



# CARING TOGETHER

Information and news for foster and kinship carers in South Australia



## Message from the Chief Executive

Dear carers,

Welcome to the next edition of Caring Together, our DCP newsletter for family-based carers. It's hard to believe we've reached the halfway point of 2022.

Since our previous edition, there is much to update you on. Most significantly, we have welcomed a new Minister for Child Protection, the Hon. Katrine Hildyard MP. Minister Hildyard has hit the ground running and, just like us, is passionate about listening, and acting on, the voices of carers. I'm pleased to share a message from the Minister in this edition.

Our feature story is about supporting children and young people with family contact. While these visits have many benefits, they can create mixed feelings for children and young people and leave carers grappling with big emotions, and sometimes, big behaviours, before and afterwards. We hope this piece will give you some handy tips for supporting children and young people through these sometimes challenging times.

We also continue our focus on the Statement of Commitment and speak to Centacare about how their staff are using it in their day-to-day work and the important initiatives it has helped spark.

You'll also hear a heart-warming story from Port Augusta foster carers Wendy and Tony, who have welcomed more than 300 children into their home over the past four decades.

I want to applaud the amazing work of Wendy and Tony, and every one of our carers, for the time, energy and love you put into providing support and security to children and young people in need. Planning is underway for events to celebrate Foster and Kinship Carer Week in September, and I look forward to sharing more details soon.

Lastly, it's important we acknowledge NAIDOC Week (3-10 July). This year's theme of "Get Up! Stand Up! Show Up!" is an important call to action and one we take very seriously. We are committed to doing better for Aboriginal children and young people in care, and ensuring they can develop and maintain their connection to their culture.

### Cathy Taylor

Chief Executive, Department for Child Protection



*Dear carers,*

I am so proud to be the Minister for Child Protection and am viscerally determined to make positive change, to ensure your voices are heard and to act on what is important to you.

Thank you so much to every foster and kinship carer in South Australia. Thank you for opening your heart, your home and your life to children and young people.

It is so important that we do all we can to support you in this incredibly important role you undertake. To better understand the support you require, I am convening regular meetings with carers. The first meetings have recently been held in Mount Gambier; thank you very much to all who attended and so generously shared their thoughts and experiences.

We will be holding more forums in the coming months and I look forward to more carers sharing their thoughts and experiences with me.

I have also attended a Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers board meeting, met with The Carer Project representatives, met carers participating in the MOCKINGBIRD program, and carers who graduated with a Diploma in Community Services.

I was very pleased that the recent State Budget included -

- \$7.5 million in child protection grants to non-government organisations to support children and young people in care and their carers, including \$450,000 per annum (indexed) for a Child and Young Person's Visitor Scheme in residential care; and
- a significant \$128.9 million additional investment in child protection, over five years.

I know this is just the beginning of our journey together and I look forward to continuing our work to better support you and the children and young people for whom you care.

Thank you again and my very best wishes to you and your family.

**The Hon Katrine Hildyard MP**  
Minister for Child Protection

## Scholarships for children and young people in care at non-government schools

A quality education is foundational to children and young people in care looking toward a bright future. For some children and young people, attending a non-government school can provide educational opportunities that support and foster their interests and aspirations.

DCP has partnered with Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) and several independent schools to provide scholarships for children and young people in care to attend these schools fee-free and with a package of educational supports.

