



CARING TOGETHER

Information and news for foster and kinship carers in South Australia



Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Carers

I am thankful, year-round, for the extraordinary contributions each of you are making to the lives of children and young people and last month's Foster and Kinship Carer Week was a wonderful opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate you and all that you do. It was great to see so many of you enjoying the events held across South Australia, in collaboration with our partner organisations.

Hosting the 2023 South Australian Child Protection Awards was a brilliant way to round out National Child Protection Week. Now in their third year, the awards, held in partnership with the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), shine a light on the many inspiring outcomes that are being achieved for, and by, children and young people in care.

The William Magarey room at Adelaide Oval (Tarntanya Wama) was full of heart-warming stories on the day of the awards presentation. These include the journey of Steve and Maxine Bowden of Port Pirie, with Maxine having been a foster carer for 40 years, and Dwayne Harvey, a Bidjara man, who welcomed his niece to live with him at the family home, alongside his five daughters. You can read their stories in this edition.

I also travelled to Darwin in September for the annual SNAICC - National Voice for our Children national conference. Focusing on early childhood education, care, and child protection issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the event highlighted some of the most important work we still have to do in our sector.

I hope you enjoy what we've put together for you in this edition of *Caring Together*.

Jackie Bray

Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection



September Read to Me book packs land

The **Read to Me** Project made its latest delivery of beautiful new books to over 1500 children in care last month. If you care for a child aged six or under, keep a look out for their package and enjoy sharing story time together!

Read to Me is a book gifting program through Raising Literacy Australia, supported by DCP. It supports children in care to improve their reading and language skills.

The project recognises the importance of access to quality age-appropriate books and encourages positive adult-child interactions to support healthy brain development.

Each young child in care automatically receives free books as gifts every three months until they turn seven years old, creating a library that they can keep and enjoy for many years to come.

If you care for a child aged six or under and have not been getting library packs, please talk to the child's case worker.

More tips on reading to young children can be found at:

raisingliteracy.org.au/books-activities





Message from the Minister

Dear Carers

I was honoured last month to meet many of the winners of the 2023 South Australian Child Protection Awards. They are extraordinary people who deserve our heartfelt gratitude for what they do. We are indebted to them just as we are indebted to you. As carers you generously open your hearts, homes and lives to children and young people, and without you the child protection and family support system simply could not function.

South Australian families are facing a myriad of complex issues; you are among those holding the key to improving the outcomes for children and young people.

I remain inspired by your tenacity to build a stronger and safer future for some of our most vulnerable children and young people, and I remain committed to ensuring we're doing what we can to support you in your vital roles.

This edition of *Caring Together* includes an update on our work to support and empower you, including through improving access to respite care. It also highlights work being undertaken to provide children and young people with opportunities to get involved in sport, be active and build social connections.

There is also an article on the new Direct Experience Group, along with news about the National Foster and Kinship Care Conference held in Hobart.

This edition features photos from some of the fantastic events held during Foster and Kinship Carer Week. I enjoyed meeting some of you at the Port Noarlunga Bowling Club and look forward to continuing to catch up with you at future events.

Thank you so much again for all you do to strengthen children's lives. Thanks for choosing to make a difference.

The Hon Katrine Hildyard MP
Minister for Child Protection



Centacare Catholic Family Services recruitment and assessment officer – foster care Eric Cruz and Life Without Barriers carer engagement officer Karen Phillips at The Show.

Big month for child protection sector

Throughout September we celebrated two weeks of great importance to the child protection sector. National Child Protection Week was held from 3-9 September and Foster and Kinship Carer Week from 10-16 September.

The National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN)'s National Child Protection Week continued to champion the message, 'Every child in every community needs a fair go'. It was complemented with the theme, 'Where we start matters'.

On 8 September, we recognised the outstanding achievements of carers, children and young people and staff across the sector at the 2023 South Australian Child Protection Awards.

Foster and Kinship Carer Week celebrated the hard work and dedication of our state's carers. Throughout the week, the department held a range of events in collaboration with non-government partners to thank carers. These included lunches, morning teas and breakfasts, at locations including football clubs, community clubs and hotels.

We also hosted a booth at the Royal Adelaide Show to raise awareness about becoming a carer in South Australia. Hundreds of people stopped at the stall to ask questions and find out more about foster care.

