



# CARING TOGETHER

Information and news for foster  
and kinship carers in South Australia

informed supported consulted valued respected



## Message from the Chief Executive

Dear carers

I hope you have had a great Christmas and New Year period and were able to spend some quality time with your friends, family and loved ones.

Before we settle into the rhythm of 2022, I hope you can take a moment to reflect on the difference that you make as carers. The lives and futures of the children and young people you care for are undoubtedly brighter because they have you. I hope that even in challenging times like these, you can appreciate the impact you make on their lives, both big and small.

COVID-19 is an evolving situation that is significantly changing the way we live, work and connect with each other. There continues to be a lot of uncertainty in the community and I thank you for your valuable contribution providing ongoing care and support for children and young people. I would especially like to mention carers who have been unwell with the virus or isolating with a close contact, and those who have continued to care for children when they have returned a positive COVID-19 test.

I think it is timely that this issue of Caring Together focuses on the Statement of Commitment. The Department for Child Protection (DCP) led the development of the Statement, in partnership with Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA and Child and Family Focus SA to ensure carers are *informed, supported, consulted, valued* and *respected*. This is a commitment that DCP takes seriously and a worthy expectation for any person who has opened their heart and home. This issue outlines just some of the ways DCP is bringing the Statement to life.

In line with the Statement and in recognition of the importance of carers' voices, we're always looking for ways to improve on the issues that impact you and the children in your care. We have started to have conversations with carers about how we communicate with one another and I'm keen that we continue that focus in 2022. We know if we all communicate well together we can improve outcomes for the children and young people you care for.

**Cathy Taylor**

Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection

# STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

In 2020, the department partnered with Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers SA and Child and Family Focus SA to develop the **Statement of Commitment** (the Statement).

The Statement is a joint commitment by the child protection sector to work in partnership with family-based carers and support them to look after children and young people in care. The Statement recognises the vital role of foster and kinship carers and that they must be valued as an essential and respected part of the care team.

It outlines the roles and responsibilities of everyone in the family-based care system and highlights five key principles that guide our work to ensure that carers are:



**INFORMED**



**SUPPORTED**



**CONSULTED**



**VALUED**



**RESPECTED**

## Bringing the Statement of Commitment to life

The department is committed to embedding the Statement in its day-to-day work and is continuing to develop new ways to ensure all carers are *informed, supported, consulted, valued and respected*. This issue of Caring Together highlights some of the ways the department is doing this.

## Statement of Commitment supporting document

A supporting document has been developed which contains practical guidance on how workers and carers can use the Statement to understand their roles and responsibilities, and work together to support children and young people in care.



## How do staff use the Statement of Commitment?

DCP Inner South Supervisor Amy Selway (pictured right) says the Statement of Commitment is intrinsically linked to everything she and her colleagues do and encouraged carers to use it to keep them accountable.

"Carers must feel heard and valued and not only understand why decisions are made, but be able to have a say in the decision making process," Amy says.

"It's so important we work in partnership with our most valuable partners, our carers. The Statement of Commitment provides a framework for how we do this. I encourage carers to refer back to it, and to use it to keep us accountable."

Amy recently won the Valuing Our Carers award at the DCP 2021 Recognition Awards for her ability to go above and beyond in supporting carers and mentoring staff in her team to do the same. She started her career as a case worker and is pictured here with DCP Chief Executive Cathy Taylor.

## Tips for carers using the Statement of Commitment

- Consider the reflective questions contained in the supporting document with your support worker or on your own. This can be a great way to build on a constructive relationship and break the ice on sensitive topics.
- Take a copy to meetings with your support worker and the child or young person's care team.
- If you have identified an area where you might need more support, you can use the Statement to start a conversation with your support worker or the care team.
- The Statement can be used to highlight areas where you feel your support worker or care team have done a good job in supporting you and you want to let them know.
- Refer to the Statement and supporting document to clear up any uncertainties about the roles and responsibilities of you as a carer and that of DCP or the agency you work with.



