



Spring 2018 newsletter



- Enter now for giveaways
- Be heard
- Scholarships
- Join a CAG

In brief...

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

Front cover image: Looking forward to Summer holidays? Apply to our travel giveaway competition on the next page to be in the running to win \$1,000 towards your family's summer holiday!

Advocacy
Support
Advice
Information
Become an
FCAV member
today



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

- Visit our Youtube channel - search for FCAV on www.youtube.com for uploads from the 2018 Carer Celebration at Parliament House and our Voice of Carers advocates speaking about the joys and challenges of caring and what should be done to improve the system for carers and the children and young people in their care. Visit www.futurefostercare.org.au to add your voice. See more on **page 4**.



- **Passports** - Carers regularly find the process to obtain passports for children in their care can be time consuming and unclear. Please refer to the CISS guide for obtaining passports: www.fcav.org.au/news/applypassport
- **Homestretch campaign success for young people in state care!** We applaud the Victorian government's announcement to extend care to 21 years in Victoria. It's a landmark decision that will make a real difference to 250 young people over 5 years.
- **Carer Advisory Groups** will be meeting for their fourth and final meeting for 2018 during November and December. If you would like to consider being part of the Carer Advisory Groups in 2019, please refer to information on **page 6**.

- **Thinking of making an end of year donation?** To better support carers and acknowledge the vital work they do that often goes unnoticed, FCAV is introducing a Caring for Carers program in 2019. We will turn direct donations into wellbeing events and giveaways for carers. Please tell your friends and family to consider the Foster Care Association and Caring for Carers if they're looking for a cause this Christmas: www.fcav.org.au/support-us



*all donations are tax deductible

Message from the CEO

The Foster Care Association has sought carer input on a number of campaigns and surveys over the last few months and I just want to thank you all for taking the time to make yourself heard and provide feedback that supports us to advocate and function to our member's needs.



This includes a fantastic response to our September Carer Life Survey with 534 respondents – representing 30% of our membership cohort with even splits across state divisions, ages and household types. FCAV has asked the same 9 questions over the last 18 months, and data trends across this period show consistent areas of concern for carers. We have also seen some areas improve and in particular training, reflecting well on the implementation of Carer KaFÉ. Allowances and client expense

reimbursements are still areas of least satisfaction for carers, particularly as length of time caring increases. To see the full report visit our website: www.fcav.org.au/advocating-change/carers-life-survey

It's not too late to join the FCAV campaign to support better funding and support for foster care. Click and send and share with your friends and family: www.futurefostercare.org.au. Every one of your letters makes a difference.

Katie Hooper,
Chief Executive Officer, Foster Care Association of Victoria

CARER GIVEAWAYS! ENTER NOW TO WIN...



Choose your own adventure.... **HUGE TRAVEL PRIZE!**

Summer is just around the corner, a perfect time to plan a getaway for the whole family!



FCAV is giving away a \$1000 travel prize for one lucky foster carer and their family!

To be in the draw to win, please email with the subject header "Travel giveaway" and tell us what adventure you would choose and why?

*Prize money will be reimbursed up to \$1000, for all receipts provided for travel, accommodation, meals and entertainment spent before June 2019.

To enter either prize draw, call FCAV on **9416 4292** or email competition@fcav.org.au. Please include your name, address, agency and phone number. *You must be an active foster carer and FCAV member to be eligible. Competition closes **30th November 2018**.



Win a Tablet – iPad or Android!

Being connected to technology is a vital tool for foster carers so we are giving a tablet away!

To be in the draw to win, please email with the subject header "Tablet giveaway" and tell us if you have been to a free Carer KaFÉ training session yet! What did you learn and have you

put your new skills into practice?

If you haven't been to a Carer KaFÉ training session, jump onto the website: www.carerkafe.org.au to view the upcoming training, tell us what session interests you and why?

CULTURAL CARER FORUMS

Following the success of our first cultural forums earlier this year, FCAV co-hosted two more cultural days with a focus on learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, history and culture.

Cultural Experience at Healesville Sanctuary on 25 September was hosted in partnership with Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). The day included Welcome to Country, smoking ceremony and didgeridoo playing by Murrundindi, Ngurungaeta or head man of the Wurundjeri people, as well as basket weaving and a delicious BBQ lunch cooked by Healesville staff.

