

# Carer *Life*

Staying connected with Foster Carers.

## *Survey #4 – Sept 2018*

The *Carer Life* survey offers effective and timely feedback of carers' satisfaction with their role, enabling FCAV to capture data in a regular, consistent and easy to use format. Priorities for the FCAV are directly informed by foster carer's experiences in providing care to the children in their homes. As the peak body representing foster carers in Victoria, the FCAV continues to champion change through government working groups and independent review processes which aim to target areas for improvement.

Consistent areas of highest priority remains increasing the foster carer allowance and more funding for other expenses for children in care, as reflected in the responses to Carer Life. Over the 18 month period that we have conducted Carer Life, Allowance and Funds remain to be lowest rated by carers (Page 5). We have seen positive shifts overall in areas of Training (Page 4), Support, Coordination and Communication (Page 5). We are passionate about lifting the voices of carers, and on pages 6 and 7 we display a diverse range of comments received from the chorus of stories and opinions shared in relation to our question areas.

## *9 Questions*

**EXPECTATIONS** I know what is expected of me in my role as a foster carer?

**RESPECT** I feel respected as a foster carer?

**SUPPORT** I feel my agency provides me with effective support to provide appropriate care as a foster carer?

**INFORMATION** I believe I receive all necessary information to be a confident foster carer?

**COORDINATION** I believe my agency adequately coordinates Care Team meetings?

**COMMUNICATION** I believe my agency adequately manages communication for the Care Team?

**TRAINING** I receive appropriate training to meet the needs of the foster children in my care?

**ALLOWANCE** I receive an acceptable level of care allowance to meet the day to day needs of the children in my care?

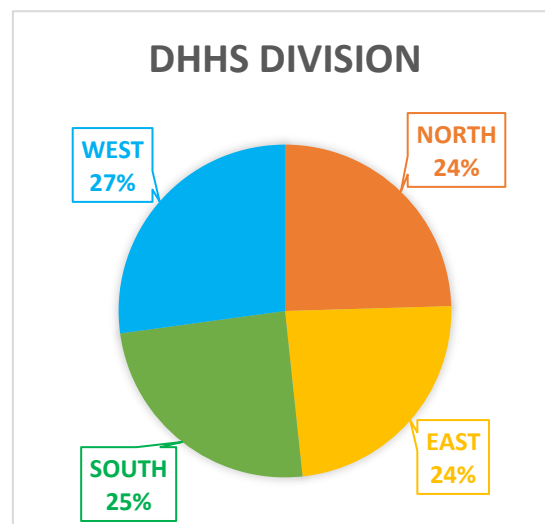
**FUNDS** Aside from the carer allowance, adequate funding is provided to meet other needs of the children in my care?

## *534 Respondents*

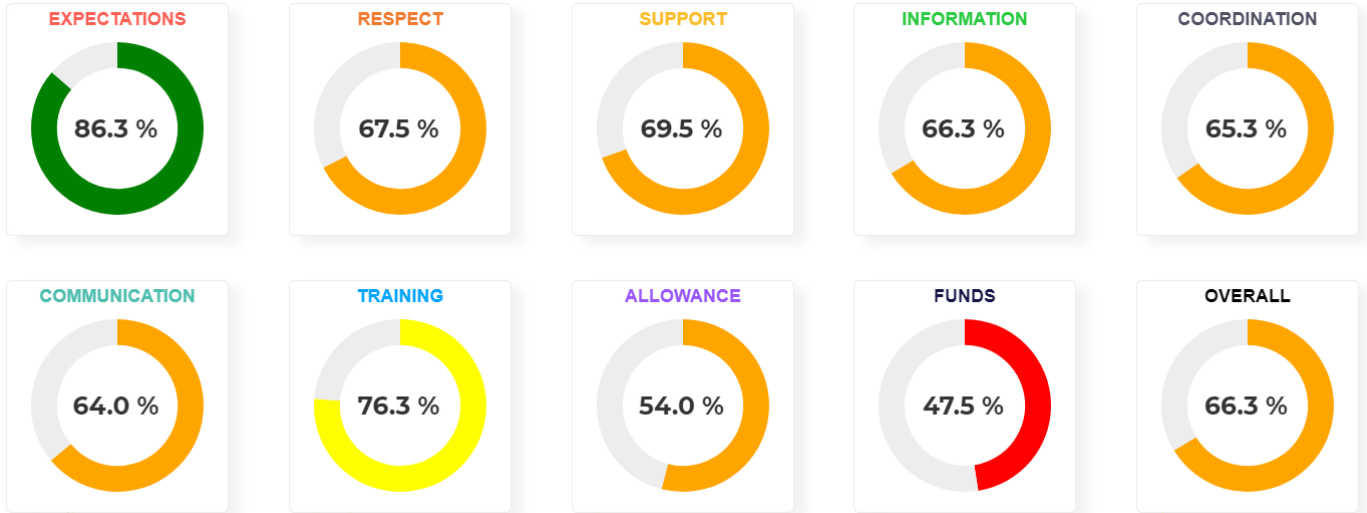
[FCAV's Carer Snapshot March 2018](#) indicates there are 1808 active carer households in Victoria. We therefore feel that we are capturing 30% of the active carer population, evenly across the four DHHS divisions (See graph to right).