Kinship carer Leanne Malchow was among those who attended a lunch at Grünthal Brew in Verdun, which she described as "marvellous".

"The setting was beautiful, and the food, and catching up with other carers and sharing ideas," she said.

"It's a really nice way to remind yourself that there's plenty of us out there and we're not alone."

We say
**THANK
YOU**

Photos from our
'thank you' events
across the state.



Dannielle and Leeanne



Naomi and Karen



Aaron, Mark and Megan



Kelly and Megan



Eion and Aynsley

In the news

Many of the state's foster and kinship carers shared their stories in local newspapers as part of Foster and Kinship Carer Week, and the 2023 South Australian Child Protection Awards.

A selection of carers' stories can be found on the Department for Child Protection's website: tinyurl.com/carersweek



**Changing lives
through caring**

**Family can pave
the road ahead
to success**




we say
THANK YOU

Dear Wonderful Foster Carers,
Thank you for all the help, love and support you give to children in care.
You are the most caring of human beings and all your efforts are very much appreciated.
Enjoy your special week.

 **Aboriginal Family Support Services**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection



Your work is valued
WE APPRECIATE YOU
You're amazing
Thank you
For everything you do!

 **LUTHERAN CARE**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

Thank you for every good day,
Thank you for every hard day.
Thank you for always having your child's back.
Thank you for taking the time to go back in time with them to learn the lessons they missed.
Thank you for sharing with them they deserve love when they try their hardest to show you they don't. Without you, the world would be less bright for a soul that needs the light.

 **Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA Inc**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

A BIG
THANK YOU!!
TO ALL OF THE
AMAZING FOSTER & KINSHIP CARERS!
THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE TO THESE KIDS IS IMMEASURABLE.
WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR ALL YOUR AMAZING EFFORTS!

 **Junction**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection



A Huge thank you!
for bringing so much happiness, tranquility & stability to children's lives.

Thank you very much for the amazing work you do everyday to bring positive impact on the children you care for. Really appreciate your compassion and selflessness that you put into it. We appreciate you.



Thank you wonderful carers. All your time, support and passion is so appreciated!
What you do is truly special! From Nat Snr Placement Prac.

 **Centacare Catholic Family Services**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

Thank you for choosing to make a difference in the lives of our youth.

 **Martinhi Kinship Care**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection



THANK YOU
for providing love and care to those who need it the most.
-Tara, UCSA

 **Uniting CountrySA**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

We couldn't do this without you
everything you do is so incredible and helpful
thank you so much!

 **ozchild**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection



Thank you isn't enough to express the gratitude we have for you. We are all blessed you have provided a safe and loving environment for our children to heal and grow.

 **Martinhi Kinship Care**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

Thank you for your time, dedication and patience.
Your commitment is appreciated.
This week is dedicated to you. Thank you from Eric (Recruitment Officer)

 **Centacare Catholic Family Services**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

Thank you so much for everything you do.
Your ongoing care and commitment makes all the difference to our children in foster and kinship care.

 **keyass**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

For all that you are we say Thank you
Nurturing Fun Loving Kind Amazing Devoted Caring

 **Uniting CountrySA**  **Government of South Australia**
Department for Child Protection

I would like to extend a massive thank you to Carers that bravely open their hearts and homes to children and young people that need a bit of extra sparkle and care in their lives!
I want to acknowledge that we understand it is a tough job and it is appreciated!

Celebrating our child protection champions

From the carers who love and support children, to the sector staff going above and beyond to improve the futures of young people, the 2023 SA Child Protection Awards celebrated the achievements of those making a lasting impact.

WINNERS - SA FOSTER CARER OF THE YEAR



Steve & Maxine Bowden

Four decades of caring for children

Maxine Bowden just wanted to give back to other families in need – and now she's helped hundreds of them.

The Port Pirie woman, 75, has been fostering children for more than 40 years, and her motivation stems back to her own experiences as a 19-year-old woman.

During the mid-1960s, Maxine had not long been in a relationship when she gave birth to her first daughter, who was adopted by another family.

"My biggest driver was that there was a beautiful couple in this world that adopted my daughter when I couldn't be there for her," Maxine said.

"I wanted to give back because someone was there when I needed them."

