



# Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

serving aboriginal, relative, kin and foster carers in South Australia

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**24 November 2014**

**Chairperson Report**

I want to start by acknowledging Board members who have retired since the last AGM.

Christy Brown from Port Pirie joined the Board in October 2013. She retired in March this year. Christy retired as she was offered work which could potentially cause a conflict of interest. I feel we were unable to effectively engage with this interested member from Regional SA because of limited face to face contact. This is an area I would like to address in the future.

Linda Bastin joined the Board in October 2012; she retired in July due to other commitments.

Rebecca May joined in October 2013 and retired in November this year due to limited availability.

I want to thank these women for the work they did, and continue to do, to build the face of foster care in their circles, the carers they support, the relationships they develop across the sector and their contribution to helping CFC connect more effectively with our members. I thank them for the commitment and priority they place on their family and children, and wish them well.

As I have put this report together, I am astounded at the amount of work that has been achieved this year!

## CHALLENGES

The past 12 months has seen significant changes and challenges within the Alternative Care Sector.

The Families SA redesign, the massive shuffle of staff and work across the metropolitan areas, the introduction of a new practice model (Solution based casework), very high caseloads for Long-term team's case managers, the introduction of case workers in metro Guardianship hubs (rather than 100% social workers), the amount of vacant positions and the cuts to financial resources in Guardianship hubs has severely impacted morale and capacity. Add to this the treatment of a relative care family when 'their' child died; the media release, court case and subsequent Inquest into Chloe Valentine's death; allegations of serious sexual abuse by a residential facility staff member; the media attention on



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Families SA practice (which has consistently been covered since May); the resignation of David Waterford and shuffling of staff at policy and directorate level; along with the Legislative Council Select Committee and the commencement of a Royal Commission, things have been incredibly hectic!

CFC SA has increased its advocacy roles this past year by stepping outside the Alternative Care system. We approached government in September 2013 regarding their move to form an Independent Appeals Tribunal, asking for an avenue where foster/kinship families could seek independent reviews of Families SA decisions, commenced an on-line petition, held a Public Rally in the city, spoke on a breakfast radio program, lodged a written submission to the Select Committee, met with the Ombudsman and Premier's office as well as gaining a better understanding of the legislation through Kelly's legal perspective.

We hosted 2 surveys this year:

- The first held in October 2013 seeking CFC members (who have access to email) feedback on their experiences with Families SA and Support Agency staff regarding teamwork and support around the children in their care. 60% of those who responded did not believe their perspective on the child/ren in their care was heard by Families SA staff. 76% had situations in the past 2 years where Families SA made decisions for the child/ren in their family they did not agree with. Of these families, 74% were not able to address the decision in a satisfactory manner. We were approached by Families SA leadership advising that the survey was not relevant as it had not been approved by the Ethics Committee. We were unable to further the advocacy this information gathered.

In this survey, we also asked if Foster/Kinship families would support the idea of an Independent Tribunal they could access personally (with support if needed) to present their perspective when confronted with poor practice and seemingly unjust decisions by Families SA staff.

100% responded yes.

- The second survey held in August 2014 asked: The family placement vs residential care debate is often raised, and one that will be discussed a lot in the near future. CFC-SA are told Residential care is often used 'because there are no placements'. This is the dominating perspective in the sector and community. Conversations with our members indicate otherwise. So what is the real picture? Tell us,

**How many approved and available bed/s do you have at your place for a foster child?**

We had 66 members respond, who had 59 beds available. This information has been shared with Minister Rankine, FSA Exec and NGO leadership. There has been limited interest in discussion to address the opportunities this information presents.



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## STATISTICS

The numbers of children under GOM orders (2577) was down slightly from last year (2615).

The number of children in Residential care reached 330, up from 247 in 2013. <sup>1</sup>

The number of families receiving our newsletter has dropped to approx. 1500 this past year, compared to 2400 in 2013. We have been advised this is due to changes to FSA database, but are aware that some families do not receive this mail out. Clarification has not been given.

<sup>1</sup> Statistics via [www.gcyp.sa.gov.au](http://www.gcyp.sa.gov.au)

## SUPPORT

CFC SA continues to provide higher levels of phone support.

