

In July 2017, we asked South Australian foster and kinship carers (Carers) to tell us what it's like to be in their shoes, to be upfront and honest, share the challenges and barriers they face, together with the successes and rewards which come from providing family-based care to children and young people who cannot live with their birth families.

246 surveys were completed, by CFC-SA Members (65%) and non-Members (35%) with the full results available on our website. Following is a summary of the key data and results from each section:

About you and your family

Age group	80% of respondents were aged between 35 and 64
Gender	90% female 10% male
Region	49% rural and remote 48% metropolitan area
Registered Carers in household	67% have a partner who is a registered Carer 33% are single/sole Carers
Other caring responsibilities	19% have other caring responsibilities (e.g. for a close relative)
Employment status	53% employed 2% looking for work 45% not employed, retired or not able to work
Cultural status	4% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander 93% non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Almost 20% born overseas (majority from U.K. & NZ)
Health status	5% managing a disability 18% managing a chronic health condition

About your caring role

Type of care	79% Foster care 20% Kinship care (including Specific Child Only) 1% both
How long	37% 5-9 years 26% 2-4 years 2 responses over 35 years
How many children and young people	2,295 4 reports of care for over 100 children and young people
How many currently living in your home	218 Carers responded, with 359 children and young people in their care the previous evening

17.5% of Carers do not intend to continue as a registered Carer beyond 5 years.

37% would recommend to a close friend or family member they become a Carer, stating "its rewarding", "worthwhile" and "children need loving caring people".

19% would not recommend it, reporting "it's hard, and at times frustrating" and "hesitant because of the continual impact on our families from the agencies and department".

About the child protection system

48% felt they had a good understanding of the child protection system in South Australia, and 50% responded 'In part'.

40% are keeping up with changes, and 56% responded 'In part'.

Foster and kinship carers are accessing information via:

- CFC-SA communications 42%
- foster care agency support worker 41%
- DCP Case Worker 40%
- DCP communications 40%

76% wanted to know more about the proposed legislation and their rights & responsibilities as a Carer.

43% report they are not informed or kept up to date re entitlements, while 20% responded yes.

76% do not believe there has been any impact on their caring role over the past 12 months (or since the release of the Nyland Report in August 2016) that have occurred as a result of system changes. 14% responded yes to this question, and comments included:

- "I feel the family has more say now and more rights"
- "change to child care arrangements - a great move for efficiency and removing double handling"
- "progression with OPG"

About caring: What's going well

What is working well for you and your family?

- "Being able to have support when needed", with range of support from agency, kinship care, social workers, other Carers, family members, respite care, mentors, school, medical and other health services
- "Long term care with more say with day to day life"

What gives you confidence?

- "Watching my children grow and develop"
- "Seeing the children achieve and accomplish new things"
- "Positive feedback from case worker and family and friends"
- "Knowing I can talk to someone if needed"
- "Being informed and knowing my and children's rights"

What is most important to you?

- "The children" – that they are happy/safe/healthy
- "My [our] family"
- "Provide a safe and loving home"

What is your motivation for continuing to provide foster and/or kinship care?

- "We love the kids"

About caring: What is currently happening

Over 90% were satisfied (22%) and very satisfied (68%) they had formed an attachment and have a strong parent-child relationship.

Responses to OPG and adoption identified a high level of interest, with potential for greater stability and security among respondents. This question also explained some reasons OPG and adoption are not an option, i.e. "Not for a grandchild!".

OPG 163 responses	Yes, granted	4%
	Yes, pursuing	27%
	Maybe	49%
	No	20%
Adoption 162 responses	Yes, granted	0%
	Yes, pursuing	8%
	Maybe	58%
	No	34%

There were several areas for improvement identified from responses, including:

- the ability to maintain cultural identity and connection to family, community and country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people
- the ability to maintain cultural identity and connection to community for culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people
- information about care concerns

- access to adequate therapeutic services
- adequate support to deal with trauma
- training opportunities be made more available/accessible in regional SA
- information about independence and transition from care planning

About caring: What are the challenges

Most challenging:

- "Dealing with difficult behaviour" "challenging behaviour"
- "Lack of information" and "communication" with DCP
- "Access visits"

Greatest worries:

- **"That the children will be removed"**
- "How things will turn out in the future"

About the future

The top 4 preferences for training and information over the next 12 months:

- Behaviour management (including managing challenging behaviour) 68%
- Helping young people to reach their full potential 58%
- Dealing with the impact of trauma 56%
- OPG and adoption 55%

Final messages:

A common theme throughout the survey related to the relationship Carers have with DCP and areas where this could be improved. The following quotes capture the views of many respondents:

- "We need to use the Carers we have. We have not had a child for over 3 months"
- "DCP should always consult a Carer when making a decision regarding a child, and the Carer's opinion should carry great weight as the Carer knows the child best. In one year we had 7 DCP workers for one child, some of who never even met our child. These workers should not be able to make decisions regarding a child they have never met"
- "Communication between DCP and Carers needs to be stronger; we treat our foster child as we would our own and therefore every detail is of the utmost importance to us"