



Carer Information and Support Service:

The Foster Care Association of Victoria's Carer Information and Support Service (CISS) provides a confidential, independent support hotline to all foster carers in Victoria. Are you a current foster carer? Do you have questions about your role? Are you having issues you need to discuss with someone?

Call **9416 4292** or access carer support online:
www.fcav.org.au

Cover Image: Samantha Hauge, CEO of the Foster Care Association with Minister for Child Protection and Carers, Hon. Luke Donnellan at the launch of the Carer Strategy. Read more on p. 5

In brief...

- **Permanent Care and Adoptive Families** - Information and support via the peak body for permanent carers - **Call: 9020 1833. See more from PCAF next page.**
- **Kinship Care Victoria** - Information and support via the peak body for kinship carers - **Call: 9372 2422.**
- **WHO CARES? Podcasts for new carers:** Visit **www.carerkafe.org.au/online-learning** or via soundcloud.
- **Fostering Connections** has launched a new-look website that aims to be an interactive, user-friendly hub for Victorians who are at the start of their fostering journey. **www.fosteringconnections.com.au.**



Thinking of becoming a foster carer?

Get the support you need, the answers to your questions, and find the right foster care agency for you.



The FCAV is funded through the State Government of Victoria and is grateful for the support of agency subscribers and our generous donors.



The FCAV is grateful for the continuing support of the Cummins team who donate in kind to the mailout of this newsletter



MESSAGE from the CEO

Welcome to our final newsletter of 2019. Since my appointment, I have been proud to lead a visionary program of work the FCAV is undertaking to advance carer welfare and interests. I have also been thrilled to progress active alliances across the sector with the shared goal of creating a better environment for carers.

I am driven by the ways FCAV can support you as carers and passionate to continue the directives of our advocacy to promote a cohesive platform for effecting change within the child protection system to better support carers as its most valuable asset.

In addition to operating a range of programs including carer training, the carer helpline and some outreach support, the FCAV has a strong advocacy platform and we have developed a targeted program of work on priority areas including:

- Actively advocating for a better system for accessing support services through funding and payment of client expenses and addressing this insufficient funding framework.
- Actively seeking to increase the Victorian carer allowance.
- Actively advocating to rectify the systemic failure to register the births of many children in out-of-home care and obtain Medicare cards in a timely manner.
- Actively supporting the Home Stretch campaign to increase funding to the program to extend the age of state care from 18 to 21 years so it's available to all young people in care.

The Carer Strategy is a particularly important initiative the FCAV has been instrumental in developing. Launched last month, this strategy has the potential to address some longstanding challenges the system has imposed on carers. We are hopeful that it will be an effective platform for driving change in the range of high priority areas carers have identified. However, success will only be achieved if there is a financial investment and an organisational willingness to work with carers. Now, the FCAV's focus is on pressing the Victorian Government to make proper financial investment in a program of work within the Carer Strategy to actually deliver what it sets out to achieve.

Which brings me to the most important people I have had the pleasure of meeting, addressing and working with in the past few months, our membership of foster carers. Whether at a retreat, a carer advisory group, a forum or carer lunch, I have been blown away by the complexities, resilience and altruism with which you continue to nurture our children and young people and I am honoured to be amongst you and lead your peak body into a strong new year.

Samantha Hauge,
Chief Executive Officer, Foster Care Association of Victoria

CARER GIVEAWAYS! ENTER NOW TO WIN...

Sport or extracurricular activity - prize giveaway!



Access to an extra-curricular activity is so important for children in care. Involvement in groups, music, sports and activities outside of school builds social and emotional skills and self-confidence. Children are given opportunities to build community, increase resilience and engage in team work. It also provides children with opportunities to achieve and build self-esteem. Activities can include football, hockey, rock climbing, music lessons, art lessons, dance, scouts or a swimming program.

The FCAV has 4 x \$100 prizes to give away to carer families to help fund a sport, music or extracurricular activity your child may enjoy!