Maxine and her husband Steve were winners in the South Australian Foster Carer of the Year category of the 2023 SA Child Protection Awards, which recognise the outstanding achievements of people and organisations from across the sector.

Maxine reconnected with her daughter 30 years ago, and also has two other adult children, 14 grandchildren and 16 great grandchildren.

But she estimates she has cared for about 300 children as a foster carer – many in respite or short-term placements and others in longer term arrangements, such as 17-year-old Jack*, currently living with Maxine and Steve.

"Our job really is to be there to try and get that child back with their family, or if that's not possible, to keep them in a safe placement," she says.

The biggest reward she's received for her role, she says, is knowing the impact she's had on children's lives.

"One day I came home from work and there was a knock on my door. I came out and there was this big, tall, young man – he gave me a smile and said, 'Remember me, Maxine?'" Maxine said.

Now all grown up, this young man was once a child who Maxine had supported for a period.

"That's the biggest congratulations you can get, when one of those young people comes back and gives you a bit of praise that you've done something in their life," Maxine says.

Maxine and Steve tied for the Foster Carer of the Year award with carers Sonia and Brenton Smith and Lisa O'Malley.

WINNER - KINSHIP CARER OF THE YEAR



Dwayne Harvey

Single dad of five has room for one more

Dwayne Harvey is a family man.

The single dad, who lives in the state's Mid North is busy raising his five daughters – but not too busy for one more.

He is also caring for his two-year-old niece, who joined his family as an eight-month-old.

"It's a juggling act," he said humbly.

"It's a big family, but she's my niece, so she is family."

For his efforts, Dwayne has been named a winner in the Kinship Carer of the Year category of the South Australian Child Protection Awards, alongside another kinship carer, Kylie Stewart.

He is supported by InComPro Aboriginal Association in partnership with Uniting Care Wesley Bowden.

Dwayne strives to never miss a family-contact visit despite the logistical challenges of travelling the 250km trip to Adelaide with a toddler. His kinship case worker was so impressed, she nominated him for the prestigious award.

"You could have blown me over," he said of the nomination.

"But I didn't start the journey for recognition.

"I started so she'd have a healthy, happy family to grow up in."

Dwayne, 38, a Bidjara man whose country is in south-western Queensland, has worked in disability care but has spent the past 18 months as a full-time parent.

His path to becoming a kinship carer was a tragic one.

Dwayne and his now ex-wife had hoped to take care of another niece, but she sadly died of health issues before the placement.

Then ...

"We got a call," he said of the day that DCP reached out to him.

"We accepted in a heartbeat.

"There was no question I wouldn't."

The little girl is now flourishing, and Dwayne plays a big part in keeping her connected to family and culture.

When Dwayne and his wife separated last year, he decided to press on.

"I'm raising five daughters," he said. "It's not my first rodeo".

"To me, she's my daughter ... I'm in this for the long haul."



**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN
CHILD PROTECTION
AWARDS 2023**

The South Australian Child Protection Awards are delivered by the Department for Child Protection in partnership with the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN). Awards were presented at a ceremony at Adelaide Oval (Tarantanya Wama) during National Child Protection Week.

Roving Reporter



with
Myra Langdon
Volunteer of the Year

In each edition of Caring Together, our Roving Reporter interviews individuals or organisations making a difference in the lives of children and young people.

This time, we chatted with Myra Langdon, winner in the Volunteer of the Year category of the 2023 SA Child Protection Awards. She recently retired from her role with the department's volunteer program after almost three decades of service.



GETTING STARTED

Myra Langdon was seeking ways to give back to her community when she signed up to help vulnerable children through the Department for Child Protection's volunteer service.

That was about 27 years ago – and she's only just finished up in her role.

The Kiwi moved to Australia about 35 years ago, first living in Melbourne and eventually settling in Adelaide's northern rural outskirts.

"I came here for a holiday and forgot to go home," Myra says.

"When (my daughter) went to school, I thought, I'm not going to stay home and do nothing, this is boring."

LEARNING ABOUT THE SERVICE

Myra and a friend attended an information session about the volunteer program, setting her on the path to almost three decades of service to children in care.

Children and young people in touch with the child protection system have often experienced significant trauma and issues affecting their families including domestic violence, mental illness, drug use and poverty.