### What schools offer scholarships?

- **Catholic Education South Australia (CESA)** provide scholarships to primary and secondary-aged children and young people in care to attend Catholic schools across South Australia. These scholarships continue until the child or young person completes Year 12.
- **SEDA College SA** is an independent senior secondary college for Year 11 and 12 students, offering a total of 10 scholarships for Year 11 students in care who are passionate about sport and interested in working in the sporting industry. SEDA has classrooms at various locations across the metropolitan area.
- **Pedare Christian College** is a co-educational R-12 Anglican and Uniting Church school in Golden Grove. Pedare is offering one scholarship for a Year 6 student to commence in 2023. The scholarship will continue each year until the young person completes Year 12. Due to high placement demand at Pedare, a young person needs to be nominated for this scholarship before the end of Term 2 2022.
- **Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School** in Wynn Vale is offering a scholarship for an Aboriginal child in care to attend their school for Years 5 and 6. For 2022, Golden Grove Lutheran Primary School will support mid-year intake of an Aboriginal child in care who is in Year 4, with financial assistance then continuing until their Year 6 graduation.
- **Good Shepherd Lutheran School** is a primary school in Angaston in the Barossa Valley offering five scholarships that can begin in any year level, subject to availability in classes, and continue until the child completes their primary schooling.

### How do I nominate a child or young person for a scholarship?

If you know a child or young person in care who may benefit from one of these scholarships, please discuss this with the DCP case worker. Note, schools are not able to respond to queries regarding these scholarships directly.



## Wendy and Tony offer a lifetime of caring

Having cared for more 300 children over almost four decades, there is rarely a weekend that goes by where Wendy Hearne doesn't have someone sitting at her kitchen table having a chat, coffee in hand.

The Port Augusta foster carer, 72, and her husband Tony, have opened their home to children and young people in need, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, for short, long term and respite care.

They currently have a 16-year-old girl in their care, who has been with them for nine years.

"A lot of the kids come back to see us for Mother's Day, Christmas and birthdays – it's very rewarding because you always try to build a positive relationship with the children and make them feel wanted and appreciated," Wendy said.

"I feel like I've been rewarded all my life in being able to look after other peoples' children. I've seen the highs and the lows, I've seen kids pick themselves up from the most awful situations and go on to lead wonderful lives. I'm so grateful for it all."

Wendy and Tony, who also have three biological children, have been carers with country foster care agency Uniting Country SA since 1997. They previously provided care in Queensland and New South Wales.

Despite so many children passing through their doors over the years, there is one that remains etched in Wendy's mind.

"I had a little boy come into my care about 20 years ago, he was 11, and came from a very harsh home," she said.

"I took him backwards and forwards to his mother. One night there had been a fire at his home, and he turned up at my house covered in soot after he'd jumped on a bus to come to me.

"I got him some clothes and cleaned him up. After that, he was placed with another foster family and I heard he had run away. I looked for him but didn't find him.

"About 18 years later I was on Facebook and I saw his name pop up, so I sent him a message saying I'd looked for him and wondered what had happened to him over the years.

"To my surprise, he replied and said he had wondered about me too. He told me he was married, had a job as a manager in Port Pirie and had a daughter.

"He told me he remembered how I used to massage his head when I put him to bed and said he'd continued to use this as a way to calm himself in his adult years.

"He ended up coming to visit and we sat around the kitchen table talking and reminiscing. On his way out he handed me an envelope and told us to open it once he had left.

"Inside was a thank you card and \$200, with a message that said this is only a small portion of what you spent on me, please go out and enjoy a nice dinner together."

Wendy said being a foster carer had brought much joy and fulfilment to her life and she wanted to continue caring for children and young people as long as she could.

"I really love these kids – if you put the energy and the care into them you'll see the rewards," she said.

"Some kids will want to go home, regardless of what home looks like, you just always have to be on their level, and think about what they are feeling.