To be in the running, email competition@fcav.org.au by **Friday 6 December, 2019**. Use the subject header "Sport & extracurricular activities" and in the body of the email tell us which activity or sport your child may sign up for. Please include your name, phone number, address and agency. Winners will be reimbursed up to \$100. Good luck!

CARER RETREAT REPORT - Hepburn Springs



We held our final Carer Retreat for the year at the beautiful grounds of Bellinzona in Hepburn Springs 10 - 11 October 2019. Joining us were 17 amazing kinship and foster carers from across Victoria.

Joanie Bartolo presented two sessions - 'Emotional Intelligence' and 'Managing Anger'.

Some of the key messages included a focus on self-regulation before helping the child and looking beyond the behaviour/

anger to see what the emotion the child is dealing with as well as spending time with the child without any devices to provide 1:1 time with each other.

Carers were involved in a number of self-care activities and developed individual self-care plans. Many relished the opportunity to have time together and a break from caring while learning new strategies. Part of each retreat is the practice of simple strategies that carers can apply in their everyday lives. Things like the mindful walk in the garden cost nothing and provide a beautiful way to de-stress and enjoy the spring day!

In addition to the learning, carers were able to meet other carers and make new connections from the group to add to their village of support. Positive feedback from the retreat included making some beautiful friendships, learning to understand triggers and finding new techniques to try.



Above: a mindful walk; and below, some of the resources Joanie shared with the group

Agency Worker Award



The Foster Care Association of Victoria introduces the **Agency Worker Award** to recognise instances of exemplary support from Agency staff.

Foster carers are invited to nominate an Agency worker who has gone above and beyond to support the carer.

The awardee will receive a commendation and certificate from the FCAV highlighting their good work.

If you would like to nominate an Agency worker, please email: admin@fcav.org.au, and include:

- Your name, phone number and email
- Agency name, worker name and email
- Direct supervisor's name and email
- Brief summary of nomination (50-200 words)

*Please note that a commendation is awarded on a case by case basis and is not a broad endorsement of any individual or agency.

Permanent Care and Adoptive Families



Permanent Care and Adoptive Families - Information and support for permanent care and adoptive parents

We're very pleased that PCA Families has recently moved and is now co-located with the Foster Care Association here in Collingwood for the time being. Being near neighbours is already allowing us to work more closely and providing mutual support and expertise. The services they offer include:

- Helpline – information, advice and support service
- Flexible funding for permanent carers
- Specialist Database referral
- Peer Support
- Training and Workshops for parents and children.

To learn more, you can view their website: www.pcafamilies.org.au or call: 9020 1833.

Carer Information & Support Service

☎ 9416 4292

🌐 www.fcav.org.au

The **Carer Information and Support Service (CISS)** at the Foster Care Association of Victoria provides free, confidential and independent advice and advocacy for Victorian foster carers, covering all areas of foster care. You do not need to be a member of the Association to access CISS, however we recommend all foster carers become members to ensure you receive all the information, assistance and resources available to you.

If you would like more information, contact the CISS team 9am-5pm Monday to Thursday and 9am-4.30pm on Friday: **9416 4292** or visit our website: **www.fcav.org.au** under Carer Resources to see the FCAV's range of Information Sheets. **www.fcav.org.au/carers-support-service**

INSIDE CISS SUPPORT:

CIMS - Client Incident Identification and Management System

A CIMS is when an incident alleging abuse, poor quality of care or unexplained injury occurs. The FCAV has experienced a sharp increase in the number of carer inquiries and complaints since the introduction of CIMS in January 2018. Common issues include lengthy delays in investigations, lack of clarity about the roles of agencies and DHHS, denial of natural justice, lack of information about the process and lack of support for carers during the process. Carers complain that they feel there is inherent conflict embedded in the CIMS process from the outset because the agency tasked with supporting them is also investigating them in a context where they may bear some responsibility for an occurrence or incident. This means that carers often struggle to find a trusted source of support.

The FCAV understands how stressful a CIMS investigation can be and has an ongoing program of advocacy to address the broad range of concerns that carers have expressed about the process. The process is stressful not only because of the immediate impact on carers and their children but also because a carers' employment can be affected by the potential cancellation of a working with children check. For these and other reasons, the FCAV strongly recommends carers consider seeking independent legal advice.