On average across our four surveys, 89% of respondents had cared for a child or young person in the previous 6 month period.

See pages 3 and 4 for demographic breakdown of respondents to our four Carer Life surveys and how levels of satisfaction varied within certain groups.

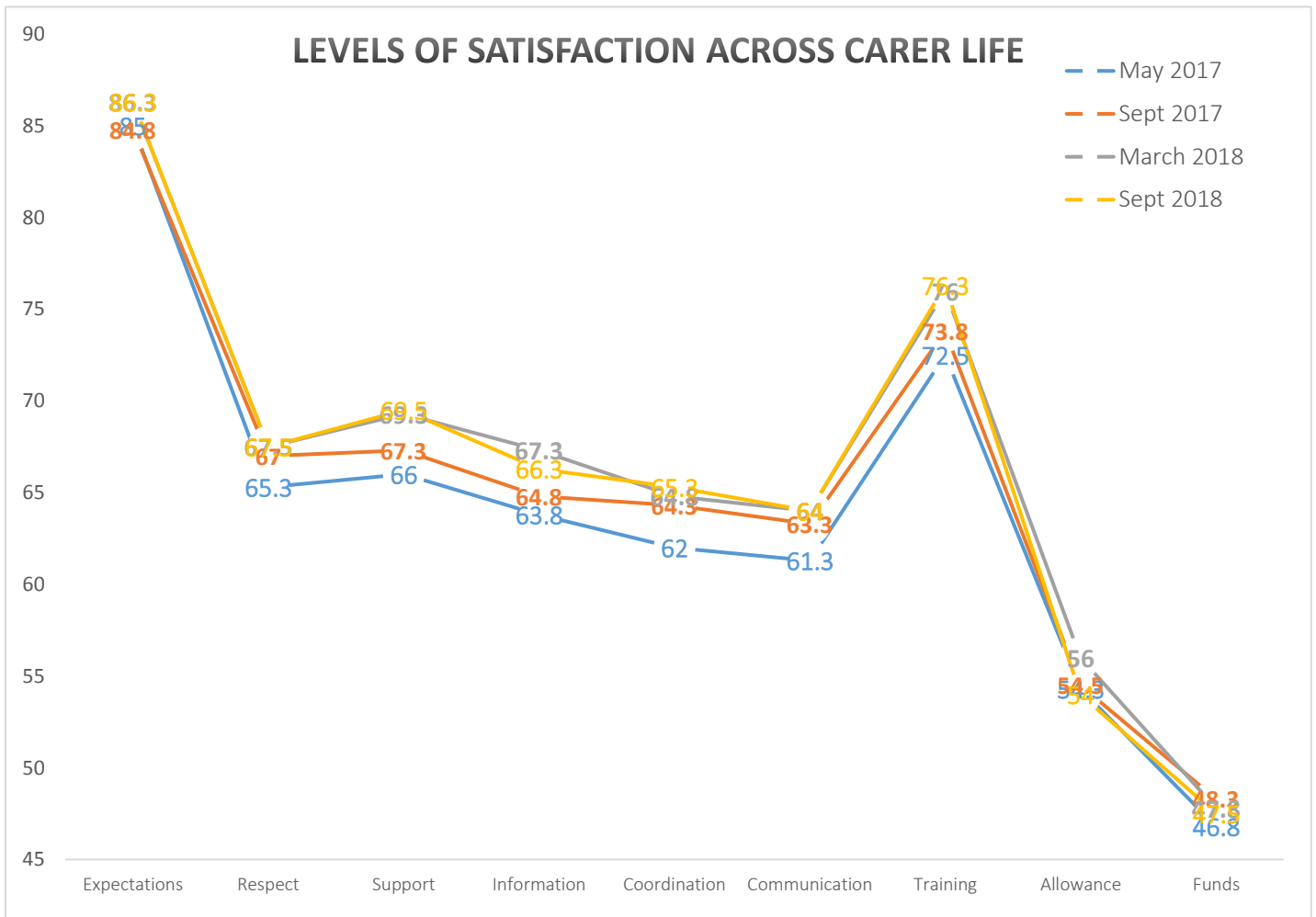


# Primary Findings: September 2018

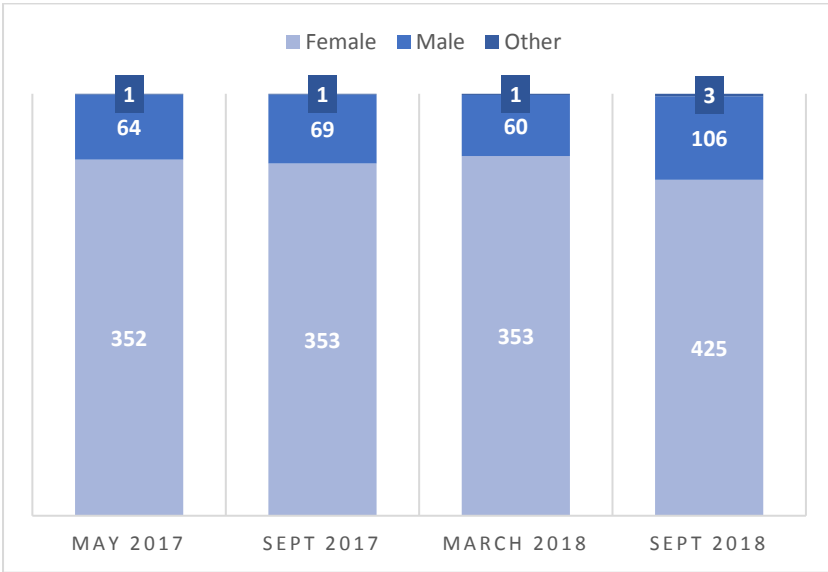


Our overall results from September 2018 showed carers are currently **highly satisfied with Expectation**, **satisfied with Training**, **neutral for Respect, Support, Information, Coordination, Communication and Allowance**, and **highly unsatisfied with Funds**.

In conducting the Carer Life survey over the past 18 months, we have seen a general increase in satisfaction across a number of areas including Support, Coordination, Communication, and Training whilst Allowance and Funding fluctuate but stay low (see below graph and pages 4 and 5 for closer look at these shifts).

