

Caring Together



**Caravan crew
has compassion
in spades**

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Conquering peaks brings resilience | Carer Council contributes to reform | Stability post care in the spotlight



For more news and stories, visit
childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers



Government of South Australia
Department for Child Protection

Chief Executive Jackie Bray speaking at the South Australian Child Protection and Family Support Symposium.



Message from the Chief Executive

Dear Carers,

I'm so excited to bring you our new-look newsletter, *Caring Together*.

If you're anything like me, you'll love hearing about the achievements of young people with a care experience in this edition. From Butch and Tanaya who completed the Kokoda Track after becoming peer mentors with Operation Flinders, to Ilesha who shares her hopes and dreams with us after completing Year 12 in 2023 - we hope they inspire others, including those in your care, to reach for the stars.

We have news about the recently-formed Carer Council on page 10, and if you're interested to have your say on matters directly affecting carers, you can read how we are also making this easier for you with our new Carers Voice section on the Department for Child Protection's website.

As always, I remain incredibly thankful for all you do, and look forward to seeing what we can achieve together as we progress further into 2024.

Jackie Bray
Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection



Helping you have your say

As a carer, we want to make it easier for you to have a say in the review and development of DCP policy, programs and strategies that affect you. The department is working to improve its approach to carer consultation, and is committed to providing you with more opportunities and options to get involved.

Our plans include Carers Voice – a new page on DCP's website for carers to find information on consultation opportunities that are available or coming up.

Carers Voice will also host reports on completed consultations, so you can see how DCP has incorporated carer feedback into our work.

Visit **childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/carers-voice/** to see how you can get involved.

Thank you to all carers who have generously given your time over the past few months to help us learn what matters most to you when it comes to consultation.

Got 5 minutes?

Tell us what you think of our new-look newsletter for carers, *Caring Together*. Visit Carers Voice to complete our quick survey.





Exciting times ahead for young kinship carer

Kinship carer Cortney has entered 2024 full of enthusiasm, after celebrating her first Christmas in the new home she shares with her younger sister.

The 24-year-old spent most of 2023 searching for the perfect home amid a tough housing market and difficulty securing a loan, eventually moving in during September.

Buying your first home is no mean feat, but Cortney has faced extra challenges to achieve her goal, having taken on the care of her sister, then 11, at 18 years old after she moved into her first rental property.

This followed her spending time in care herself as a child.

She said her biggest sacrifices were scheduling her work commitments around caring for her sister *Charlotte, and not always being able to go out with her friends as a young woman.

"I had to change my schedule to be able to have an 11-year-old," Cortney said. "I had to be there for the pick-ups and the drop-offs and the meltdowns."

Throughout her journey, Cortney has received support through her DCP kinship care worker, and their trusting relationship helps her talk through and manage her challenges.

Like other kinship and foster carers, she receives financial support to help cover expenses associated with caring for her sister. The department has also provided funding for her to study a Certificate 3 in Education Support and helped her access the Federal Government's Transition to Independent Living Allowance.

Cortney said despite the challenge of juggling her commitments, caring for her sister came very naturally.

"I always raised (my siblings), even when I was little," the Murraylands woman said. "I felt really lucky to have that opportunity to have (Charlotte) come and live with me. She often says how grateful and appreciative she is."

Cortney, who works in a child care centre and is also studying child care at the Australian Institute of Early Childhood Studies, is eyeing a future career in occupational therapy, specialising in children's services.

She struggled to find a bank that would lend her the money for her new home, finally accessing the finance from HomeStart after finding a house that turned out to be "the one."

Cortney is "very excited" to work on a range of projects such as putting in a lawn, growing fruit trees and installing a rainwater tank.



Conquering peaks brings resilience

On top of towering mountains on the Kokoda Track and SA's Flinders Ranges, Tanaya and Butch found the keys to building greater self-esteem, tenacity and resilience.

Tanaya and Butch, both 18, recently returned from Papua New Guinea where they were among eight young people selected to hike the Kokoda Track as part of their involvement with Operation Flinders.

Tanaya, who is part of a foster family, said the life-changing experience included climbing a hill so steep it's known colloquially as "The Wall".

"Every time I get to the top of one of those mountains, it definitely fills my bucket – it's just amazing," Tanaya says.

