



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

17 NOVEMBER 2015

CHAIRPERSON REPORT

What a year! At this time last year we were living under the initial impact of Families SA redesign, the introduction of Solution Based Casework and high media coverage, which included Finn's Law, Chloe Valentine and allegations of serious sexual abuse by a residential care staff member. The Legislative Council Select Committee was in full swing and the Royal Commission was just starting. As I reflect on this I realise the wheels of change turn very slowly! There have been areas which have come under focus (Carer support, Transitioning young people from care, OPG), but little major reform will be addressed until the Hon Margaret Nyland hands down her findings from the Royal Commission, expected May 2016.

ADVOCATE – our growth area this past year.

During this past year we have seen the Select Committee hand down their Interim Report, Ministerial changes (Min Susan Close with DECD, Min John Rau with Child Protection Reform) and the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission.

CFC has been involved with all of these, including a detailed written submission to the Royal Commission (Feb 2015) followed up by a hearing (September 2015) which was attended by Jo Jarvis and Kelly Ryan. Huge thanks to Kelly for her outstanding work, which would have cost thousands of dollars if we paid someone to do that level of research and submission. CFC's submission was considered one of the most comprehensive. We now meet quarterly with Minister Close. We have also met with Min John Rau and will do so more often as reform aspect is enacted after the Royal Commission completed.

CFC also took up the opportunity to provide feedback to the DECD Complaints Policies and Procedures. Kelly again did a brilliant job highlighting the lack of procedural fairness and autonomous, independent, binding oversight. We have received no further communication on this topic since our submission was lodged in June 2015. This was recently raised with Minister Close, who is following up.

The key messages are:

- The **child protection act** needs to change –
 - Foster and Kinship families need to be acknowledged with legislated rights.
 - Prescribed timeframes needed to make decision for children and young people.
- An **Autonomous, Binding Authority** needs to be established –
 - to provide oversight of all FSA business. Possibly SACAT.



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

- to enable opportunity to appeal decisions made which negatively impact families, children and young people, so kids are safe and stable.
- **Permanency planning** needed – Open Adoption or OPG
- **A Foster Care Advocate** is needed – a lawyer provided by the Govt to represent Foster and Kinship families to provide advice navigating the system, advising of rights and represent them at court proceedings if necessary.

The need for Foster homes increases, with a record number of children in residential/commercial care recently, some new born babies. In October this year there were 145 children needing emergency placements (up from 70 the same time last year). Commercial care was not even able to cope, with many children spending the day at Families SA offices. The need to highlight the opportunities that do exist, help to formulate systems that work more efficiently and tell the positive stories to the community are urgent.

An acknowledgement of different types of care (and relevant payments) needs to be considered. The current 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not work in the 21st Century. Long term, permanent families have different requirements to the short-term, emergency, respite and therapeutic families. As Other Person Guardianship is rolled out, we trust thought will also be given to this.

Two surveys were hosted this year:

1. Seeking perspective on "If it wasn't for the children you currently care for, would you stay in the SA foster care system?" Response rate was 37% (industry average 4%) February 2015
 - a. Yes = 26% No = 61% Undecided = 13%
 - b. Comments indicated:
 - i. Interests welfare and protection of children not first priority in FSA practice and system (38%)
 - ii. Children are the reason they would stay (20%),
 - iii. Limited financial support (20%) – including impact on ability to work, impact on household budget including retirement funds, waiting months for reimbursement.
2. As follow up to the May forum with Etienne Scheepers we also asked our members the following in July:

On balance, do you believe that you have a voice that is equal to Families SA and/or your Support Agency in relation to matters that may affect the foster children in your care? YES: 17% (21) NO: 83% (103)

Do you believe that during your annual review, any matters of potential concern about you and/or the placement must be discussed and dealt with finally, so that they cannot be raised at a later time? YES: 81% (92) NO: 19% (22) (excludes N/A responses)

Do you believe that Families SA and/or your Support Agency hold incorrect/inaccurate information about you? YES: 50% (62) NO: 50% (62)

Do you feel you have adequate and appropriate opportunities to review such information and have any inaccuracies remedied? YES: 6% (4) NO: 94% (58)

This info was passed onto Etienne.