At the beginning of an investigation, your agency consults with Child Protection within 24 hours to consider the safety of the child and decide on the classification of the incident as either Major Impact or Non Major Impact. In addition to this, CEOs must advise the Commission for Children and Young People within three working days of any reportable allegation regarding an employee or volunteer.

There are many layers to a CIMS investigation that can create time delays, such as police involvement.

The CISS team at FCAV can support and guide you through this process. We may be able to advocate for the process to be hastened, depending on whether or not the police are involved. Despite this, we generally find there are delays.

We can also sit in and support you at the interview, provide clarity about the process and ongoing support whilst the investigation proceeds.

Carers report feeling supported by having an FCAV advocate involved and feedback is that knowing someone was supporting, guiding and advocating on their behalf enabled them to get through.

The CIMS Policy Summary details its guiding principles which relate to:

- Procedural fairness
- Transparency and accountability
- Impact of alleged incident to the child governing decision making
- Timelines for investigation – 28 business days
- Supporting positive client experiences and outcomes.

DHHS have produced some some FAQ sheets that may assist carers:

- Major impact incident process and timeframes
- A guide for out-of-home carers – CIMS.

In addition to support from the FCAV, we would urge you to consider debriefing with your agency's EAP service or obtaining a mental health plan from your GP so you can see a counsellor of your own choice.



ADDITIONAL CHILD CARE SUBSIDY

Did you know that foster carers may be eligible to receive the **Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS)** (child wellbeing) for a child placed in their care who is considered to be 'at risk' for the purposes of ACCS (child wellbeing)?

What does the foster carer need to do?

Foster carers are not automatically eligible for ACCS (child wellbeing). To be eligible, foster carers must:

- contact Centrelink to obtain a CRN (if they don't have one) and have the child/ren in their care linked to them
- apply, and be approved, for Child Care Subsidy (CCS), and
- complete a Complying Written Arrangement for each foster child in their care.

To avoid any delays the foster carer should be encouraged to undertake these steps as soon as they become the primary carer of the child/ren.

What do providers need to do?

- If a foster carer has met and completed all of their requirements to be eligible for ACCS (child wellbeing), you must follow the same procedure as for other 'at risk' children in order for the additional subsidy to be paid (see page 23 of the Guide to ACCS (child wellbeing)).
- You will not need to make a referral to a support agency.
- Evidence provided for subsequent determinations should not be more than six months old and can be a letter from the state/territory child protection agency stating that the court order is still current (see page 31 of the Guide to ACCS (child wellbeing)).

Sometimes a foster carer may be responsible for the care of two or more children from the same family. In this case you must apply for ACCS (child wellbeing) for each child individually through the Provider Entry Point.

Carer Voices | BEING HEARD

LAUNCH OF THE CARER STRATEGY

The FCAV was pleased to attend the launch of the **Victorian Government's Carer Strategy** on Thursday 24 October 2019 at the Victorian State Library.

The development of the Carer Strategy is a significant achievement and a useful first step in responding to long standing carer concerns.

The Carer Strategy has the potential to evolve into an important platform and it is now our job to campaign Treasury and the Victorian Government to fund development and implementation of a work program to meet the strategy's aims.

The Carer Strategy was first proposed by DHHS in the *Roadmap for Reform* and its development was elevated in priority following the FCAV's advocacy. The FCAV believes that carers need to be better represented in the *Roadmap* and that a work program is required with specific aims to address long standing issues with decision making, documentation, respect, training, funding and support to carers.

Funding from the Minister assisted the FCAV to consult with carers to ensure the development of the Carer Strategy was carer-led. Following extensive carer consultation, the FCAV developed the **Carer Strategy Discussion Paper** to articulate carer concerns and as an input into the development of the Carer Strategy.

www.fcav.org.au/images/FCAV_Carer_Strategy_Discussion_Paper2018.pdf

The next step is the development of a targeted work program that prioritises issues and outlines timeframes and resources for agreed projects. In order to craft an effective work program (in the context of current resourcing constraints) a dual strategy may be required. In effect this would mean tackling issues that are within the control of DHHS in the short to medium term while building the case for more substantial initiatives, dependent on

working with external organisations in the longer term.