For both Tanaya and Butch, the experience followed a longer association with Operation Flinders, which helps youth affected by issues such as school disengagement and challenges with authority, to build important life skills.

Tanaya had previously experienced anger issues and was disengaged from education – but after tackling the peaks of Yankaninna Station in the Flinders Ranges as a program participant, she learned what she was truly capable of and her school grades and attendance improved.

"They (Operation Flinders) assure you that you can do anything you put your mind to, and it's true," she says.

Operation Flinders Chief Executive Officer David Wark says among the initiative's key aims is battling young people's misconceptions about what they can achieve.



Page opposite, Tanaya with Jeff and Harry McDonald in Papua New Guinea. This page, Butch on the Kokoda Track with other walk participants.

"In so many instances they've been told, 'You can't, you're not good enough'. But our message is that the sky's the limit and let's see what you're capable of."

"For so many of them, it's like an awakening – that a week ago, there's no way I would have been able to do this, but they realise you take one step at a time and you get there."

After finishing their own initial Flinders Ranges treks, Butch and Tanaya joined the Operation Flinders Next Step Program, offering young people the chance to take part in other camps and outdoor activities and complete qualifications in hospitality and barista work.

Through their roles as peer mentors, they guide other young people through treks, learning leadership skills and identifying new passions.

After just completing Year 12, both Butch and Tanaya hope to move into youth work where they can support other young people.

Butch, who was a finalist in the 'Outstanding achievement of a child or young person' category of the recent SA Child Protection Awards, says tackling his first Operation Flinders journey was "probably the hardest thing I've ever done".

"It taught me so much about integrity," he says.

"My work ethic has definitely gotten better."

The eight young Kokoda Track walkers were able to participate through support from the Duke of Edinburgh Award and Flight Centre, which partnered with Operation Flinders to fund the trip.

Family's care experience reaches new heights

For specific child only carer Aaron, DCP's Over 18 Education Initiative was a chance to keep his new-found family together.

Aaron has cared for his neighbour's son Jake since 2019.

Now 21 years old, Jake has been able to remain with Aaron with the support of this DCP initiative.

Under the scheme, Aaron continues to receive basic carer payments and an education allowance for Jake, until he's 25. Jake is among almost 100 people with a care experience taking part in the initiative.

Aaron, 58, said he had known Jake and his family for a long time.

"Jake had been living with an aunt for 13 years, but she wasn't in a position to continue," Aaron said. "I got a call from her to see if I could care for him for a weekend."

"Five days before Christmas I got a call my clearances had come in, so I went and picked him up."

"I understand the importance of stability for Jake, and I told him he could stay as long as he liked."

Aaron set about helping Jake get a part-time job in a supermarket, his licence and eventually a car.

He even reached out to a friend in the building industry to see if there was any full-time work and two years ago, Jake started a plumbing apprenticeship.

Jake said his life with Aaron has been a good one, and that he has learnt a great deal under his guidance, particularly in what can be a challenging time for young people as they transition to adulthood.

"He helped me with all the major milestones," Jake said. "I'm definitely grateful." Aaron is determined to show Jake as much as he can and said the education initiative has been key to that. "It's all about experiencing new things and building confidence," Aaron said.

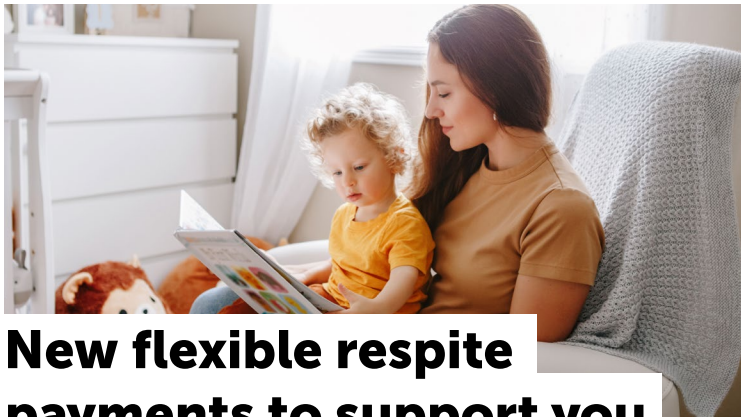
Jake's girlfriend Kesie has also become part of the family and they recently travelled to Sydney to climb the harbour bridge.