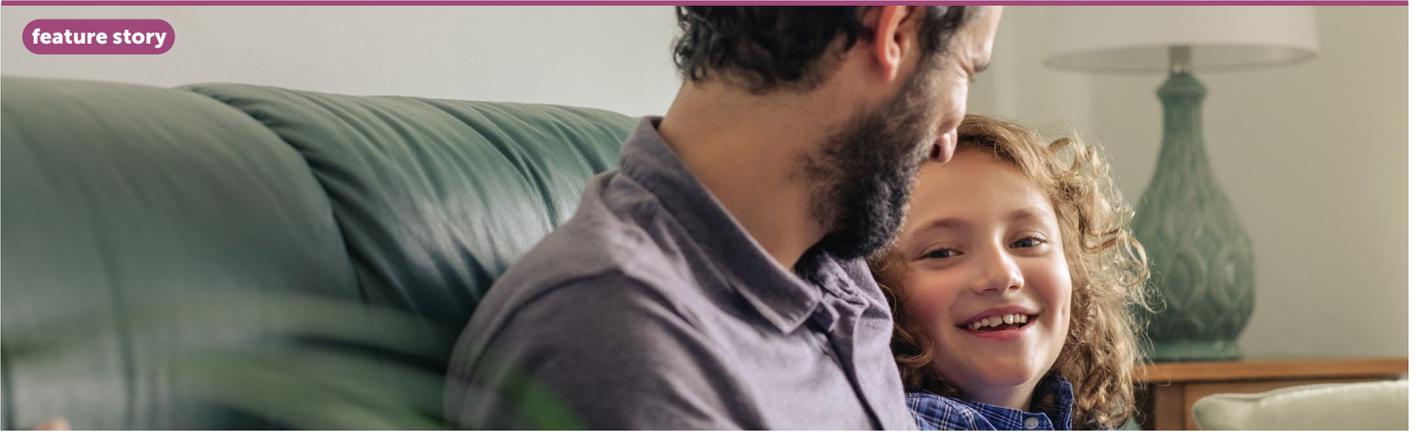
"You can't be half-hearted about it, you have to be all in for them to know they are safe and valued.

"Foster care isn't a 9am to 5pm job, it's sometimes during the night when the kids need you the most. When they can't sleep I put a movie on and we just talk – at their speed, at their level.

"For everything that I have given these young people over the years, they have given me just as much."



What Wendy and Tony told us really sums up the life-long impact carers have on the children and young people they care for. Even a short period of care can make a lasting difference and carers really help children and young people know that there are people there for them in their hardest times. These experiences change children's lives.



## Supporting children and young people with family contact

Visits with a child or young person's family of origin can help children to understand their family and cultural connections, build their identity and support family connections in a safe way when living together is no longer possible.

Whilst there are many benefits, many children and young people have mixed feelings about family contact visits. They may be excited to see their parents or siblings but also feel sad that they no longer live together. They may be worried about what is going to happen during the visit, or remember difficult things that happened in the past. This often leads to big feelings and sometimes big behaviours before and after visits.

The following tips can help carers support children and young people with family contact:

### Before visits

- Remind your child that family contact will be happening soon. Some children like to have a lot of warning but others find this stressful and respond better to being told a day or so in advance. Use your expert knowledge about your child as a guide.
- Remind them how long the visit will be, who will be there, who will be picking them up, and where that person will be. Some children may like you to do this many times.
- Using a connection item (like a blanket, bracelet, t-shirt or toy) to help them feel close to you while you're apart.
- Help them plan out what they want to wear or bring with them.
- Support them to create something they can bring and share with their family like a drawing, a joke, a story, or something that they have made.

- Talk openly about mixed feelings they may have about or during their visit. Listen non-judgmentally and stay neutral about the situation yourself. If you express negative views about their family of origin, your child might find it hard to share their positive feelings with you. If you express an overly positive view, your child might struggle to share their negative feelings. It is most helpful to stay neutral and let the conversation be about your child's feelings, beliefs, and experiences rather than your own.

### After

- Reconnect with a warm welcome; "Hi mate, so good to see you again!"
- Stay neutral, appropriate, and light if you need to interact with family members.
- Leave serious talk with the social worker for another time.
- Expect and accept that your child or young person will be tired and emotional after visits. Focus your energy on helping them manage this.
- Have a post-contact ritual that meets your child's 'calming down' needs: for some this will be all about burning off stress (like playing chasey at a local park) and for others it will be all about feeling still and held (like wanting to sit in your lap and be cuddled, play with your hair, or read a favourite story together).
- Ask your child or young person how they are feeling and listen non-judgmentally to anything they have to share with you.
- Answer the tough questions as honestly and neutrally as you can. If you don't have an answer it's okay to say that. Reassure your child that they are not to blame for the situation and that none of this is their fault. For example, if your child or young person asks, "why won't mummy/daddy do X so that I can come home?" you might say, "well, I really don't know. Sometimes people find it very hard to change. But I DO know that it's not your fault. None of this is happening because of you."
- Confirm when the next contact visit is scheduled.

