



# Connecting Foster Carers – SA Inc

advocate support connect inform

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

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8 November 2016

### Chairperson Report

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The past financial year has again proven to be a busy time. The needs of the child protection sector continue to increase. The number of children on child-protection orders increased by 20% in the past year to 3098 (at 30.6.2016). Of these children, 83% are on long term orders\*. The demands on Caring families and the need to ensure the voice and perspective of Foster and Kinship families (and children involved) is heard and used to inform decisions at all levels continues to increase.

I want to acknowledge and thank the team at Connecting Foster Carers SA. I particularly wish to thank Sandra Jackson (10 years), Helen Mann (9 years), Dawn Hawthorn-Jackson (1 year) and Mel Round (4 years) who faithfully served Connecting Foster Carers SA Board and our members and will not be continuing into the new year. I also wish to thank our members for their involvement, encouragement and interest.

\* Data from [www.gcyp.org.au](http://www.gcyp.org.au)

## ADVOCATE

### Royal Commission

The most prominent aspect of CFC's advocacy this year has been submissions to the Child Protection Systems Royal Commission led by Hon Margaret Nyland. Following up our initial submissions lodged last year, CFC were also asked to provide a written submission regarding Other Person Guardianship, to attend a hearing and were summonsed to present DECD/CFC SA Inc. service agreement. As the financial year closed we awaited the release of Nyland's report which occurred on August 9 2016. CFC's initial response was disappointment and concern regarding what effective change would be implemented to ensure rights, protection and appeal avenues for foster and kinship families and address the power imbalance that exists. Advocacy continues.

### Minister Close

Members of CFC's executive team met regularly with Minister Susan Close. Key topics raised include:

- Other Person Guardianship – This received a large financial investment from SA Government. CFC continues to advocate for effective and clear processes.
- Placement vacancies and under-utilised Carers.
- Inconsistency across Families SA hubs.
- Lack of clear process and effective accountability when conflict between Families SA and Carers arise.
- The need for broader training and orientation for the different types of care and knowledge/skills required regarding children needs and understanding of the system.

Other topics raised across the sector include:

## **Consents and Decisions review**

CFC SA provided extensive feedback in the original consultation phase (May 2016) and again post release (August 2016). The document that is currently available on-line is still open for feedback.

## **Care Concern Management**

Changes were implemented in December 2015 to the management of serious care concerns which saw provision of forensic investigation conducted by DECD Incident Management Division. Minor and moderate concerns are still managed by the Care Concern Unit. CFC's members continue to report this practice is not sufficient. It is unclear what changes will occur under the newly formed Department for Child Protection. It continues to be an area of priority.

## **Carer Payments**

Members and the broader sector continue to report inconsistency and lack of clarity regarding this. CFC has been advocating for clear, current documentation that outlines current practice which has not been forthcoming. Due to this, we advise our members to continue to use the 2009 payment information.

The Carer Payments Handbook 2015 fails to provide adequate direction and clarity. CFC has also raised concern regarding the contradiction with the Foster Carer Charter. Work continues.

## **Families SA Complaints Management Policy Consultation**

CFC provided a 12 page report regarding the way complaints are managed by DECD, including Families SA, in August 2015. The final policy was released in February 2016. Many thanks to Kelly Ryan for her extensive work on this topic.

## **Superannuation for Carers**

CFC recognises that many caring families are under-employed due to their commitment to the needs of the children in their families. There is currently no provision for Carers and their post-caring needs.

## **Accessing mental health services for children and young people**

The Council for the Care of Children invited CFC to conduct a survey of members to find how accessible mental health services were for the children in their care. This was conducted via email. 74 members responded. Findings were:

17.6% reported adequate mental health services for children and young people in their care.

35.3% found Families SA staff were supportive of children's needs in this area.

31.8% reported Families SA were supportive of Carers position regarding mental health services for children and young people.

Many comments were also provided. This de-identified information was presented to the Council for the Care of Children in August 2016 and subsequently to Minister Susan Close and Executive Director Etienne Scheepers.



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## Carer Satisfaction Survey

Following CFC's survey on this topic in Feb 2015 which was presented to Etienne Scheepers, Executive Director Child Protection, Families SA developed and conducted a further survey. Results of this survey were concluded earlier this year and will be presented at the AGM.

## SUPPORT

Calls to the 1800 phone number had a slight increase: 471 calls last financial year (up from 463 in 2015). Calls to Board members increased by 45% to 505 (up from 348 in 2015).