Info on the Over 18 Education Initiative can be found on DCP's website: bit.ly/postcareservices

A fact sheet is available at: bit.ly/sfbc-factsheet

You can also read about kinship carer Michelle's experience caring for her twin niece and nephew with the support of the DCP Stability in Family Based Care Initiative here: bit.ly/DCP-news-education-initiative



New flexible respite payments to support you

Carers are now receiving an additional \$800 each year, in a move to help them access a range of respite-like supports.

Eligible carers can directly use the new flexible respite support payment towards services that best meet their individual needs. They have said services like gardening, cleaning, meal services and transport for children can all provide a respite-like effect.

The changes do not affect traditional respite care, which will still be available to kinship and foster families.

During recent consultation, more than 400 people including over 250 kinship and foster carers, had their say on how to make respite more accessible for South Australian carers.

Eligible carers began receiving a \$200 payment quarterly from late January, representing a total investment of about \$2.15m per year.

Minister for Child Protection, the Hon Katrine Hildyard MP said the government was committed to doing all it could to recognise carers' vital roles, as they were "the backbone" of the child protection and family support system.

"I am continuously inspired by the tenacity and commitment carers show in their efforts to strengthen children's lives and keep them safe and supported to reach their goals," she said.

Care connections

Minister for Child Protection, the Hon Katrine Hildyard MP caught up with kinship and foster carers in Whyalla and Port Augusta in January, to hear more about the issues affecting them. Minister Hildyard said carers' views, shared during roundtable discussions, were "crucial on our journey of change".





Back row from left, Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA CEO Fiona Endacott, Jakob Schmaal, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy, Minister for Child Protection Katrine Hildyard, Suzanne Scanlon, Emily Ware, Peter Kennedy, Alexandra Ingleton and Gai McMichael. Front row from left, Ellese Nelson, Gail Ward, Kailah Hurditch, Dana Wright, Carer Council Project Lead Lauren Gibbs and independent facilitator Dana Shen.

Carer Council to contribute to reform

The newly-formed Carer Council met for the first time in December 2023.

The Council was a key recommendation from Dr Fiona Arney's Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care, and will provide Minister for Child Protection Katrine Hildyard with independent advice that contributes to the design of policy, practice and reform surrounding foster and kinship care in South Australia.

The 12 members are Alexandra Ingleton, Dana Wright, Ellese Nelson, Emily Ware, Gai McMichael, Gail Ward, Jakob Schmaal, Kailah Hurditch, Kate Thomas, Lorraine Joy, Peter Kennedy and Suzanne Scanlon.

Peter and his wife Deb, who are based in the Riverland, have been foster carers for four years.

Over that time the couple has seen how well the care system works – along with opportunities for improvement.

"I see my involvement in the Carer Council as an opportunity to be part of conversations about positive enhancements to a good system," he said.

All Council members are active carers, and together represent a diverse group. The members include seven kinship carers and five foster carers, while four are Aboriginal, and five are from regional SA (the Riverland, Limestone Coast, Eyre Peninsula and Far North).

The first meeting was an opportunity for the members to meet one another and to be welcomed to the Council by the Minister.

They also developed their work plan for the next 12 months and confirmed the Carer Council's Terms of Reference. The Council will meet at least four times each year and report directly to the Minister.

The Carer Council is administered by Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA.

To find out more about becoming a member of Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA and accessing their free advocacy, information and support services visit **cfc-sa.org.au** or call **1800 732 272**.

KAravan of kindness



From left: Grant Sapwell, Kristy Sapwell, Starna Vincent, Rob Vincent and Glenn Smith.

A group of dedicated and hard-working foster carers has developed an innovative support network based around their passion for camping.

The KAravan Klub has met four times at campgrounds around the state since last year.

Organiser Glenn Smith said he regularly camped with extended family and thought it would be a good idea if other foster carers became involved.

He established a WhatsApp group and 35 people including 20 young people travelled to Nuriootpa in the Barossa Valley in January last year.

They've since met at Tanunda, also in the Barossa, and at Goolwa, and returned to Nuriootpa this January.

Members of the KAravan Klub are supported by non-government care provider Key Assets (hence the 'KA' in KAravan), which is a partner of DCP.

"We thought we'd go somewhere close the first time," Glenn said. "Most of the carers live north, so Nuri' seemed a natural fit."

Glenn and his wife Jan are long-term carers for siblings aged 13 and 15. They're also respite carers for their other siblings aged 16 and 17. He said the campers – particularly the core group – had developed a strong connection.