24 carers and 34 children attended, along with 10 staff from VACCA and 6 from FCAV. Of the feedback forms received, 11 carers had Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in their care, 12 said the forum expanded their cultural knowledge and 11 said the forum provided awareness of VACCA and FCAV staff.



Above: Murrundindi at Healesville Sanctuary

The following week on 2 October, we travelled to Ballarat to co-host a **Cultural Experience at Lal Lal Falls** with Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative (BADAC).

Uncle Peter Lovett provided an Acknowledgement of Country, spoke about the significance of Lal Lal falls and Bunjil the Creator, played didgeridoo and led a walk around Lal Lal Falls. Carers enjoyed a BBQ lunch in a natural setting, basket weaving, art activities and prizes.

22 carers and 19 children attended, along with 8 staff from BADAC and 4 from FCAV. Of the feedback forms received, 6 carers had Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in their care, 10 said the forum expanded their cultural knowledge and 10 said the forum provided awareness of staff and networking opportunities.



Above: Katie with BADAC staff Kelvin & Tim at Lal Lal Falls.

Bushfire Season – Be Prepared



We have experienced a mild spring here in Victoria, but by all reports a hot, dry summer is on its way. Have you prepared a **Client Bushfire Leaving Early Plan** for each child in care for travel you have planned during the coming bushfire season? This information is especially important for carers who are taking children on holidays to areas considered to be at potential risk.

The Country Fire Authority website is the best resource for establishing which areas are rated 'extreme' or 'code red': www.cfa.vic.gov.au. For carers living in, or visiting, high-risk areas, it is essential to have a clear bushfire plan as advised by the CFA. The CFA offers very sound advice regarding bushfire preparation at **Make your Bushfire Plan today - Country Fire Authority** including information on Fire Ready Kits, Bushfire Plans, Leaving Early, Pets and Bushfires and Back up Plans.

Your **Handbook** also has information about Fire Safety and bushfire preparedness on page 122. Don't forget to keep your agency up to date about any travel plans you make during this summer season and stay safe.

Carer Voices: BEING HEARD



futurefostercare? FCAV Advocacy for Improvements to Foster Care

#Vicvotes - As a Victorian carer or a supporter of carers, we urge you to go online to www.futurefostercare.org.au

It only takes a second to add your postcode and hit send so your local MP knows you are focused on foster care ahead of the election.

Make sure you get your friends and family to do the same.

Together we have sent over 500 letters to MPs but we want to double that to ensure our politicians understand that out of home care needs their attention.

Make yourself heard, every letter counts.

Go to www.fcav.org.au/advocating-change for more information on FCAV's voice in the sector

A dark blue banner for the Carers' Voices study. It features three logos at the top: Melbourne Children's Hospital (with the tagline 'A world leader in child and adolescent health'), Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and The University of Melbourne. Below the logos is the text 'Supported by The Royal Children's Hospital Foundation'. The main heading is 'Carers' Voices study: Health - Survey open!' followed by '~ Kinship and Foster Carers ~'. The text describes the study's purpose and provides a link to the survey: 'Go to the Health Survey to complete it online at: https://redcap.mcri.edu.au/surveys/index.php?s=8MXRK7JRN'. It also provides an email address for more information: 'carer.survey@mcri.edu.au' and a phone number: '9416 4292'. The text concludes by stating that the survey is anonymous and takes up to 15 minutes to complete.

"IN OUR OWN WORDS"

Children and young peoples' experiences of care

The Commission for Children and Young People has established an Inquiry to hear from children and young people about their experience of out of home care. The purpose is to develop a deeper understanding of young peoples' experiences of care and the extent to which they have a say in formal and informal decision making processes that impact on them. The Commission wants to hear from young people across Victoria who have recent experience living in care.

We want to understand directly from children and young people about what it's really like to enter, live in and leave care, and what needs to change. To do that, we want to speak to as many children and young people who have experience of living in care as possible. This includes kinship care, foster care, residential care, lead tenant accommodation.

We think that the more people we speak to, the better our findings and recommendations will be. If you are interested in speaking to us face to face, there are two ways to make contact with us to arrange a time to come and speak to you.

For more information about the inquiry or to register your interest, please visit the website - ccyp.vic.gov.au/upholding-childrens-rights/systemic-inquiries/in-our-own-words or email: oohc@ccyp.vic.gov.au. You can also let us know what you think by taking part in one of our anonymous surveys for young people who live in care or for people who have recently left care.