Ask your worker for a copy and explore the Statement of Commitment, supporting document and more information at: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/soc](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/soc)

## Internationally renowned child protection expert to lead inquiry

The State Government has appointed Dr Fiona Arney as the Independent Person to lead an Independent Inquiry into foster and kinship care.

Dr Arney has significant national and international experience in child protection spanning two decades and has served on multiple royal commissions and independent oversight bodies.

The Inquiry commenced on 8 January 2022 and will be completed within six months.

*Letter from Dr Fiona Arney opposite*

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## Increased financial support for foster and kinship carers

Foster and kinship carers for children and young people under the age of 16 have started receiving an additional fortnightly \$50 allowance to their base and respite payments from 1 January 2022.

The increase will help contribute to the day-to-day expenses of caring for a child or young person such as food, clothing, and recreation. It came into effect on 1 January 2022.

It is also another example of how the department is bringing our Statement of Commitment to life, recognising the importance of working in partnership with our carers, and valuing them as an essential and respected part of the care team for children and young people.

We've also updated the Carer Support Payments handbook to reflect recent legislative changes. The handbook helps foster, kinship and other family-based carers understand the financial support provided by the department when caring for a child under the Guardianship of the Chief Executive.

To download the booklet visit the carer platform on the Department for Child Protection website: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/carer-support-payments](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/carer-support-payments)



Dear carers,

I am pleased to be able to write to you having recently been appointed as the Independent Person to lead the Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care.

It is an honour and a privilege to have been appointed to lead the Inquiry.

As already announced, the scope of this Inquiry is determined under section 169A of the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017*, and will include, but isn't limited to:

- Existing complaint mechanisms as they relate to foster care and kinship care
- Existing consultation processes with foster and kinship carers
- Information sharing and the sharing of documentation with foster and kinship carers
- Ensuring that there is sound partnership with foster and kinship carers and that the rights of children in foster and kinship care are respected, addressed and realised
- Recommendations to improve foster and kinship care in South Australia.

The establishment phase for the Inquiry has commenced and I'll be formally calling for submissions shortly. The voice of carers is vital to the Inquiry and its recommendations for change. I hope to receive submissions from as many carers as possible.

Details about how to provide a submission, scope of the Inquiry as per the legislation and timeframes will be available at [sa.gov.au/careinquiry](https://sa.gov.au/careinquiry) and we will continue to update you through the Caring Together newsletter and other communication channels.

An email address for the Inquiry has also been established. It is accessible only to the Inquiry team, and queries can be directed to [carer.inquiry@sa.gov.au](mailto:carer.inquiry@sa.gov.au)

Thank you for the incredible role you play.

Regards,

Dr Fiona Arney

## COVID-19 update

### Face to face visits

Be assured that DCP staff and your support agency are doing everything possible to continue to support you safely through this time of uncertainty. Home visits and family contact arrangements will continue where it is safe and appropriate to do so.

Staff are screening each visit, as well as wearing masks and physical distancing. All DCP and support agency staff visiting carers and children are required to be fully vaccinated.

### Where to get support

If you, or the child and young person in your care, receive a positive COVID-19 test, please notify your DCP case worker and/or support agency.

To help carers manage COVID-19 in the home, the Women's and Children's Hospital has launched a dedicated virtual service called COVIDKids. This service provides direct online and phone access to experienced paediatric nurses and doctors (by referral only). Find out more at: [wch.sa.gov.au/covid-19/covidkids](https://wch.sa.gov.au/covid-19/covidkids)

You can also call **SA Health COVID-19 Response Care Team on 1800 272 872** and tell them that you are caring for a child under guardianship. Due to the high volume of calls, it may take more than one attempt to get through.

If you are a single carer household and require hospitalisation, please contact your support agency who will work with you to make other arrangements for the child or young person while you are unwell.