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

Care Concern Unit Review was completed in the past year. Claire Kelly had done some excellent work on this. It was later outsourced to Price Waterhouse Cooper. The outcomes of this review seem to have limited (if any) impact. We understand CCU will now hire trained investigators, but we have little other details at this stage. This is an area to follow up.

SUPPORT

Calls in to the 1800 phone number continue to increase: 463 last financial year (386 in 2014) – a 20% increase. We started to record the amount of calls direct to Board members phones during last financial year. A further 348 calls were received this way from people seeking advice and support.

Topics raised are more clearly identified in the new reporting method. Details of information sought are (in order of majority):

- Foster Carer information 33%
- Placement support and Advice re Families SA 30%
- Placement support and Advice re Support Agencies 19%
- Care Concerns 17%
- Placement support and Advice re children and young people's behaviour 1%

This information is sent to our Families SA contract manager each quarter.

There is a high level of frustration experienced by CFC board members who answer the 1800 calls when seeking to support and advise families of their avenues of appeal and review as there is limited effective means to ensure this. The need to care for ourselves is high. Rotating the phone between experienced board members helps. Changes to the legislation and addressing the other key messages under Advocacy in this report would help alleviate this pressure.

CONNECT

We gained 56 new members during 2014/15. Total Membership number at 30.6.2015 was 629. (A clean up of data base was done in July 2014 which saw 70 members moved to inactive due to incorrect details.) Membership currently sits at 668.

CFC SA continued to provide face-to-face connection events through 2014/15 in the following ways:

- Family event at Bounce in January (270 bouncers + family over 2 sessions)
- Helping Sara McLean from Australian Centre for Child Protection developing on-line resources for all in the alternative Care Sector. Original meeting held in March. Email contact continues.
- Hosting a stall at the Reconciliation Action Event in May.
- Hosting a forum to gain Carer insight on DECD complaints policy and practice in June (8 attended)



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

- Hosting a regional lunch at Murray Bridge in August (8 attended – 6 last minute apologies due to terrible weather!)
- Hosting Recharge 2015 with Gregory Nicolau – another outstanding success. (240 attended in total)
- Hosting 2 sessions with Etienne Scheepers in May and October (62 attended in total)

Thanks Helen and Sandra for expert catering!

Connecting with Etienne Scheepers, Chief Executive Director FSA: first held in May. It was a first step, and highlighted for us the gaps in understanding between system and reality. A survey was conducted to follow up and the details forwarded to him, along with priorities and recommendations. We also sent him the results of our “Spare Beds survey, where 64 families from 6 agencies across the state had 59 spaces available for children and young people. (Done to address comment “There are no placements!”) A second forum with Etienne was held on Oct 16. Topic: Carer recruitment, Retention and placement stability. He has expressed interest in continuing discussions and we are planning the next forum, over a longer timeframe early in 2016.

CFC was successful in gaining a grant to send 5 members to the International Foster Care Conference in Sydney in November this year. It was great to be able to provide this opportunity to regional carers.

We also had 10 spaces for members at the Clipsal 500 races in Feb, enjoying the SA Govt Corporate Box.

I continue to work with Guardianship Hubs managers across metro to build **care team connections**. Salisbury (FACT group/forums) and Mt Barker (Hills Carers Network) are going well. Hindmarsh (Woodville) and Marion have held a few things but not regular as yet. They have been challenged by staff shortages and finding the right people available to take the lead.

CONNECTING WITH SECTOR

We continue to meet with **Support Agencies** to raise concerns, gaps and help improve services/support.