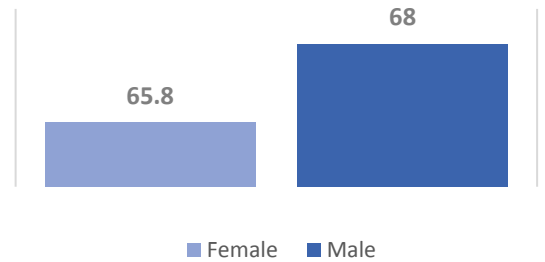


# Gender

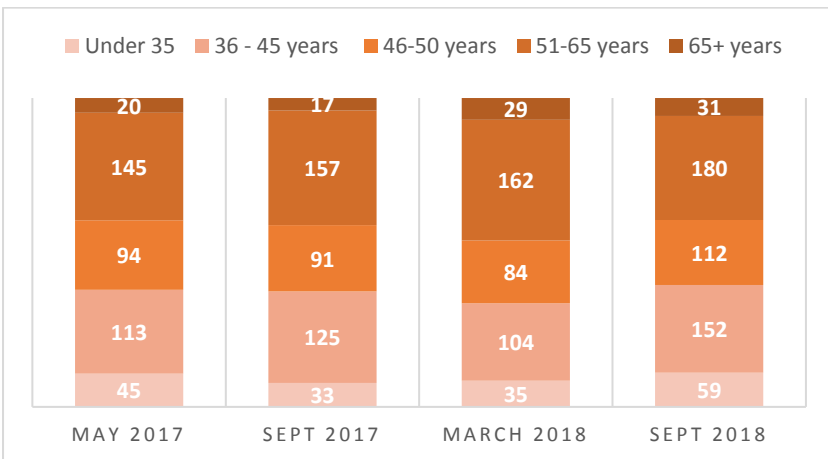


Carer Life data showed increases across all areas of satisfaction for both genders from May 2017 to September 2018.

## OVERALL SATISFACTION SEPT 2018



# Age

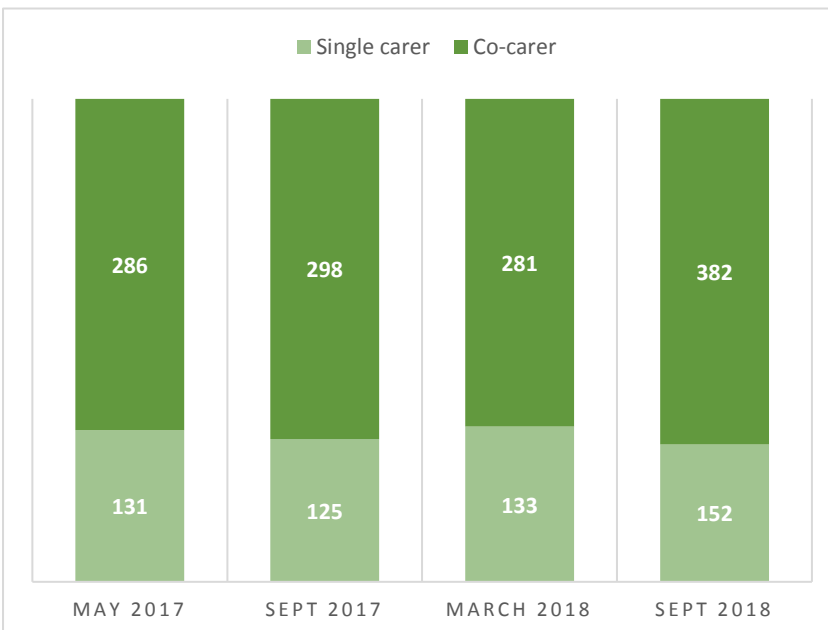


Our 2016 Carer Census showed that 53% of foster carers are between 46-65 years old [\[x\]](#).

Carer Life results consistently showed carers aged over 45 with:

- Higher levels of satisfaction with Expectations, Respect, Information, Coordination and Communication
- Lower levels of satisfaction with Allowance and Funds