If you or anyone in your household experience severe symptoms such as difficulty breathing or chest pain, call 000 and tell the ambulance staff that you have COVID-19. There will be no cost for this ambulance.

### Vaccination

Getting vaccinated against COVID-19 continues to be an important action to protect ourselves and the community.

We are continuing to encourage carers to support vaccination for eligible children and young people, except when there are medical reasons that vaccination should not occur.

Updates about COVID-19 are regularly published on the carer platform: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers/coronavirus-covid-19](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers/coronavirus-covid-19)

## Relationships, consent and sexual health for children and young people

The following excerpt about protective behaviours has been adapted from the new webpage by the same name as above.

Children and young people who have experienced trauma can find it difficult to understand when they feel unsafe. Carers can support them to understand safe and healthy relationships, respect their own and other's bodies, personal boundaries and privacy. Starting these conversations early is important to ensure children develop the ability to recognise feeling unsafe and feel able to seek help if they feel unsafe.

Carers can help educate children and young people on protective behaviours with these messages:

- Children and young people have the right to feel safe all of the time
- Everyone has the right to privacy, respect and to be valued
- Nothing is so terrible that you can't tell someone about it
- Secrets should never feel bad, scary or yucky
- There will always be someone who can listen and help
- Most adults are helpful, caring and responsible, but some can be dangerous and children and young people should tell an adult if someone is making them feel unsafe.

Read the rest of the webpage and access other useful resources at: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers)



### \$100 sports voucher

All children aged 5 to 15 years are eligible for a \$100 voucher to help cover the costs of sport, dance and learn to swim fees. Make sure the children in your care don't miss out. For more information, go to: [sportsvouchers.sa.gov.au](https://sportsvouchers.sa.gov.au).



## EARLY CHILDHOOD

### Early access to preschool from 3 years old

Did you know children in care can enter preschool for 12 hours per week after they turn 3? Enrolment can happen at any time of the year, so there's no need to wait for the start of the next school term to lock in a spot!

Talk to your child's DCP case worker about preschool enrolment or find out more by visiting: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/education-support-for-children-in-care](http://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/education-support-for-children-in-care)

### Healthy Start for School

The health and development of children in care is especially important, and one way of ensuring good continuity of care is through regular health checks through a GP or Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS). Having a health check can be a requirement for certain Centrelink payments.

Your child may need to have a health check if:

- The child is turning 4, and
- You or your partner receive Family Tax Benefit (FTB) Part A and an income support payment.

You have up until your child's 5th birthday to tell Centrelink they have had a health check otherwise your FTB Part A rate payments may reduce. You can inform Centrelink via myGov.

If you are not sure if the child in your care has received the health check, you may be able find details in your child's Child Health and Development Record, sometimes called the Blue Book or speak with your child's case worker.

To arrange the health check, speak with a GP or call Child and Family Health Services (CaFHS) on 1300 733 606.

More information about the Centrelink requirement is available at: [servicesaustralia.gov.au/healthy-start-for-school-health-check](http://servicesaustralia.gov.au/healthy-start-for-school-health-check)

### Child care assistance for carers

The Australian Government provides eligible families with financial assistance to help cover the cost of child care through the Child Care Subsidy.

Child care includes centre based care, family day care, out of school hours care and in home care.

Eligible carers are also able to access additional fee assistance through:

- Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing); or
- Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent).

To receive Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing) or Additional Child Care Subsidy (grandparent), eligible carers need to the claim the Child Care Subsidy first.

For the majority of children in care, these subsidies should cover all of the child care fees.



To find out more about child care assistance for carers, please visit: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/child-care-assistance-for-carers](http://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/child-care-assistance-for-carers)



## Working with Children Checks

Everyone who works or volunteers with children must have a current Working with Children Check by law.

Your support worker, all DCP staff, teachers, nurses, party entertainers, transport services and even volunteers at sports clubs need a Working with Children Check, so it's no surprise that carers also need one as an integral part of the care team.

