer unless there are increases to the care allowance. I give hundreds of hours of my time each year for very little reimbursement and it is no longer sustainable, particularly when I also work full time. The care allowance must be increased to ensure you don't lose more and more carers.

I have been a carer for 23 years. The struggle to provide for the needs of children is a constant and growing concern. The Allowance has not kept pace with economic trends. Carers are being placed in a difficult financial position.

Anglicare Victoria
June 29

The Foster Care Association of Victoria is spearheading a much-needed initiative to increase the Care Allowance. FCAV is standing up for the rights of carers and the children and young people in their care. Let's highlight the fact that Victoria currently holds the lowest Care Allowance rate for foster, kinship, and permanent care in Australia.

Join FCAV in their push for change. Every voice counts in advocating for a better system.
<https://pulse.ly/x7lv9dmuxn>
#FCAVAction #... See more

Caf's
June 11

Join Caf's and the campaign to increase the Care Allowance.

Carers are already volunteering their hearts and homes to provide care to young people who need them and the allowance rate is falling in real value by the month, forcing carers to pay out of pocket on essentials like food, bills and services because they will not let the children in their care go without.

Carer peak bodies including Foster Care Association of Victoria, and Permanent Care and Adoptive Families will send a letter to Treasurer Palaszczuk and Minister Blandhorst, along with all submissions to the petition. We invite you to add your name to the petition to show that we're not alone in expecting better for carers and the children and young people in their care.

Sign the petition here: <https://bit.ly/43fR8bJ>

The State of Foster Care Allowances in Australia

State/territory	Amount	Age
ACT	\$601.69	0-4
Queensland	\$567.14	0-5
NSW	\$540	0-4
Tasmania	\$451	0-4
Western Australia	\$440.45	0-6
Victoria	\$427.05	0-7

Anglicare Victoria

The Victorian Care Allowance is too low to cover the costs of living.

Volunteer carers are paying to provide care.

Sign the Care Allowance Petition!

carer • KaFÉ

Kinship and Foster Care Education

SESSIONS

86

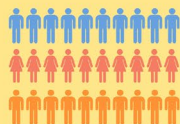
86 sessions held over the period, averaging 2 sessions every week



1,216

PARTICIPANTS

Kinship, Foster and Permanent Care participants in Learning and Development sessions held over the period



NEW CARERS

238

New carers engaging with the program



253

CONFERENCES

Carers attended seven conferences including 4 online conferences and 3 in-person conferences



CARER RETREATS

79

carers across 3 carer retreats including 22 Kinship families - 27 adults and 51 children & young people at 2 Kinship camps



156

CULTURAL DAYS

62 carers and 94 children and young people attended across 3 Carer Cultural Days



Achievements of Carer KaFÉ

Carer KaFÉ was hosted by FCAV for 9 months of 2022-2023 financial year as the program went to tender in November 2022 with a new consortium assuming responsibility for the program from 1 April 2023.

The Carer KaFÉ snapshot (left) illustrates the assiduous achievements of the program underpinned by dedicated staff, passionate in their support of Victorian carers despite their role concluding on 31 March 2023.

As we emerged from the shadows of the pandemic, carers embraced the ability to connect in person as evidenced by the attendance levels at the range of learning and development opportunities encompassing carer retreats, family camps, conferences and events.

- Therapeutic Life Story Work International (online Conference-Richard Rose - July)
- Australian Childhood Foundation Childhood Trauma conference (in Melbourne - August)
- National Foster & Kinship care conference (in Darwin -September)
- National Permanency Conference (online - October)
- Emotion Management for Autistic Children & Adolescents conference -Professor Tony Attwood & Dr Michelle Garnett (online - November)
- The Living with Teens Summit (online Conference - February)
- Calming Today's Anxious Kids – Maggie Dent (in Melbourne - March)

Carer KaFÉ was so pleased to be able to offer even greater access for carers to international experts through sponsoring tickets to conferences and events. This included renowned speakers such as Dan Hughes, Cathy Malchiodi, Dan Siegel and Bruce Perry.