## When family contact is cancelled

- Provide a short, simple explanation about why the cancellation has happened: "Unfortunately, (DCP Case Worker) hasn't heard back from mummy/daddy so the visit can't go ahead."; "Unfortunately, (DCP Case Worker) wasn't able to organise a place for the visit to happen so it can't go ahead this time."
- Give your child a chance to share any thoughts or feelings they have about the cancellation.
- Be empathetic about what they share but stay neutral in your own attitude towards the family members and/or DCP Case Worker, "I'm sure you are disappointed, it is frustrating, I see you are feeling mad."
- Reassure your child that they are not to blame for the cancellation and that they are still loved.
- Mentally prepare to spend extra time connecting with them and working through some difficult feelings for the next couple of days. Cancellations can feel like a rejection to children and young people and sometimes this can make them worry that you will reject them too. This can come out in a variety of behaviours which are trying to say "Please see me, I need you!"

If you are concerned that family contact arrangements are not meeting your child or young person's needs, you can make notes about what you are seeing and share them with their DCP Case Worker. You might note down:

- Specific descriptions of the behaviours you're seeing.
- When they happen (day/time).
- What was happening just before the behaviour.
- What happened just after.

Family contact can be challenging for carers as well as children and young people themselves. It's important to reach out to a safe and trusted person in your support network so that you can have a frank conversation about your own feelings, needs, and beliefs about the situation. Remember all carers need and deserve access to good support!

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## Legislative reforms to improve child sexual abuse protection

The Statutes Amendment (Child Sexual Abuse) Act 2021 came into effect on 1 June 2022. This legislation, which applies to carers, includes two new offences - failure to report suspected child abuse and failure to protect a child from sexual abuse.

We've created frequently asked questions to help you better understand the new offences and your legal obligations. You can view them on the DCP carer portal: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers](http://childprotection.sa.gov.au/carers)



## Post care services

Did you know the Department for Child Protection (DCP) offers two programs to support young people in their family-based placement beyond the age of 18? These programs are Stability in Family-Based Care (SFBC) and Over 18 Education Initiative (O18EI).

SFBC provides basic carer payments to eligible families until the young person turns 21.

O18EI provides basic carer payments and an education allowance to eligible families until the young person turns 25.

Young people can transition between the two programs depending on their circumstances.

To create greater consistency for young people and their carers, both programs will be managed by the Stability Post Care (SPC) Team from June 2022. For young people currently receiving the O18EI, this means they will be re-allocated to the SPC team and a member of the team will be in contact with them soon.

If you already receive either of these payments, you will not experience any disruptions while these changes occur.

For carers who have a young person who is about to turn 18, you are able to self-refer to either of the programs.

You can apply by filling out the **SPC application form** and submit it to [DCPPost18CarerPayments@sa.gov.au](mailto:DCPPost18CarerPayments@sa.gov.au). Your caseworker can also submit this application on your behalf.



You can submit your application to: [DCPPost18CarerPayments@sa.gov.au](mailto:DCPPost18CarerPayments@sa.gov.au). Your caseworker can also submit this application on your behalf. If you'd prefer to call, you can ring **8303 0764**.



Centacare's Foster Care program team, with carer Danielle O'Reilly (left) and program Manager Amalie Mannik (third from left).

## Statement of Commitment helps create meaningful change at Centacare

Centacare Foster Care tells us how they use the Statement of Commitment to guide their work with carers.