Topics raised (in order of majority)

1. Placement support and advice re Families SA 32%
2. RSVP to CFC events 22%
3. Foster Care information 15%
4. Placement support and advice re Support Agency 13%
5. Care Concerns 5%
6. Placement support and advice re children's behaviour 3%
7. Miscellaneous 10%

CFC Board members hosted 22 coffee support groups throughout the year. Individual personal support and advice was also given regularly.

## CONNECT

CFC received 126 new member registrations in 2015/16 (up from 56 in 2014.15). Membership as of 30.6.16 was 708.

Face to face connection events with members held this past year includes:

- Regional visit to Murray Bridge in August 2015. 8 attended.
- Connecting with Etienne Scheepers forum in October 2015. 30 attended.
- Carer Christmas lunch held at North Haven Yacht Club in Dec 2015. 70 attended.
- Family Drive In night in January 2016. 70 families attended. Coming again January 2017.
- Connecting with Etienne Scheepers (and Directors) forum in March 2016. 43 attended.
- Recharge 2016 with Fay Jackson in September. Only 130 attended this year due to the extraordinary storms that week, which saw all of South Australia without power. (Thank you to those who braved the terrible conditions!)
- The first general board meetings, held in May 2016, where members were invited to join an active board meeting. 4 members attended. The second held in September 2016 saw 14 members and 2 visitors attend.

CFC also **connects with the sector**. Areas of sector connection have declined over the past year, with Family Based Care forums (hosted by FSA) and Partnership events (joint venture with FSA and CAFWA) both ceasing. Opportunities to meet with Families SA offices have decreased dramatically, while connections with Support Agencies (including Kinship Care) have grown. Board reps continue to

attend Hub gatherings when they occur. Mt Barker FSA is the only office currently hosting these on a regular basis.

The total number of meeting across the sector totaled 103. This was again down on the previous year (114) due to lack of opportunity to engage with Families SA offices.

Sector meetings attended in 2015 and 2016 are shown in the following table:

Meetings held with:	Number attended 2015/16	Number attended 2014/15
Minister Office	8	6
FSA Exec	10	8
Families SA Offices/Hubs	6	19
DECD	14	17
Agencies	38	29

## INFORM

In addition to the above meetings and to ensure Board members are well versed in good practice and learning from a broad perspective CFC Board members have attended the following:

- Child Protection Symposium held in Dec 2015 with presentations from Prof Fiona Arney (Australian Centre for Child Protection), Prof Leonie Segal (Ireland) and others.
- International Foster Care Conference held in Sydney in November 2015. CFC was successful in gaining additional funding to sponsor 6 members to attend this also.
- CREATE conference in Brisbane in November 2015.
- Australian Foster Care Conference held in Darwin in June 2016. CFC also sponsored 2 members to attend.

The **website** continues to provide a broad range of current information.

Enquiries via the website totaled 452 this past year, a massive increase from 69 last year.

Three newsletters were posted to active carers via the Families SA database last year.

16 e-news were sent to members who have provided their current email addresses.

CFC Facebook page had 463 followers at 30 June 2016 and 129 posts were added last year.

Two General Board meetings were also held to better inform our members of the work undertaken by CFC Board. (See Connect for more details).

## LOOKING AHEAD

CFC Board achieved a long awaited goal in August 2016 when Amanda Porter was appointed as CEO. Amanda brings to CFC strong networks, solid understanding around policy development, strategic planning and a warm, approachable personality. Her position is currently on contract until Feb 2017. CFC Board will advocate strongly to gain the necessary funding to keep her position on a more permanent basis. Constitutional changes will also assist this.



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Having an active and committed CEO will help enable the Board to achieve the following identified goals:

- Increased connection and communication with members
- Increased connection with regional families
- Implementing a clearly defined Strategic Plan
- Increased use of volunteers
- Have a clearly defined strategy and necessary skills to manage media effectively
- Have clearly defined policies and procedures.

Further aims include building connection for Aboriginal children and families.

Ensuring the Board is managed well is a large priority. The need for solid governance, increased reporting mechanisms, increased demand from the sector and funding bodies and the desire to represent our members in the strongest, most transparent ways possible will place extra demand on Board members. Regularly training is planned to build the Board's understanding and practice. The proposed Constitution changes will also enable the Board to move to a stronger skill-based focus, although not at the cost of representing foster and kinship families!

I believe the past year has presented an unprecedented level of challenge. I encourage you to continue to look for the positives. May we role model collaborative team work wherever possible. And ultimately, keep our eyes on the children and young people. They will provide the motivation and encouragement we all need.

Jo Jarvis

Chairperson 2015/16