Working with Children Checks (Check) help keep all children safe in our communities, and for children in care we know that safety holds a special significance.

The Check is one of the important steps in becoming and remaining a carer. Your support worker keeps a record and will reach out about six months before it is due to expire to help you renew your Check.

The Department of Human Services (DHS) Screening Unit is the only agency that can do a Check.

It's simple to apply for or renew your own Check online at the DHS Screening Unit website (link at bottom). Your application will need information about you, including your name, date of birth, recent address history and documents to confirm your identity. The DHS Screening Unit may need to contact you so that you can provide information to assist with the determination.

For more information about Working with Children Checks for carers, go to: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/working-with-children-checks](http://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/how-dcp-works/working-with-children-checks). This webpage links to the DHS Screening Unit page with even more information about the Working with Children Check process.

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### Do others in my household or regular guests need a Working with Children Check?

A more detailed discussion with your carer support worker or your child's case worker can help to clarify each individual household circumstance.

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### Did you know?

Working with Children Checks are free for carers and can be used for other employment or volunteering.

## Sortli – helping young people navigate the leap into adulthood



Supporting a young person preparing to leave care is a very important role. That's why the CREATE Foundation has put together an information kit which includes ideas and promotional tools to keep Sortli front of mind for those supporting young people in their transition to independence.

The free Sortli app, developed by young people, for young people aims to help young people navigating the transition into adulthood. It includes step-by-step help to navigate some of life's biggest challenges like getting a job, finding a place to live, managing money, and staying healthy.

To download the kit visit [createyourfuture.org.au](http://createyourfuture.org.au) and type information kit in the search box.

### Sortli training

CREATE's training team is available to help carers and support teams become confident users of the Sortli app and is offering 15 minute online training sessions.

Please register your interest by contacting Erin Laing at [erin.laing@create.org.au](mailto:erin.laing@create.org.au) or 0401 880 522.



## Young people can now get their L-plates online

Better Learners.  
Safer Drivers.

The myLs online interactive learning and assessment course is now available. Once young people work their way through the course and pass the online theory test they can be issued with a learner's permit.

Designed to improve learner driver education, the myLs course focuses on road rules, road safety, and driver attitudes and behaviours, giving new drivers the best possible start before they get behind the wheel.

Young people must be 15 years and nine months to access myLs. Before starting they will need to attend a Service SA customer service centre with evidence of identity.

For more information visit: [mylicence.sa.gov.au/myls](http://mylicence.sa.gov.au/myls)



## School scholarships for children in care

The DCP School Scholarship program is continuing to expand following the success of our initial partnership with Catholic Education SA. A number of other non-government schools are now also offering scholarships for children and young people in care to attend fee-free and with a package of educational supports.

We're very pleased to be supporting 95 children and young people in care who are commencing a school scholarship in Term 1 this year.

For some young people, attending a non-government school provides educational opportunities that best reflect their particular talents and aspirations. For example, one of our new scholarship partners, SEDA College SA, deliver a SACE curriculum through immersion in the sports and recreation industry.

In 2022, we're excited to see the DCP School Scholarship program grow even bigger. To express an interest, speak with your DCP case worker. More information, including a list of participating schools, is available at: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/iitf](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/iitf)



## Voices in Action: Resilient, Resourceful, Remarkable

CREATE Foundation's fifth national conference Voices in Action: Resilient, Resourceful, Remarkable will be held online from 26 to 29 April 2022.

Voices in Action is an innovative and inspiring event where young people, carers, professionals and sector leaders come together to work on making changes to the out-of-home care system for children and young people.

The 2022 conference will provide an in-depth exploration of key issues identified by children and young people with a care experience as fundamental to improving the out-of-home care system.

The conference format will feature a daily keynote address from inspirational thought leaders in the care system, followed by a series of interactive, workshop-style sessions focused on applying the insights of young people, carers and professionals to some of the key issues facing our sector.