Myra "couldn't believe" what some of the children in care had experienced, and wanted to do what she could to support them.

Her role was to drive children to and from access visits with family members, or to school or appointments.

GETTING TO KNOW THE CHILDREN

Myra says she loved developing a rapport with the children and seeing them open up, trust her and share more conversation.

Sometimes the children she worked with would be beaming when she arrived, and chatty during the journey.

"There were a lot of kids that when they saw me they'd run out," she says.

Others were quiet, but often they would open up as she got to know them over transport relationships that might last up to a year.

Department for Child Protection volunteer Merv Trubee was also a finalist in the Volunteer of the Year category, along with Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA's Lorraine Joy.

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS OR FAMILY WHO COULD HELP?

Volunteers take on a range of roles such as transport, helping children with their Life Story book work (a scrapbook of memories), homework, and supporting young people at events.

People interested in volunteering can call **0492 000 743** or visit **childprotection.sa.gov.au/volunteers**.

Carers have their say on respite

More than 400 people, including over 250 foster and kinship carers, have provided feedback on how they'd like respite support to look in South Australia.

The Department for Child Protection is exploring additional ways respite arrangements could be used to improve carers' wellbeing and strengthen children and young people's placements.

This was supported by a recommendation in Dr Fiona Arney's *Report of the Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care* that carers be offered flexible funding packages to pay for respite care placements and other arrangements that support their caring roles. For example, this might include funding to access services such as babysitting, cleaning and gardening.

The department recently held a series of forums and also conducted an online survey, receiving feedback from more than 400 people. We are grateful for the time carers have taken to comment on this important issue, with your input helping determine how the respite support payment will work.

The department is now reviewing feedback, and further information on respite support will be available in the coming months.



SA carers at the National Foster and Kinship Care Conference

A large group of SA carers attended the National Foster and Kinship Care Conference in Hobart, Tasmania, in September.

The themes this year focused on mental health, trauma, wellbeing and culture. A particularly relevant part of the program was the ongoing challenge of cyber-safety. One in five children experience cyberbullying at some time in their childhood, at an average age of just 14.

Carers found the topic helpful in supporting children and young people in their care in online environments.

SA was very well represented this year, with a high number of carers in attendance, and presentations by SA Life Without Barriers, Key Assets and Connecting Foster and Kinship Care SA.

Care concern reform work

The department is reforming how it manages care concerns.

Priorities for this reform include ensuring procedural fairness for carers, more nuanced response pathways, and increasing reporting visibility to support timely responses to concerns raised.

Our guiding principles for this work include that all children and young people in care have the right to receive safe care and carers should feel informed, supported, consulted, valued and respected.

The department will set up several consultation groups as part of this work, including a dedicated group of family-based carers. Once drafted, the proposed new care concern management process will also be subject to public consultation, which will be open to carers.

Keep an eye out for future updates in *Caring Together*.





Recruitment begins for Direct Experience Group

Recruitment has begun for members of a new Direct Experience Group (DEG). The DEG will provide an opportunity for parents and families who have been directly involved with the child protection system, to have a voice in system improvement.

The first meeting is expected to occur in the next few months.

The Department for Child Protection recognises the value of lived experience and is committed to supporting the establishment of the platform to bring together knowledge from diverse sources to inform a strong child protection system.

The department has engaged Life Without Barriers to establish the DEG in partnership with the Reily Foundation to ensure the perspectives of those with lived experiences are captured to inform practice improvement initiatives.



Supporting children's self-regulation

You may have heard the words 'regulation', or 'self-regulation' in conversation, school newsletters and even your social media feed. In simple terms, regulation is the ability to manage emotions, attention and energy levels.

As carers, you will have seen the children in your care experience moments of dysregulation when their buckets are empty and they are struggling to manage the big feelings in their bodies.

Self-regulation is a skill that develops over a lifetime. Parents and caregivers have an important role in supporting their child to develop this lifelong skill through connection, teaching and modelling.


To help you with this challenging task, the Department for Education has developed a free online course for carers and parents called "An introduction to regulation". This self-paced module can be completed in about an hour and is open to anyone.

It is designed to help families to learn about regulation and includes some concepts and tools to support the ongoing development of regulation skills in children and young people.