"Every night we get around each other and have a chat," Glenn said. "We look after each other and the kids look after each other."

There are now 60 members, and while the networking is important, Glenn said the club is primarily for the children and young people in care.

"It works for the kids," he said. "They love it." They're all friends, and we try to make it as good as we can for them. It's all about support, and the most support there is for the kid is the carer."



The Hon Katrine Hildyard MP
and Professor Leah Bromfield.

Reimagining the future of child protection

More than 300 people attended the Beginning Together: 2023 South Australian Child Protection and Family Support Symposium at Adelaide Oval in November.

The symposium was co-hosted by the Minister for Child Protection, the Hon Katrine Hildyard MP and Professor Leah Bromfield, Chair of the Child Protection Expert Group.

It brought together young people, families, carers, workers, academic experts, and other community members to hold conversations about how we can work together to reimagine the way we respond to children and families in need.

A number of carers participated in a 'lived experience' video that was played at the symposium. Their insights were a snapshot of the carer experience and prompted rich and meaningful conversations at the event.



Care concern reform work

DCP is continuing work to reform how it manages care concerns.

Several expert consultative groups have been established to support this. Throughout September and December the department met with more than 100 stakeholders, including a group dedicated to family based carers.

Members provided feedback and input into the four main concepts proposed to underpin a new care concern management process. The department will be using this feedback to continue to inform the design and development of a new process.

Once finalised, the new proposed care concern management process will be released for public consultation and we encourage all carers to participate.

Keep an eye out for future updates in *Caring Together* and on Carers Voice, on DCP's website.



School's out for Year 12 graduates

Experience inspires Iesha to guide other young people

She has a wealth of experience being on the receiving end of social workers' support, and now, 18-year-old Iesha hopes to draw on that knowledge to help others.

Iesha, who until recently, lived in the state's Mid North with her foster carer, went into care at 13 years old.

"I've had some pretty good support to help me over my time in care – some pretty good social workers," she says. "I just want to be able to be that for someone else. It's definitely good to have lived experience."

"I'm not quite sure which way I want to go, but I was thinking (of working) either in child protection, or working in a school."

After receiving accolades from her school for subject excellence in English and Child Studies, the Year 12 graduate was in January offered a place at Flinders University studying social work.

Iesha says Year 12 was a challenge to complete, but she found listening to music through headphones a great way to remain focused and avoid procrastination.

Iesha is among more than 170 young people in care, or who have recently left care, who studied Year 12 in 2023. These young people were invited to a ceremony at Government House, where attendees received certificates to recognise their achievements.

In the lead up to her move to Adelaide for university, Iesha said she was nervous but also "very excited" to move to the state's capital, home to some of her existing friends. She was also looking forward to making new connections.

You can also read about Isabel's hopes for the future following her Year 12 graduation here bit.ly/DCP-news-Year-12-graduation





Sports Vouchers program now includes Scouts and Guides

The State Government's \$100 sports vouchers have now been extended to children who want to join the Scouts and Guides.

Carers and case workers of school children from Reception to Year 9 can access the vouchers to help cover the cost of a range of sports and physical activities.

For details, visit sportsvouchers.sa.gov.au



Caring for Children and Young People with Trauma

This online self-paced training program is available to all South Australian carers free of charge, through a collaboration with the Australian Childhood Foundation (ACF) Centre for Excellence in Therapeutic Care.

Register for your free course today
cetc.org.au/training/caring-for-children-and-young-people-with-trauma



Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund
For Children & Young People

Helping young people look to the future

The Dame Roma Mitchell Trust has passed a significant milestone in its efforts to assist young people transitioning from the child protection and family support system.

More than \$1 million in grants have been approved since the Department for Child Protection took responsibility for the fund.

This milestone is reached after the trust reported its most successful-ever round of grant applications, receiving 224 applications during the round that closed in September.

Dame Roma Mitchell Trust grants provide opportunities for young people aged under 30 with a care experience to achieve personal goals, and funds can be used to contribute to an individual's health and wellbeing or provide developmental opportunities.

That can include anything from purchasing whitegoods to set up a new home, to a computer to assist with study.

Applications for 2024's first round have now closed, and the next round opens in August.

For more information visit bit.ly/drmtgrants or scan the QR code.



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