Registrations are open to young people aged 12 to 25 years with a care experience, carers, government officials and sector workers. Shortly we will be announcing how you or a young person in your care can register for free. Free tickets are strictly limited. Be the first to find out by following: [facebook.com/ChildProtectionSA](https://facebook.com/ChildProtectionSA).



## New resource webpages for carers

The online carer platform is one of the ways that we keep you informed and ensure you have access to the information you need. The following pages are new to the platform this year:

### Caring for Aboriginal children and young people

Explore resources that may be useful to carers of Aboriginal children and young people and read about important annual events.

### Raising children and child development

Learn about what typical development looks like for children of different ages and how to spot gaps by understanding their behaviour.

### Relationships, consent and sexual health for children and young people

Read about how to support the developing children in your care to understand safety, establish healthy relationships and learn about their sexual health. An excerpt of this webpage is contained earlier in this issue.

Read the rest of the webpages and access other useful resources at: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers/resources-for-carers)



## Consultation on peak body to represent voices of Aboriginal children and young people

Aboriginal children and young people will soon have their voices, aspirations and priorities represented by an independent peak body in South Australia, with an Aboriginal-led process underway to design and seek feedback on a preferred model.

The Department for Child Protection has funded SNAICC – the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – to consult with South Australian Aboriginal people, communities, and organisations about a model tailored to South Australia.

Consultation workshops have already been held in metropolitan areas as well as Port Pirie, Port Augusta and Ceduna, with Murray Bridge and Mount Gambier to be held early this year. These workshops are being supported by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, April Lawrie.

DCP Deputy Chief Executive Fiona Ward said the establishment of an Aboriginal peak body was a critical step forward in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

“South Australian Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders have long advocated for the establishment of a peak body in South Australia, and we are very excited to be one step closer to achieving this goal,” Fiona said.

“Having a peak body for Aboriginal children and young people – that is child-centred in its approach – will ensure that the voices of Aboriginal children and young people are front and centre in our work.

“While we will await the outcomes of the consultation process to determine the exact model, our intention is that the peak will partner with government to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in all parts of the child protection system, including those in care.

“And importantly, the peak will also work to strengthen and support the Aboriginal community controlled sector – as we know Aboriginal organisations are best-placed to provide culturally safe and responsive services for Aboriginal children and families.”

The State Government’s commitment to establish an Aboriginal peak body is included in the South Australian **Aboriginal Affairs Action Plan 2021-22** and supports achieving Target 12 of **Closing the Gap** – which seeks to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care by 45% by 2031.

## Fostering family ties



Foster carers Debbie, Danielle, Lydia and Tania helped to reunite four siblings who had been in their care. Picture: Matt Loxton

### KATHRYN BERMINGHAM

FOUR young siblings have been reunited with each other and returned to the care of family in time for Christmas, thanks to four big-hearted northern suburbs foster carers.

Centacare specialist reunification carers Danielle, Deb, Lydia and Tania looked after the two boys and two girls, all under four years old, after they were placed into care.



Shantae's star shines bright

Shantae Beres-Cowan, 11, has topped over 12 grades with a flourishing singing career. Picture: Simon Green

Story credits:  
The Sunday Mail  
and The Advertiser

To read the full stories, see latest news at:  
[childprotection.sa.gov.au](http://childprotection.sa.gov.au)



## Child in kinship care wins Irish dancing competition

A big congratulations to an 11-year-old boy in kinship care who recently took out a top prize at the Australian International Oireachtas Irish Dancing Championships.

He won the Under 12 section of the Championships and qualified to compete at this elite level by winning at the interschool and state level.

The Championships were scheduled to be held on the Gold Coast in October, but due to COVID-19 restrictions, were conducted virtually online with dancers from around Australia and New Zealand competing.

The boy’s natural talent was quickly picked up by his kinship carer and dance teachers, who have supported him throughout his dancing journey.

DCP is also proud to have assisted this boy and his family in his successful achievement of becoming one of the best Irish dancers in Australia and New Zealand.