If you are a carer of a child or young person who wishes to be involved, please head to the link below to find out the various options available.



Twitter: @CCYPVictoria



Facebook: ccypvictoria



COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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/carer-support-service

INSIDE CISS SUPPORT: Authorising carers using the standard instrument of authorisation

AS A CARER, you will make many decisions every day about caring for the child in your care, for example, the clothes they will wear, their routine and daily activities. These are day-to-day care decisions, and, as the child's carer, you have both the right and the responsibility to make them in the child's best interests. You do not need authorisation to make these decisions.

At other times, routine decisions that require authorisation will need to be made for a child.

The standard instrument of authorisation (the standard authorisation) will be provided to you as the primary foster carer to enable you to make decisions about specified day-to-day issues for children in your care. Your standard authorisation lists the issues you are authorised to make. It does not apply however if you are a respite carer.

The standard authorisation enables you to make decisions about the specified issues for a child subject to an interim accommodation order or a protection order, including a family reunification order. This means that you do not need a new standard authorisation if you accept a new placement, or a new protection order is issued for a child in your care.

When you are issued with the standard authorisation you can expect to receive:

- a cover letter
- the standard instrument of authorisation (the standard authorisation)
- an attachment A to the standard instrument (the specified issues about which you can make decisions)
- an information sheet

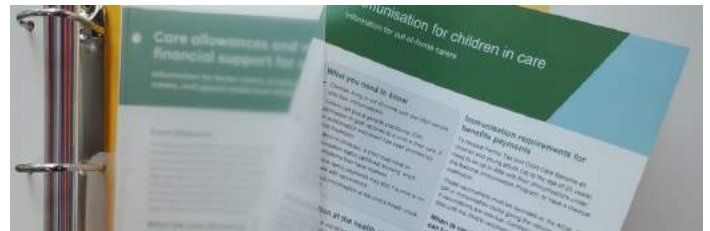
The standard authorisation must be signed by the Chief Executive Officer (or equivalent) of the registered community service organisation you are accredited with.

The standard authorisation is only valid for the primary carer named on the standard authorisation.

A new standard authorisation will be required if you transfer to a new community service organisation or Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation.

What will be included in the standard authorisation, completed by the Case Planner:

- routine medical and dental care (including child immunisations)
- education related activities within Victoria
- photographs in relation to school or other educational, sporting or community activity
- overnights stays with friends or siblings within Victoria (over 4 year olds)
- Haircuts to maintain an existing style or healthy condition – to change the style you need guardian permission.



For more information about this and on what is not included in the standard instrument of authorisation please refer to:

www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/out-home-care/administration/authorising-carers

www.fcav.org.au/news/improving-the-carer-authorisation-policy

CARER AUTHORISATIONS



The standard authorisation will be provided to you as the primary foster or prospective permanent carer to enable you to make decisions about specified day-to-day issues for children in your care. Your standard authorisation lists the issues you are authorised to make decisions about to support the care you provide. It does not apply if you are a respite carer. The standard authorisation enables you to make decisions about the specified issues for a child subject to an interim accommodation order or a protection order that confers parental responsibility on the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services including a family reunification order.

This means that you do not need a new standard authorisation if you accept a new placement, or a new protection order is issued for a child in your care.

REMINDER - Care allowance payments changing only to direct deposit to carers bank accounts

Payment of care allowances via cheque payments is ending in 2018.



Carers who have not yet done so are reminded to return an authorisation form providing their bank details to enable direct deposit of care allowance by EFT.

If you are still receiving payment of care allowance by cheque FCAV encourages you to provide the requested details to the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that you continue to receive care allowance payments. You can obtain the form by calling the Care Allowance Helpdesk: **1300 552 319** or emailing: dhscaregivers@dhhs.vic.gov.au.



CARER ADVISORY GROUPS NEED YOU!



Do you...

- have an interest in improving the kinship and foster care experience for children and carers?
- have an understanding about some of the challenges carers face in your area?
- have an interest in promoting caring to the broader community?
- have time and commitment to attend 4 meetings per year and participate in occasional working groups?

If this sounds like you then you may be interested in joining your Divisional Carer Advisory Group.

WHAT ARE CARER ADVISORY GROUPS?

Carer Advisory Groups bring together foster carers, kinship carers, community service organisations, peak bodies and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to help create a stronger home-based-care system in your division and across Victoria. Established in 2016 we are now recruiting for 2019/20 term.