For example, tackling internal administrative inefficiencies that result in a failure to register a birth or obtain a Medicare card through reform of DHHS processes is a project that could commence immediately.

This could deliver some relatively quick changes and build goodwill across the sector for support of more complex initiatives.

More complex issues may require commissioned research as a stepping stone to a longer term reform objective. This includes a cost benefit analysis of the economic and social benefits of early service intervention to support a funding bid to reform the Client Support Funding Framework. Commissioned research on carers to obtain quantitative and qualitative baseline data would also be useful as we work towards better understanding carers so as to improve recruitment, retention and supports.

The FCAV CEO is due to take over the co-chair position of the Carer Strategy sub-committee at the beginning of 2020 and we look forward to working with DHHS, carers and stakeholder groups on the development of a Carer Strategy work program which will commence in 2020.



Above: Luke Donnellan, Minister for Child Protection, launching the Strategy

Strong Carers - Stronger Children has been published on the Department of Health and Human Services website:

www.dhhs.vic.gov.au/publications/strong-carers-stronger-children

This year the FCAV is participating in
GIVING TUESDAY

December 3, 2019

#GivingTuesday is a day of action asking the community to make a donation to a cause close to their heart. Share our posts on social media this December 3 to support us to support foster carers of children and young people.

www.fcav.org.au/support-us



**WHERE DOES FCAV
FIT INTO YOUR
SUPPORT NETWORK?**

See our *About Us* on fcav.org.au for how our support is independent from DHHS and your agency.

CALL FOR NATIONAL ABORIGINAL CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER



Above: Justin Mohamed, Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People



COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, Justin Mohamed, marked the tabling of the Commission's annual report in the Victorian Parliament on October 31 by strongly supporting the call for dedicated Aboriginal children's commissioners in all states and territories, and the establishment of a new National Commissioner role with independence from government.

The creation of state, territory and national Aboriginal Children's Commissioners was a recommendation of the recently launched Family Matters Report 2019 and a position paper launched in October by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, which the FCAV endorses.

"We've seen at a state level in Victoria that having a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People allows a very specific focus on their wellbeing and cultural needs. We need this to be in place across all states and territories, with a National Commissioner to draw together this work and advance it as a national priority.

The Commission's annual report makes clear the serious challenges still facing Aboriginal children and young people across Victoria's child protection and youth justice systems, where they remain starkly over-represented.

The inter-generational trauma, disadvantage and persistent discrimination reflected in these realities demand the intensive focus that dedicated Aboriginal Children's Commissioners can give.

The solutions to the issues facing Aboriginal children and young people must be led by Aboriginal people. These solutions can be achieved through recognition of culture, and deep engagement with Aboriginal children and young people themselves, with their families and their communities. We need to see this at a state, territory and national level as a matter of urgency."

Justin Mohamed, Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People

Below: Endorsing organisations for a National Commissioner



“The FCAV supports the call from *Family Matters* and SNAICC to establish Aboriginal children's commissioners in all states and territories, and the establishment of a new National Commissioner role.”



Carers' financial support guide

Before the beginning of the next school year we wish carers and their school-aged children a great school holiday period!

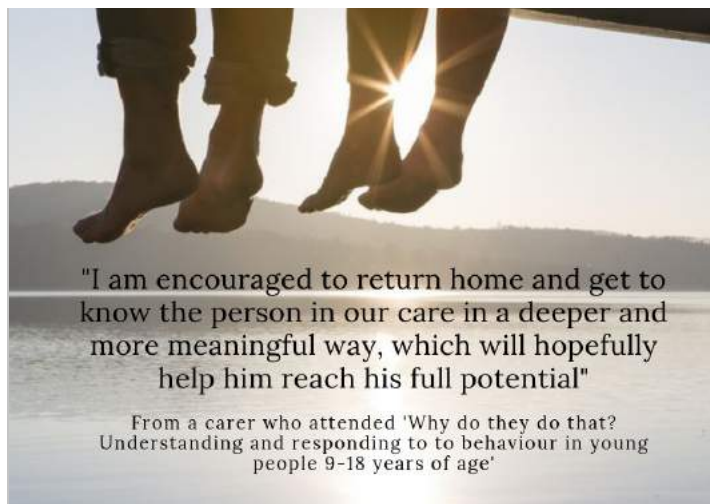
In preparation for the 2020 school year, read the financial guide to ensure you are receiving all the correct supports available, particularly the state school relief section.