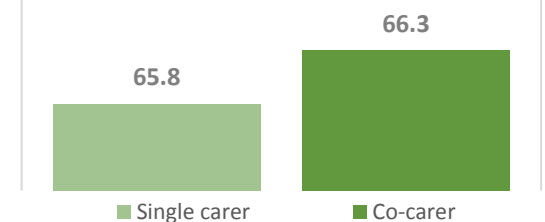
# Household type



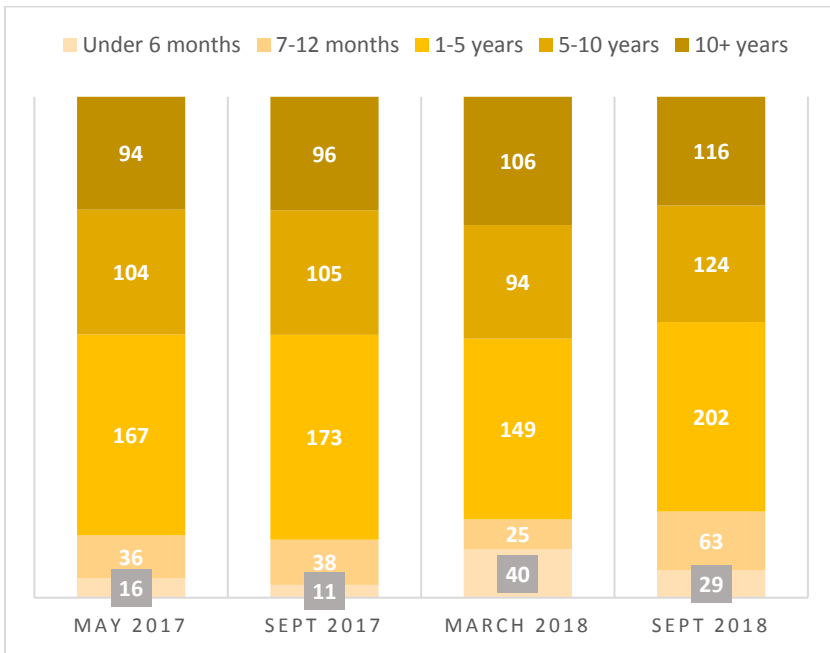
Our 2016 Carer Census showed 66% of foster carers share caring with a partner, and 35% care alone [\[x\]](#).

Single carers showed lower levels of satisfactions with Respect, Allowance and Funds across Carer Life.

## OVERALL SATISFACTION SEPT 2018



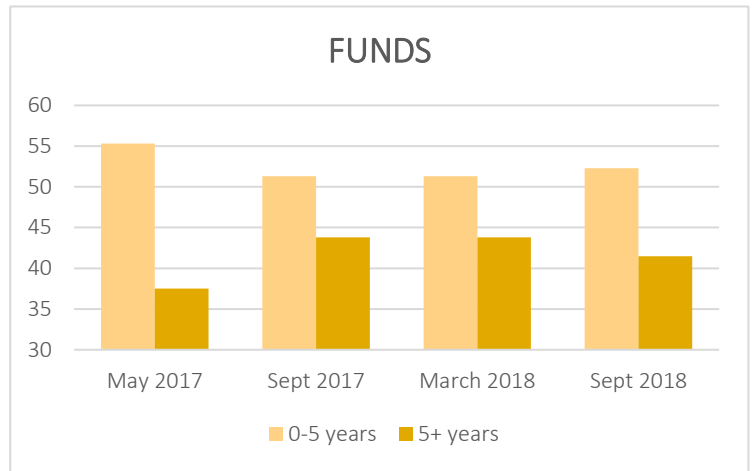
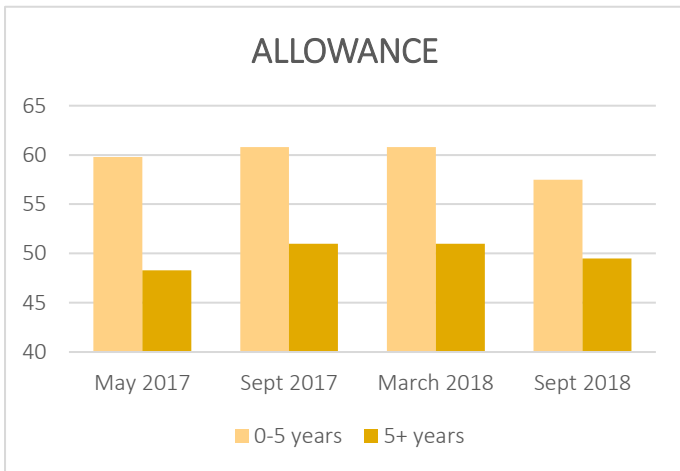
# Length of Caring



Our 2016 Carer Census showed 56% of foster carers have under 5 years' experience, and 26% have been accredited carers for over 10 years [X].