WHAT DO CARER ADVISORY GROUPS DO?

Carer Advisory Groups provide kinship and foster carers the opportunity to drive improvements at the local level, participate in consultation and comment on topics or issues that impact on carers and children and young people in care; to help improve the caring experience. Your carer experience is invaluable, being a CAG member will keep you up to date on issues affecting carers, connect you to other carers and provide an opportunity to collaborate on improvements for carers.

HOW DO CARER ADVISORY GROUPS WORK?

Carer Advisory Groups were established in each of the four Department of Health and Human Services divisions; North, South, East and West. The groups meet quarterly and are co-chaired by

a carer and a DHHS representative.

There are approximately 20 members in each CAG. Membership to the CAG is for a period of up to 24 months. CAG meetings last up to two and a half hours and assistance is provided with travel and child care costs to allow you to attend meetings. Key sector developments are discussed and carer input sought.

HOW ARE CARER ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS SELECTED?

To be considered for membership you need to submit an Expression of Interest application. Visit our website to download the EOI form:

www.fcav.org.au/divisional-carer-advisory-groups

The application is an opportunity to demonstrate your interest in carer issues, and what you think you can bring to the CAG. If there are a greater number of carers interested in participating in the group, applications will be considered based on achieving a mixed representation in the group. Re-applications from current members will be considered depending on numbers.

APPLICATIONS FOR 2019/20 ARE NOW OPEN - CLOSING DATE 7TH DECEMBER 2018

If you have any questions regarding Carer Advisory Groups or the application process please contact your Divisional CAG representative at Department of Health and Human Services:

North	Noel Buckley 03 9412 5382 noel.buckley@dhhs.vic.gov.au
East	Ashley Malpass 02 6055 7778 ashley.malpass@dhhs.vic.gov.au
West	Jo Tomlins 03 8397 1932 jo.tomlins@dhhs.vic.gov.au
South	Michele McElroy 03 5144 9100 michele.mcelroy@dhhs.vic.gov.au

VOLUNTARY ROLE - SECRETARY, FCAV BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Are you passionate about foster care, governance, with time to attend meetings and undertake the work of a Board?

Come and join our friendly board of directors, 8 meetings per year.



This role commences in February 2019 for a 12 month period.

Must have experience in:

- Preparation of Agenda and other documentation prior to each meeting
- Email documents to the board of directors prior to the meeting
- Attend each meeting, most held in Collingwood in the evening 6.30pm
- Write the minutes and distribute in a timely manner

Meetings are held at the FCAV office in Collingwood, 6.30pm-8.30pm.

To be considered for the role, applicants are required to provide a short bio and meet with Chief Executive Officer and the President Toni Hetherington. If you are interested in this position please contact the office via email admin@fcav.org.au or 9416 4292 to speak with Katie Hooper our CEO or our President Toni Hetherington.

The successful applicant will be required to undergo satisfactory pre-employment checks, a criminal records check and a Working with Children check.

SCHOLARSHIPS - CARER KAFÉ

Would a unit of formal accredited training support you in your carer role?

In 2018, Carer KaFÉ offered carers scholarships of up to \$5000 to complete a unit of accredited training relevant to their care role, which could go towards potential further formal qualifications. Four foster carers and three kinship carers were selected with interest in studying units ranging from community services, psychology, play therapy, to grief and loss counselling.

Juggling study, work and parenting can be difficult, and a majority of the carers found that studying online suited their needs. After checking in with the carers undertaking study, we're happy to announce that two have completed their units (one with "flying colours"!), and five are continuing on with their studies and are projected to finish their course at the end of this year.

Many of the carers felt that the units they studied confirmed the quality of care they are already providing. All of the carers reported that the training has also given them new skills that directly feeds back into their caring role. They also felt that the units complimented the Carer KaFÉ training they have completed, giving them a more in-depth understanding of concepts learned in training. Another benefit from the accredited training has been the elevated confidence and standing they feel they now have in their caring role. Many of the carers feel they can better advocate for themselves and others because of what they've learned, with one carer saying the unit "gave her the power to know that you can make change".