Calls to the 1800 number reached 386 to 30 June 2014 – 60% increase on 2013 (241), and 340% increase on 2012 (114).

Calls regarding placement support and advice fall into the following categories:

- Families SA practice 40%
- Care Concerns 19%
- Agency support 10%

Our membership reached 615 as at 30 June 2014 – 20% increase on 2013 (512) and 40% increase on 2012 (442).

CFC SA continued to provide support to foster/kinship families across the state by:

- Face to Face events:
  - Carer Christmas lunch – 60 attended
  - Drive Inn family event – approx. 500 attended (125 cars)
  - Recharge 2014 – 165 attended day session, 66 evening.
  - Office Of Guardian forum – 23 attended
  - Care Concern Unit forum – 16 attended
  - Regional visit to Clare (Auburn) hosted by Uniting Care Wesley
  - Speaking at Carer events – Centacare, Anglicare, Lutheran Community Care, Key Assets
  - Carer support groups – 36 attended this year (Oct 1 2013 to Sept 30 2014)



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- Increased website content and updates:
  - Kate has been doing a brilliant job keeping the website updated.
  - Weekly newsletters sent to all members who have a current and active email address improves communication. Engagement via this medium is strong, with an early report showing 'Open Rate (Opened email)' of 52.8% compared to industry average of 15.1%. The 'Click Rate (clicked onto links for further information)' of 33.1% compared to industry average of 2.6%.
- Establishment of Facebook page, which has opened up a simple, easy to access way to offer information and support to carers across the state.

We have been able to link carers with the Dental Outreach Scheme in the past year. It would be great if we could find more community/corporate sponsorship for foster/kinship parents.

Fifteen members also attended Clipsal 2014 at the invitation of the Premier. Three families took up this opportunity.

## SECTOR NETWORKING

We continue to attend opportunities to build networks with the wider sector.

We attended 51 separate meetings with Government, Families SA leadership and District Offices.

We attended 22 meetings with various Alternative Care Support Agencies.

We also connected with local and national bodies including CREATE, Disability services, Kinship Care working groups, Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund, National Clinical Health Assessment Framework and regularly contribute at Community and Family Welfare Assoc. (CAFWA).

We are members of the Australian Foster and Kinship Care Partnership (AFKCP) and join in advocating for change and recognition at a National level.

In total: CFC Board members attended 170 meetings between us (132 separate occasions). This shows a massive level of commitment from our volunteer board members.

Over the past 12 months CFC board members have also attended:

- CREATE conference in Canberra (Nov 2013)
- Dan Hughes Masterclass in Melbourne (Aug 2014)
- AFKCP national conference in Hobart (Nov 2014)



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## LOOKING AHEAD

During the past year we entered a new contract period, guaranteeing our existence for 3 more years. Although we did not receive the extra funding we were asking for, we did not lose any as did many other organisations.

With the revised Constitution, subcommittees and paid staff member which will be actioned in the new year, I believe we will achieve so much more over the coming 12 months. There is an excellent window of opportunity before us for the profile and perspective of foster/kinship families to be heard and for our rights to be defined and endorsed.

The following quote from Office of the Guardian Annual Report is worth keeping in mind...

“There will be many hours of debate and discussion generated by the Royal Commission which is also an ongoing conversation predominantly had by adults. The voice and views of children and young people are too easily drowned out in the enthusiastic deliberation. So, **what do children want from us?** In the ten years of asking this question of children and young people in state care there are some fundamentals.

- If their family could care for them safely, they want us to help their family.
- If their family cannot, they want a second family, not to replace the first but to be their safe and secure and loving home.
- They want to be treated like other children who do not live in care and to have the same opportunities.

If these are our yardsticks, how do we measure up?”

Gccyp annual report 2013-14 p5

The views of children and young people strongly echo that of foster and kinship families.

As we move into 2015 I thank those foster and kinship parents who have offered to serve other caring families in South Australia by joining the Management Board to continue and grow the work of Connecting Foster Carers SA.

Together we will make a difference.

Jo Jarvis  
Chairperson