www.services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2017-10/Financial-support-guide-for-home-based-carers.docx

Carer COMMUNITY & SKILLS



Kinship and Foster Care Education



The **Carer KaFÉ 2020 Learning and Development Calendar** will be published in December, featuring some CK favourites you may have missed this year as well as a range of new and exciting courses. If you haven't already, sign up to our newsletter or follow us on Facebook to get the calendar delivered to your inbox, or call us to have it posted.

Carer KaFÉ provides free training to statutory kinship and accredited foster carers throughout Victoria. We understand that it can sometimes be tough to attend our sessions in person, so we offer carers free on-site babysitting as well as financial support for travel. Go to our website to find out more and to subscribe to our newsletter www.carerkafe.org.au

Don't forget our online courses are still open on our website and you will receive a certificate for each course you complete!



STAY IN TOUCH
**HAVE YOUR DETAILS
CHANGED?**

Please call us 9416 4292 or email admin@fcav.org.au to update your agency or contact details so we can keep you up to date!

OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS CARE DEMONSTRATION SURVEY - Parents and carers of children with a disability

The FCAV is promoting this survey on behalf of the Victorian Department of Education and Training and PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), who require your assistance in understanding the need for Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services among carers of children and young people with disability in out of home care.

The department is currently piloting after school care and holiday programs for school-aged children and young people with a disability. The department has engaged PwC to evaluate the implementation and impact of these services. As part of this evaluation, they are opening a survey to all parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities across Victoria to understand what their needs look like and which services may meet these needs. Filling out this survey will take 10 minutes.

This survey is now live!

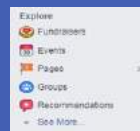
Complete the survey here:

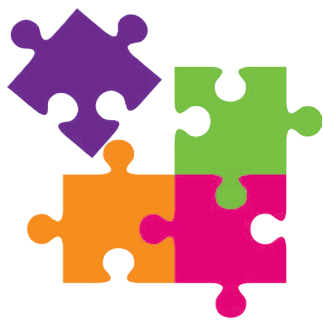
https://pwc.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_40Xrl8rZLuHzmi9



Create a fundraiser for FCAV!

Facebook has created a 'Fundraisers' option you can use to create a fundraiser for the FCAV. Funds donated are put to use to support foster carers. On the Facebook homepage click 'Fundraisers', Click 'Select Nonprofit', Start typing Foster Care Association of Victoria, select us and you've started a fundraiser supporting FCAV! Thank you.





fcav
foster care
association
of victoria

Contact us

Foster Care Association of Victoria

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Stay in touch with the Foster Care Association online:



facebook.com/fostercarevictoria



[@vicfostercare](https://twitter.com/vicfostercare)

www.fcav.org.au

ABN: 30 747 101 099

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of country throughout Victoria and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and culture. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.



Happy Holidays

You're invited to...

CREATE's 2019 CHRISTMAS PARTY!!

When: Saturday the 30th November 11am-3pm
Where: Inner Western Suburbs
Details: Have tonnes of fun with us with GO KARTS, Laser Tag, Sumo Wrestling, Kids Playground, Santa, Art and a Photo Booth. We could go on, or you could just come and see for yourselves!!!



Children under 18 must be accompanied and supervised by an adult. Venue safety rules and conditions apply. Playing the arcade games are extra (not included)

REGISTRATION DETAILS:

Registrations are open from October 21st, 2PM – 5PM daily

CONTACT CREATE on 03 9918 0002