"Carer KaFÉ subjects have fed into what I've been doing, which has made everything work well. The scholarship acknowledges that you're doing something really professional to aid your position as a foster carer. It elevates the status of foster carers, which is one of the most important things we can be doing." Carer KaFÉ Scholarship Winner



Sometimes big learning institutions can be challenging to work with, but luckily all of our carers felt well supported. This was especially true when their caring role effected their ability to study and complete assignments. In particular, carers were impressed by the availability and speed of their educator's response to their issues and questions. Where placement was involved, the institutions were flexible and accommodated their needs.

The scholarships provided important resources to the carers as six of the seven said they wouldn't have been able to undergo study without the Carer KaFÉ funding. As one carer said, "all spare money goes towards the kids – you know how it is?"

Carer KaFÉ is again offering carers the opportunity to study units relevant to foster and kinship care that could lead to formal qualifications.

Carer KaFÉ is seeking expressions of interest from foster or kinship carers.

Please go to the Carer KaFÉ website, under the 'News' section you will find the expression of interest form. Please email this to info@carerkafe.org.au or call us to complete it on **9416 4292** by **Friday 30 November 2018**.



Carer Life

Staying connected with Foster Carers.

Priorities for the FCAV are directly informed by foster carer's experiences in providing care to the children in their homes. 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. We have seen positive shifts overall in areas of Training, Support, Coordination and Communication. We are passionate about lifting the voices of carers, and thus we display a diverse range of comments received from the chorus of stories and opinions shared in relation to our question areas. We are thankful to all carers who participated in the survey.

See our website for September survey full report:
www.fcav.org.au/advocating-change/carers-life-survey



FOSTER CARE QUEENSLAND

2018 National Foster and Kinship Care Conference

7 September – 9 September 2018

Gold Coast, Australia



The Foster Care Association Victoria, through Carer KaFÉ, was so pleased to sponsor the attendance of a delegation of carers to the National Conference in September.

Those attendees absorbed a lot of information and overall feedback was that they had an intense weekend of learning and connecting with other carers.

Look on our website for learning and take home messages from their experience at the conference...

www.fcav.org.au/news/2018-nfkcc



CREATE's Hours of Power (HOP) events are an opportunity for young people with a care experience to present their experiences and ideas for reforms directly to decision makers, in front of an audience of peers, carers, workers, teachers and other people involved in the system.

On October 11, just weeks out from the state election, the Election HOP saw young people aged 13-25 present their ideas for change directly to politicians. Minister Jenny Mikakos (Labor), Georgie Crozier (Liberal) and Nina Springle (Greens) heard presentations and were asked questions by young people in front of an audience of over 100 people. The young people's stories were powerful, their questions of urgent importance and their ideas sensible and clearly expressed.

The young people involved should feel extremely proud of their advocacy. Kim, Ash, Ella, Russ, Sharney, Allan, Ayden, Nikita, Cat, Jesse, Aaron, Rosie, Sam, Charlotte and Victor – you are stars!

The topics included better mental health support, providing post-care support for young people who have moved from interstate, improving how the justice system, providing better supports for kinship and permanent care placement, and improving communications within the sector.

Mental health was the first topic discussed, and it formed a major theme throughout the different presentations. Young people advocated for an out of home care-specific mental health service to be established across the state, and funded to provide mental

health support as needed to all children and young people in care and post-care up to the age of 25. It would also provide advice and support to carers and workers and importantly, it would offer a diverse range of therapies. One young person felt that existing public services had been "rigid in their approach to working with me. I also found that DHHS would wait until I had a crisis to find mental health support for me, where as we really need support when we are doing well, so that we don't reach crisis point as readily. I was not a fan of working one on one in a room with a therapist".

Extending care to (at least) 21 years of age was also a major topic, as it has been in previous HOPs. All three political parties represented on the day had already announced at least a partial commitment to the Home Stretch project of extending care to 21. Minister Mikakos stated that "this has been the missing piece of the puzzle".

In her opening speech, Principal Commissioner for Children and Young People, Liana Buchanan, said "you can't say you care about kids rights if you don't value youth participation and not hear what young people are telling us".

You can revisit the conversation via the hashtag #electionHOP

CREATE provides training and a supportive environment for young people who want to use their ideas, experiences and passion to try to make a change in the out of home care system. Call CREATE on **9918 0002** to enquire about the Speak Up program, and the HOP.

Did you know?

The FCAV newsletter is now quarterly. If you are not on the mailing list to receive our regular e-news updates in between times, send us an email at:

admin@fcav.org.au

Stay in touch with the Foster Care Association online:



facebook.com/fostercarevictoria



@vicfostercare

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