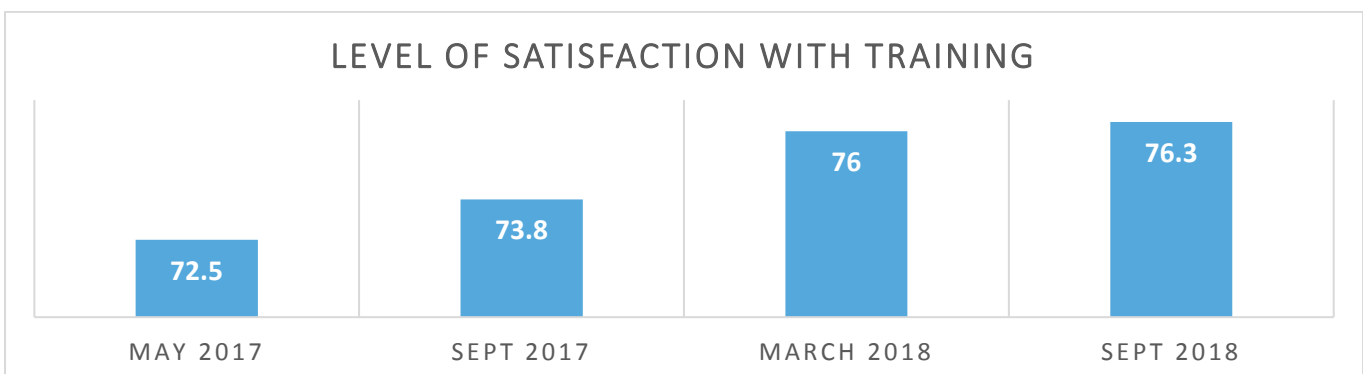
Carers who had been caring for over 5 years showed that they felt more confident with Expectations than less experienced carers, but showed significantly lower levels of satisfaction across all other areas, in particular Allowance and Funds (see below tables)

This reflects that the longer carers are in the system, the less happy they become, perhaps contributing to the flux of carers leaving the system.



# Training

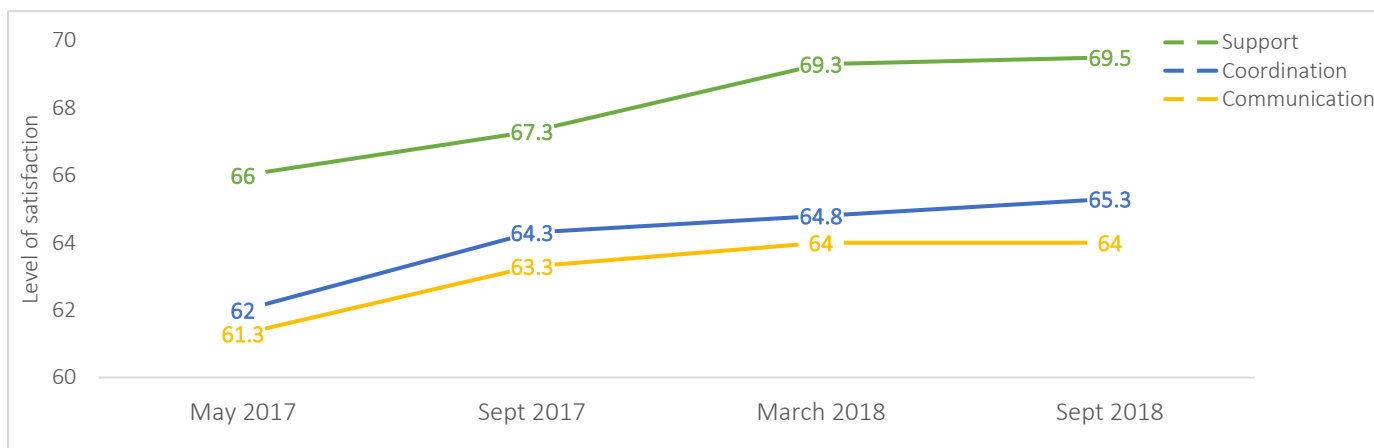
[Carer KaFÉ](#), the state-wide training framework for foster and kinship carer education, has delivered over 200 training sessions since March 2017, with over 1200 foster carers attended. We expected to see change in the levels of satisfaction with Training as Carer KaFÉ gained momentum, and as you can see from the below table there has been an increase of 3.8% over the lifespan of Carer Life.