Centacare Foster Care is passionate about carer rights, their voices being heard and ensuring that the Statement of Commitment (Informed, Supported, Consulted, Valued and Respected) can be seen across all aspects of the program.

Centacare Foster Care Manager Amalie Mannik says, "as a support agency for foster carers, we have been privileged to walk alongside carers during their assessment process and caring journey, hearing their experiences and receiving carer feedback along the way.

"We felt strongly that the wisdom from carer's lived experiences needed a channel to feed into innovative changes within the program and to enable this, the program established a Carer Reference Group (CRG).

"This group provides a mechanism for foster carers to provide meaningful input on the way Centacare's Foster Care services are delivered."

The CRG members are involved in decision making through collaborative engagement with Senior Centacare employees and providing their lived experience wisdom. The CRG raise issues that impact on carers within the program and the wider sector, advise on the program's processes, share their experiences and identify any gaps or concerns within the program.

An example of the CRG in action was the reinvigoration of Centacare's carer newsletter, 'In the Loop', which has been co-designed with and continually informed by the CRG members. This has led to a communication platform led by carers, designed for carers and with content shaped by carers.

### Introducing Narrative Exposure Therapy

Centacare's Foster Care program has also reviewed findings from surveys and the Australian for Social Enterprise and the University of South Australia's research report, 'The foster care and family reunification nexus: Care as a mechanism for bringing families back together.'

"Through this review, it was identified that specialist reunification and short term carers, who provide care for traumatised children and work towards reunifying them safely with their birth family experience significant grief and loss," Ms Mannik says.

"Developing bonds and attachment is necessary to provide quality care and when a child is reunified the 'letting go' can be extremely difficult."

In response, the program has been supporting carers by implementing Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET) as part of Centacare's therapeutic framework and trauma responsive approach.

NET is an individual therapeutic, trauma responsive therapy, which addresses trauma, grief and loss experiences for carers. It is utilised between specialist reunification placements, and helps prepare carers to move forward with another placement.

Whilst the program is still in the early stages of implementing NET, it has proved to be an effective tool and has received positive feedback including one carer sharing their experience:

**"I will not say that it is an easy process but will say thank you, what a great gift to offer to carers...The staff were great and very supportive despite tears during some of the sessions, they listened, did not push and waited for me 'til I was ready to proceed... it really was a good process, allowing me time and space to explore my first placement journey and the intense feelings of loss and grief I experienced when it ended with two very empathetic and non-judgemental people. Thanks to this great gift I have had the opportunity to relive and process some of the feelings and let go."**



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

## Enrolling in preschool reminder

Did you know that children in care can enter preschool for 12 hours per week after they turn 3 years of age?

Research shows that 90% of a child's brain develops by the time they're five years old and play-based learning is a powerful way to support children's development. Two years are better than one when it comes to early learning, especially for vulnerable children. A high-quality preschool program will have more of an impact for children who start at age three rather than four, with the benefits lasting into the school years and beyond.

Enrolment can happen at any time of the year, so there's no need to wait for the start of the next term to lock in a spot! Talk to your child's DCP case worker about enrolling in your local government preschool.

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## Moving to electronic carer communications

We are moving from hard copy to electronic carer communications, starting with emailed carer subsidy slips.

This will enable you to:

- receive your carer subsidy slips quicker, allowing you to check the payment details sooner
- be informed of carer news, including new initiatives sooner
- contribute to more environmentally friendly practice.

If you do not have access to email, or would prefer to continue to receive correspondence from the department in hard copy, this will remain an option.

There's still time to complete the electronic form on the carer portal or return the hard copy form you receive in the post, if the department does not currently have your email address or you need to provide a new email address. We also need you to fill out the form if you would prefer to continue receiving hard copy carer subsidy slips and communications.



## SOUTH AUSTRALIAN CHILD PROTECTION AWARDS 2022

### Nominations are now open for the 2022 South Australian Child Protection Awards

The awards celebrate the outstanding achievements of children and young people, carers, volunteers and staff from across the child protection sector.