**STAY
IN THE
KNOW**

Follow us on Facebook
 /ChildProtectionSA

The course is available at:
bit.ly/regulationresource





Minister for Child Protection, Katrine Hildyard, speaks at the recent engagement workshop with DCP and ORSR.

Exciting beginnings for sport collaborations

The Department for Child Protection (DCP) has recently partnered with the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR) to provide children and young people with opportunities to get involved in sport, experience the mental, physical and emotional benefits doing so brings, be active and build social connections through better engagement with sport and recreation clubs.

A highly successful engagement workshop was recently held by the two agencies, with attendees including carers, representatives of community organisations, sporting associations and clubs, the Commissioner for Children and Young People, and DCP and ORSR staff.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many expressing enthusiastic support for providing children with easier, more affordable access to sports and recreation activities.

One carer in attendance told DCP that she felt privileged to be asked to attend, and found the workshop very enjoyable and empowering.

The event has prompted new connections between DCP and local sporting associations and clubs, and ignited an increased interest in how we can enable more for children and young people to connect with their local club and feel the sense of belonging that comes with that.

DCP and ORSR are currently working on further progressing this initiative by finalising key themes and following up on actions raised at the event.

Many young people speak about wanting to actively participate in community sport, and we are actively committed to helping them do so.

Adelaide Crows score points with young footy fans

The elation of cheering on your footy team live from the grandstand is an experience some children might take for granted. For Crows fans Caitlin* and James*, their first opportunity to visit Adelaide Oval and watch a live footy match came during the 2023 AFL season.

Thanks to Adelaide Football Club, the Department for Child Protection received a number of tickets to each of the Crows' home games, so that children and young people in care and their carers could attend for free.

Dressed in Crows colours, Caitlin and James cheered loudly from the stand and excitedly video-called their brother who was unable to attend on the day. "Thanks for making this a life memory for Caitlin and James," their carer told DCP. "Their smiles are fantastic".

Eight-year-old Bradley* was also among the lucky recipients of tickets. Having recently moved to Adelaide from regional SA with his grandma, who is now his primary carer, finding his place on his local field has been a big part of managing this life transition. Grandma Sharon expressed her gratitude for the tickets, telling DCP, "Bradley loves football, and was so excited to go see the Crows. What a fantastic game of football it was, with the Crows winning as well!"

Thank you, Adelaide Football Club, for giving these young footy fans such a special day out!

*Names have been changed to protect the identities of children in care.





Noticeboard

Ambulance cover for children and young people

A reminder that young people transitioning from care can access ambulance cover for emergency hospital transport until they turn 21, under an agreement with the SA Ambulance Service.

It's all part of our Investing in their future initiative, which gives children and young people with a care experience priority access to a range of services. This includes services from health, education and housing to recreational activities, training and employment.

For more information, speak with your DCP case worker or visit bit.ly/dcpambulancecover.



Free membership to carers' organisation

As a foster or kinship carer, did you know you are eligible for free membership of Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA, the peak representative body for carers in South Australia?

Sign up today to access free advocacy, information and support, as well as opportunities to connect with other carers across the state.

As a member, you will be invited to provide your voice to shape and improve the child protection system for foster and kinship carer families across SA.

To find out more, scan the QR code, visit cfc-sa.org.au or call **1800 732 272**.



Register now for summer VACSWIM program

Did you know children in care aged between 3 and 12 can participate in a free* five-day water safety and survival program through Surf Life Saving SA (SLSSA)?

The program runs across South Australia during December 2023 and January 2024 and is a great way to keep children busy during the school holidays while they learn valuable life skills.

If you wish to enrol a child in care in a VACSWIM lesson, you must first complete the registration of interest application form, which can be found here: vacswimsa.com.au/dcp.

The application will then be assessed and you will receive a promotional code and further instructions on how to complete the enrolment process. Please allow up to one week.

Enrolments for the VACSWIM program will close at noon on the Friday before the program begins. To find the most suitable location and check program dates and available places, visit: vacswimsa.com.au/locations

**Please note, while the program and equipment is free for children in care, some venues charge entrance fees.*

If you have any further questions, please speak to your child's case worker or contact VACSWIM directly via 8354 6996 or vacswim@surflifesavingsa.com.au.