## Support, Coordination and Communication

Support, Coordination and Communication have sat at a neutral level of satisfaction across the Carer Life survey with a slight increase over the past 18 months (see below graph). In response to our September survey, we received over 100 comments regarding care teams and lack of support and communication between DHHS, agency and carers, which you can read on page 6.

In addition to our push for changes to carer allowance and expense reimbursement, we are also advocating for **adherence and accountability to care team meeting policies** that state care teams are held a minimum of once every 6 weeks and that foster carers are invited, sent minutes and **heard in making decisions** about the children and/or young people in their care. We are also in support of a **professional foster care model** in addition to the current volunteer carer system, which provides an opportunity for carers to join a waged carer system, remunerated on the basis of skills, qualifications and experience to care for our state’s most complex and vulnerable children and young people.

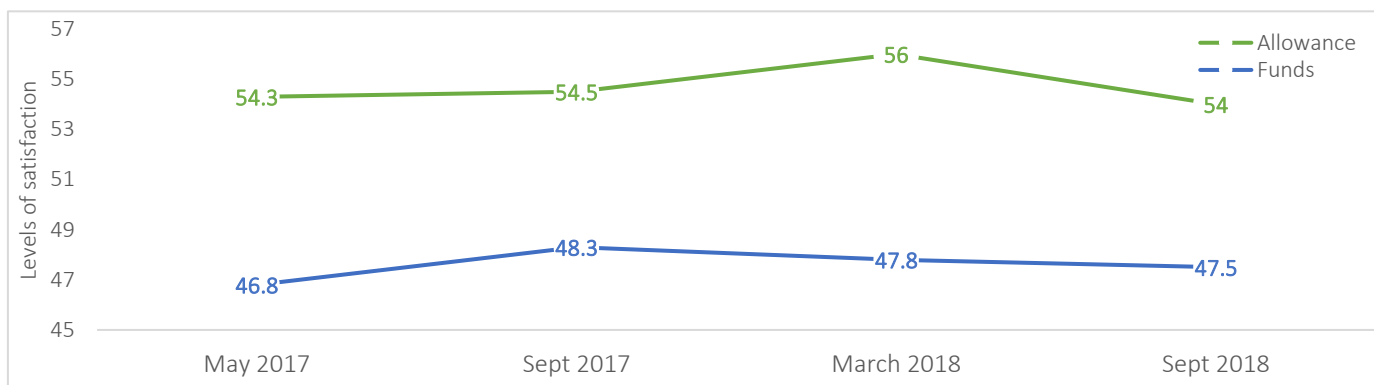


## Allowance and Funds

Allowance and Funds consistently show the lowest levels of satisfaction for foster carers (see below graph). We also received 40 comments expressing dissatisfaction with foster carer allowance and expenses reimbursement (see pg. 7).

As reflected in these results, the Foster Care Association data shows that the Victorian carer allowance falls short of covering the true costs of providing foster care by an average of \$70 per week per placement at the two lowest levels of care. This means that on top of their time, empathy, patience, care and sharing their home, a single carer looking after one child has to contribute \$3,640 from their own pocket each year. This does not include loss of income and sometimes superannuation.

Ahead of the 2018 State election we are calling for an **increase to the basic foster carer allowance by \$70 per week** to cover foster carers’ real out of pocket expenses whilst they care for our state’s most vulnerable children and young people. The **removal of the two lowest levels of carer allowance**, will bring the basic rate in Victoria to parity with other states. [See here for Marilyn McHugh’s analysis of foster care remuneration estimates.](#)



# *A diverse range of comments received*

## **RESPECT (16)**

“As carers we feel very undervalued”

“Foster carers are not consulted enough about children in their care”

“Foster carers are underappreciated... it’s one of the hardest jobs that I know of and there should be more recognition”

“Foster carers are treated as second rate citizens. Yet most of us give our heart and soul to our kids and consider our role to be extremely important. Many carers are too scared to speak up for fear of losing the children in their care.”