“

“Thank you for offering this. Tony was FANTASTIC! The training taught me some GREAT new ideas & reinforced my prior learning and as a bonus boosted by moral & confidence. I feel so inspired and reassured.”

”

Carer KaFÉ also invested in access to prominent Australian child development educators - Maggie Dent webinars and conference and a 12-month membership to the Happy Families online resource headed by Dr Justin Coulson (parenting expert on Channel 9's program "Parental Guidance"). This initiative gave carers access to all of Justin's webinars and full back catalogue of over 300 past articles with strategies around traditional and modern challenges of raising children.

Left: Carer KaFÉ 2022/23 data snapshot shows record participation and event rates

“

"The TLSW Conference was brilliant. I learnt so much from Richard Rose & can see how it makes such a positive difference to the lives of children who are living in care. It was very professional & at the same time personal and real"

”

Exceeding program goals, Carer KaFÉ supported over 90 regional carers with travel and accommodation to enable them to attend these educational events.



Above: Carer KaFÉ-sponsored carers attended the Welcome to Country water ceremony at IFCO in Darwin in September 2022

A commitment to Cultural education

Carer KaFÉ was pleased to instigate a partnership with VACCA to address the need for more cultural resources for carers. This led to considerable investment enabling VACCA to develop them.

Carer KaFÉ financially supported The Alliance in September 2022 to deliver a series of yarning circles for Aboriginal carers in 2 regional locations during this period.

Carer KaFÉ collaborated with First Nations Elders for Carer Cultural Days at Geelong, Mt Martha and Wyndham Vale. Carers and children and young people were immersed in a variety of cultural educational activities.

We continued to grow our reach with Aboriginal carers – representing around 10% of carer attendees (6% in 2021-2022).

A focus on Kinship care

Carer KaFÉ was excited to enter into a substantial funding agreement in June 2022 with the Centre For Excellence in Child & Family Welfare to develop a new Kinship Carer Induction Training Program with the goal of making it available to new kinship carers by the end of the financial year.

A highlight of the year was the celebrated return of Kinship family camps held at YMCA Glenmore in February and CYC The Island camp at Cowes in March 2023.

“

"It was so wonderful to be in a space with other carers and professionals. How great being in a Zoom with world experts such as Bruce Perry and Gabor Mate!"

”

Carers appreciated the ability to engage in fun activities (archery, rock climbing, giant swing) as a family in a safe, supported environment.

Another key milestone was our third intake of carers for the How to Thrive Program (using BEACON platform) for carer wellbeing. Participants displayed a significant uplift in their overall wellness and ability to meet the challenges of caring upon completion of the 8-week program.



Carer Retreats

Carer KaFÉ coordinated 3 carer retreats during this 9-month reporting period with two in Ballarat and one in Torquay. 79 carers came from across the state - travelling from Mildura, Swan Hill, Hamilton, Wodonga, Lakes Entrance, Sale & Warrnambool. Carers acknowledged the ability to connect and learn, not only from the facilitators but their fellow carers, and the importance of self-care so they can better respond to the needs of children in their care.

"Great networking with other carers; loved the openness to share & learn from each other".

"Excellent presenters & resources– really felt so much more informed about being a carer".

"Felt safe, supported, accepted, and valued the connections made".

There was a range of new calendar offerings to Carer KaFÉ which were embraced by carers as evidenced by the number of attendees. Notable sessions included Caring for LGBTQIA+ young people, Achieving Compassion Satisfaction and Caring for Complex Kids.

On behalf of the staff and Carer KaFÉ management, we are grateful to have had the opportunity to support our valuable carers.

Treasurer's Report

Zoe Sredovic

Treasurer



Luke Sapwell

Vice President



As of the end of financial year 2023, FCAV Net Assets are \$577,845, reflecting a notable increase of \$43,788 compared to the previous financial year. This growth is a testament to our diligent use of resources and our commitment to financial stability.