Partnership Events: CFC has been instrumental in ensuring Foster and Kinship families are included in these. They provide an opportunity for FSA, Support agency staff and families to learn together.

The first one held in March at Sunnybrae focused on Solution Based Casework. Dana Christensen presented. It enabled all in the care team to talk together and learn from each other’s perspective. Carers were allocated 30 spaces.

The second was held in August at Morphettville. The topic was Child Development and looked at the importance of Early Development in the first five years in 5 life domains: Attachment, Physical, Social & Emotional, Language & Communication and Cognitive development. Carers were allocated 100 spaces.

The next one is in the early planning stages and expected to be held in late Feb 2016.



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY

Reconciliation Action Group: CFC reps are involved with this group, which exists to promote and heighten the spirit of Reconciliation with Aboriginal communities and culture. The first annual event was held in May at Marra Dreaming Salisbury. An opportunity for everyone to share and experience cultural activities. Keep an eye out for the next one. From this has grown the desire for CFC to help establish opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families, children and carers to connect, especially with the aim of helping Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal placements to gather information and connection with their land, culture and people.

Media: CFC has been approached by printed media, radio and TV over the past year for comment. It has provided excellent opportunity to raise public awareness and bring debate.

Total number of meetings across the sector totalled 114. This was down a bit on last year (132) as there were less Carer support groups attended by Board members. (22 in 2014/15 vs 40 in 2013/14)

Facebook

CFC Facebook page has been well received. We currently have 330 followers. There have been over 100 posts to the page, the 5 highest ranking posts as follows:

1. "A powerful letter from a Carer" (2704)
2. "The Youth Court – an anonymous letter from a Carer" (1796)
3. More Say for Foster Parents (1787)
4. Turnbull's push for adoption reforms (1641)
5. Foster parents asked to step up for their kids (1593)

The average number of people reached per post was 361. It highlights the priority for our facebook followers is Carer rights and placement stability.

INFORM

As well as all the above, CFC Board members have attended:

- Australian Childhood foundation training (June 2015),
- CREATE conference (October 2015)
- Trauma Informed Practice hosted by Berry Street (October 2015)
- International Foster Care conference (November 2015)

Some of these have been funded by Anglicare, and we thank them for their support. The need to keep Board members well versed in good practice, well connected and learning from a national perspective is a priority.

Website: Kate continues to do an excellent job promoting our work and keeping the website updated.

Enquiries via website are stable (69 this year, 70 last financial year).

Emails to support@cfc-sa.org.au totalled 807 this past financial year.



Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

2 newsletters were sent to carers on the FSA database via snail-mail. 20 e-news were sent to members with current email addresses.

LOOKING AHEAD

The need to move CFC to the next Organisational stage continues to be a priority. We have not been able to implement our plan for paid staff member/s and subcommittees over the past year. I trust this will occur over the coming year. Our Constitution review is well underway and should be ready to be adopted early next year.

The priorities of Carer and Sector engagement consume the majority of our time and as these demands continue to grow, the need for adequately skilled staff to implement some of the strategic changes rises.

I want to acknowledge the board team who volunteer their time and talent to enable all of this to happen.

Lastly I wish to thank the majority of the members of Connecting Foster Carers SA Inc. for their high level of support, their willingness to engage, to respond to our emails and surveys, to attend forums and events, and enable us to inform all levels of the Alternative Care sector in South Australia. I know at times frustration with the challenges and delays to change can sap our energy. The need for CFC board to be a cohesive team with a common focus on the big picture is high. As families co-parent with Families SA we need to work within the system in respectful ways, that address the problems and seek real, workable solutions that will have lasting effect. Attacking individuals and organisations will undermine this work. A professional and informed approach is a high priority. I believe the positive groundwork we have laid has occurred when this has been our focus.

May we continue to keep the big picture and together inform and role model collaborative team work, so the ultimate goal of why we are here – the children and young people! – know increased safety and stability – and learn to fly!

Jo Jarvis

Chairperson, 2014/15