## **SUPPORT (73)**

“Our agency is wonderful at supporting their staff to be happy, consistent, well-educated and professional. They treat us like partners, with respect”

“I find our team to be outstanding ... I always feel they are focused on providing the best possible care for the children’s needs and are there to support me”

“My agency shows me unwavering support and never fail to ask if there is anything they can help me with, be it support or just an ear to listen”

“I believe foster care agencies are understaffed and overloaded to meet the specific needs of children in care”

“Management cuts and so much administrative work affects the time the case managers can directly give to the children”

“I have been a carer for 18 years... I feel that the system does not meet the needs of high risk children, I don't feel supported by the agency and I don't feel my concerns are listened to”

“Support from agency is good when placements are going well but when placements are more challenging agency is slow and ineffective in providing additional supports”

## **INFORMATION (10)**

“DHHS have not been thorough enough with information and have left out vital information on numerous accounts which would have helped us in our care of our current placement. This in-turn has resulted in us deciding to end this placement”

“It is very frustrating not know what support is available to help us, knowing what we are eligible for would be great, even if we were deemed not suitable. It’s only through talking to other carers that we know what’s available”

“There is insufficient background material provided for most of the children I have cared for to fully understand the child's needs and help them progress through trauma. Initial information provided for the placement is totally insufficient to make a reasoned decision as to whether the placement has the chance of being successful. I acknowledge that agencies only give what they can but it isn't enough”

## **COORDINATION (5) / COMMUNICATION (13)**

“Although communication with the care team is managed well by my agency it is within the constraints of a system that isn't quite meeting the need. I think a more co-ordinated approach needs to be found that enables instant and complete communication simultaneously among the care team”

“As a carer the hardest thing should be looking after children with many complex needs, however this is not the case; the hardest challenge is working with workers that do not care, do not know how to pick up the phone to see how you are and do not know how to respond to calls”

“I think the other departments that are involved in the placement of a foster care child should work more closely and consistently with open and honest communication so we are all on the same page in regards to the health and wellbeing of the foster child”

## **TRAINING (10)**

"I appreciate the training offered and take part whenever I can"

"The training offered by Carer KaFÉ has been very helpful"

"Most of the trainings are during weekdays and during work hours, so it's quite difficult to attend them. We both work during the week and miss these opportunities"

## **ALLOWANCE (20) / FUNDS (20)**

"Foster carers are leaving in droves. People just cannot afford an extra human being living in their home. We are hanging in for as long as we can"

"The current payments do not cover the cost for looking after children. There is not enough funding and if you ask for support you are made to feel it is about the money"

"Requirements to meet funding applications for further financial assistance to provide care for children is sometimes unreasonable and therefore carers are left out of pocket or child unable to receive supports"

"More money needs to be put into the system to ensure children receive the psychological and educational support they need to help them heal"

"Funding for activities is lacking, traumatised children require more than the average child, not less"

"All too often decisions on appropriate funding for services for the children in care is based on how much has been spent, rather than assessing what the individual child needs and funding accordingly"

"Carer allowance needs to be reviewed and adjusted annually to meet the specific needs, level of trauma of individual children and the difficulty in caring for individual children according to their behaviours and developmental stages"

"Current allowance needs to be addressed to meet the needs of the whole family"

## **BROKEN SYSTEM (27)**

"Agencies and all DHHS should all be focused on the client NOT on their politics, stats and egos"

"DHHS fails at acknowledging the importance of the feedback provided by foster carers"

"I feel the agency are very limited in their ability to support me as a foster carer due to the restrictions and obstructions created by DHHS. DHHS are not willing to listen to foster carers and the expertise, education and experience of the foster carer is not considered relevant to the team care meeting. Despite consistently raising issues that we felt needed addressing in order to care for the children placed with us, DHHS discounted these. Our agency had no authority to implement or initiate any of these solutions without the consent of DHHS"

"My agency is great, DHHS is impossible - documentation required is impossible, funding variable and likely to change as the regular caseworkers leave in short succession. The system is broken and kids are not be supported nor are foster families"

"The system we are all expected to work within is broken and carers are pulling their hair out on a daily basis. I don't feel heard or respected at all .... I wouldn't continue to be a carer but I love my kids too much to quit"

"I love being a foster carer, it's the system that is frustrating and not designed with the child in mind"

## **OTHER (26)**

Included comments about need to extend age care of care to 21, complexity of caring for children with disability, struggles with permanent care conversion process and lack of support.