Our total income for the year amounted to \$2,140,222, a slight decrease from the previous year's figure of \$2,383,427. State Government funding accounted for most of our financial support, contributing \$1,945,096 which accounts for 91% of our overall income.

We thank the Victorian state government for their ongoing support of the organisation, however we note that in order for FCAV to continue to maintain its independence in decision-making processes around its operations, it is important for the organisation to explore alternative funding sources in coming years and diversify its revenue streams. Given we received the lowest amount of donations on record over the past financial year, we are conscious of the need to build momentum in this area and have identified some initiatives to consider implementing in the future to achieve this goal.

Our expenditure for financial year 2023 amounted to \$2,096,434. This allocation of funds reflects our ongoing commitment to our core programs and services. Over the year we also allocated more funds than ever before in our 30-year history to carers and carer events and hope to continue this important initiative well into the future.

It is important to acknowledge the significance of the Carer KaFÉ (learning & development) program no longer operating under FCAV. Responsibility for this program was transitioned from FCAV management following the outcome of a public tender from 1 April 2023.

While this decision allowed for a streamlined focus on our core mission, it is prudent to recognise that FCAV will face financial challenges stemming from the loss of this program in the 2024 financial year. This shift in our financial landscape necessitates careful planning and resource allocation to ensure continued sustainability.

This month marks the end of our phenomenal Treasurer, Zoe Sredovic's time with FCAV. We thank Zoe for all her hard work in a role that is often very challenging and requires a very high level of commitment and skill. Zoe has been a highly valued board member and Treasurer over her time with the organisation and will be missed. We wish Zoe all the best for the future.

Zoe had these parting words to leave us with...

"It is with a heavy heart that I say farewell to FCAV, but go I will, hoping I made a bit of a difference to our Foster Care community. My time with the FCAV was incredibly fulfilling and I thank my fellow board members and staff for having me as your Treasurer - it's been a privilege."

Further reading: The Foster Care Association of Victoria full Financial Statement for the year ending **30 June 2023** is available on the FCAV website: www.fcav.org.au/images/FCAV_Financial_Statements_2023.pdf

Financial Report

Profit and Loss

		2023	2022
	Note	\$	\$
Revenue	3	2,140,222	2,383,427
Employee benefits expense	4	(1,205,483)	(1,017,880)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	4	(34,840)	(48,533)
Consultancy fees		(647,434)	(909,037)
Administrative expenses		(25,076)	(15,501)
Carer and event expenses		(44,381)	(15,558)
Office expenses		(31,343)	(58,050)
Occupancy expenses		(32,755)	(9,534)
Operating expenses		(73,756)	(39,534)
Finance costs		(1,366)	(2,555)
Surplus before income tax		43,788	267,245
Income tax expense		-	-
Surplus for the year		43,788	267,245
Other comprehensive income, net of income tax			
Revaluation changes for property, plant and equipment		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		43,788	267,245

Balance Sheet

		2023	2022
	Note	\$	\$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	5	1,375,531	2,057,510
Trade and other receivables	6	41,835	49,324
Prepayments		3,900	3,900
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		1,421,266	2,110,734
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Right-of-use assets	9	32,179	30,188
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		32,179	30,188
TOTAL ASSETS		1,453,445	2,140,922
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	7	747,489	1,472,029
Lease liabilities	9	13,507	33,335
Employee benefits	8	67,521	76,732
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		828,517	1,582,096
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	9	19,042	-
Employee benefits	8	28,041	24,767
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		47,083	24,767
TOTAL LIABILITIES		875,600	1,606,863
NET ASSETS		577,845	534,057
EQUITY			
Retained earnings		577,845	534,057
TOTAL EQUITY		577,845	534,057

Auditor's Report

Foster Care Association Of Victoria Inc

In accordance with the requirements of section 80-40 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, as lead auditor for the audit of Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc for the year ended 30 June 2023, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- (a) No contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in section 80-40 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 in relation to the audit; and,
- (b) No contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.