Delivered by DCP in partnership with the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN), the event will be held during National Child Protection Week, on Friday 9 September at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

There are two categories to recognise carers and we encourage you to nominate someone you think is doing an exceptional job – or even nominate yourself!

These categories are:

#### **South Australian Foster Carer of the Year:**

recognises assessed and approved foster, specific-child only and Long Term Guardianship (Specified Person) carers, who have made a significant contribution to the lives of children and young people in care.

#### **South Australian Kinship Carer of the Year:**

recognises assessed and approved kinship carers, who have made a significant contribution to the lives of children and young people in care.

We also encourage you to consider nominating a child or young person in your care for the below category:

**Outstanding achievement of a child and young person who has a care experience:** celebrating a child or young person's (or group of children/young people) achievement.

There are also opportunities to nominate educators, volunteers and DCP and agency support workers. Nominations close on August 1, so get nominating now at: [childprotection.sa.gov.au/awards](https://childprotection.sa.gov.au/awards)



Government of South Australia  
Department for Child Protection



**COVID  
UPDATE**

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



## MOCKINGBIRD program providing more support for carers

The MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ program, delivered in partnership between DCP and Life Without Barriers, creates constellations of carers who live in a similar area and act as an extended family network.

A second MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ Constellation has been established in Adelaide's north-east, uniting up to 10 foster carer homes and providing connection, information, training and emotional support.

A 'hub home' operates at the centre of the constellation, similar to a grandparent's house that is familiar and comfortable. The Hub Home Provider provides support and acts as a resource to the constellation by providing respite care, organising and hosting monthly constellation meetings, and coordinating social events involving the children, young people and their carers.

The North Eastern Hub Home Providers are Life Without Barriers carers Debraha Bills and Adam Price. Deb says: "serving as MOCKINGBIRD Hub Home providers with Life Without Barriers enables Adam and I to collaborate in creating a sense of community with foster carers and the young people with whom they are building safe supportive 'everyday moments'."

A southern suburbs constellation was established in 2021. A third SA constellation, in the Adelaide Hills, is expected to launch in coming months.



Caption: At the launch of the North Eastern MOCKINGBIRD™ constellation are, from left, Robyn Skilbeck (DCP), Michelle Jones (Flinders University), Sue Barr (DCP), Simone Mather (Life Without Barriers), the Hon. Katrine Hildyard MP, Minister for Child Protection, Kerry Currey (Life Without Barriers), Debraha Bills (Hub Home Provider, Life Without Barriers) and Helen McLaren (Flinders University).

IFCO  
2022

The 2022 International Foster Care Conference will be held in Darwin, NT, from 22-25 September 2022. Register: [darwinifco2022.com](http://darwinifco2022.com)



## Hats off to our newest graduates



Congratulations to the South Australian carers who recently completed their Diploma of Community Services!

Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA and the Bradford Institute have partnered to offer the diploma, which allows carers to enhance their skills and be acknowledged for the life experiences they have developed in their caring role.

A graduation ceremony to celebrate the sixth cohort of carers to undertake the course was held at Parliament House in late April. Among the graduates were sisters Jasmyn and Josephine Kalikas (pictured).

The Minister for Child Protection the Hon. Katrine Hildyard MP presented graduates with their parchments and paid tribute to their commitment to be the best carer they can by adding theoretical knowledge to their practical experience.

To find out more about the program, call Connecting Foster and Kinship Carers SA on 1800 732 272 or email [admin@cfc-sa.org.au](mailto:admin@cfc-sa.org.au)

## Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care update

Submissions for the Independent Inquiry into Foster and Kinship Care have now closed.

The independent person appointed to lead the inquiry, Dr Fiona Arney, is now preparing a report of the inquiry, a copy of which will be provided to the Minister for Child Protection.

We'd like to thank carers who have taken the time to make a submission.

For the latest updates, visit: [www.sa.gov.au/careinquiry](http://www.sa.gov.au/careinquiry)