Mr Benjamin Horner
Chartered Accountant; Registered Company Auditor
Director
McConachie Stedman Audit and Assurance Pty Ltd
819 Ruthven Street
Toowoomba Qld 4350

16 August 2023

Statement by the Board of Directors

Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc

Responsible Persons' Declaration

The responsible persons declare that in the responsible persons' opinion:

- the attached financial statements and notes comply with the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012*, the *Australian Accounting Standards - Simplified Disclosures* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*;
- the attached financial statements and notes give a true and fair view of the Association's financial position as at 30 June 2023 and of its performance for the financial year ended on that date; and
- there are reasonable grounds to believe that the Association will be able to pay its debts as and when they become due and payable.

Signed in accordance with subsection 80.15(2) of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Regulation 2013*.

Responsible person

Megan Sadler

Responsible person

Zoe Sredovic

Dated this 17th day of August 2023

The FCAV says Yes to the Voice

As a peak body focused on giving voice to human rights and the protections of those who are impacted by decision making at the highest levels, the FCAV encourages all Victorians to vote Yes.

The FCAV stands with First Nations carers, sector colleagues and counterparts to support a Voice to Parliament, protected by the Constitution, so that agreement-making and truth-telling can finally be done on equal terms.

The Uluru Statement from the Heart issues a gracious and inclusive invitation to all Australians to join Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the journey to a more equitable and just community.

We take this position knowing that the Out-of-Home Sector has a complex relationship for generations of First Nations families across Victoria and throughout this Nation, having, until recent years, failed to embed the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in determining the best interests of their children and young people.



Bundyi Girri Consulting

FCAV Board and Operations has benefited from the expertise and guidance of First Nations consultancy Bundyi Girri Consulting (BGC) over the past 6 months. BGC has liaised with ACCOs on FCAV's behalf to form guided and informed wording around FCAV aims to empower carers of Aboriginal children to ensure they remain connected to their culture and families, and to provide a care environment that is culturally safe.

As the peak body representing foster carers in Victoria, FCAV advocates for the principles of Aboriginal self-determination including the Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC) program that ensures Aboriginal children in care remain connected to their culture and communities. As part of our vision to strengthen foster care in Victoria including ACAC, we want carers to feel empowered to provide culturally safe care, informed by ACCO's approach that encompasses expertise in the care of Aboriginal children and the lived and living experience of the communities they serve.

Through this relationship with BGC, we have been able to own and articulate our support of the Uluru Statement From the Heart and the need for a constitutionally embedded First Nations voice. Yes to the Voice and full review of our new website content, ensuring our work with ACCOs, CSOs and Members is embedded in the principles and supporting our aims to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.



We champion foster carers that they may be recognised and valued for their role in the lives of children and young people in care.

As the peak body in Victoria, we are the united voice of foster carers, advocating for systemic improvements, building productive partnerships and nurturing respectful relationships. We deliver a full range of information and support services to meet carers' needs at all points in their care journey.

**BECOME
A MEMBER!**



As an FCAV member you have access to free advocacy, support & information. Your membership is instrumental to our strength, ensuring a better Victorian system for our carers, children & young people.

FCAV.ORG.AU | (03) 9416 4292



The FCAV celebrates the diversity of its carer membership, board and staff. We are committed to a workplace, policies and services that are safe and inclusive for LGBTIQ+ communities, young people and families.



Acknowledgement of Country

The FCAV acknowledges the unceded sovereignty of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the continued connection to Country – including lands, cultural knowledges and their peoples – and pay our respect to Elders past and present. We are the united voice and advocate for all foster carers across Victoria, and we aim to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.

Contact:

Foster Care Association of Victoria
Ground Floor, 2 Greenwood Street,
Abbotsford VIC 3067
Telephone: (03) 9416 4292
Email: admin@fcav.org.au
Website: www.fcav.org.au

