

In July 2018, 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.

165 surveys were completed 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	82% of respondents were aged between 35 and 64
Gender	91% female
	9% male
Region	49% rural and remote
	48% metropolitan area
Registered Carers in household	64% have a partner who is a registered Carer
	36% are single/sole Carers
Other caring responsibilities	22% have other caring responsibilities (e.g. for a close relative)
Employment status	53% employed
	3% looking for work
	44% not employed, retired or not able to work
Cultural status	2% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
	93% non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
	14% born overseas (majority from U.K. & NZ)
Health status	10% managing a disability
	25% managing a chronic health condition

About your caring role

Type of care	73% Foster care
	24% Kinship care (including Specific Child Only)
	3% both
How Long	15% 0 – 1 years
	23% 2 – 4 years
	34% 5 – 9 years
	18% 10 – 14 years
	10% 15 + years
How many children and young people	More than 1,500 with 8 reports of care for over 50 children and young people
How many currently living in your home	156 carers responded, with 279 children and young people in their care the previous evening

15% of Carers do not intend to continue as a registered Carer beyond 5 years.

34% would recommend to a close friend or family member they become a Carer, 24% would not recommend it, whilst 42% maybe.

About the child protection system

54% felt they had a good understanding of the child protection system in South Australia, and 44% responded 'In part'.

43% are keeping up with changes, and 51% responded 'In part'.

Foster and kinship carers are accessing information via:

- CF&KC-SA communications 46%
- Foster care agency support worker 39%
- DCP Case Worker 37%
- DCP communications 49%

66% wanted to know more about the proposed legislation and their rights & responsibilities as a Carer.

37% report they are not informed or kept up to date re entitlements, 39% in part, while 24% responded yes.

67% 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) as a result of system changes. 13% responded yes to this question, and comments included:

- "invited to the annual review for the first time"
- "not having to pay child care upfront has helped"
- "I am able to make more of the 'on the ground' decisions"

About caring: What's going well

What is working well for you and your family?

- "the beautiful forever connection and love with and for our child"
- "the positive change we see in the children who stay with us"
- "working as a team"
- "we have lots of support within our own family and friends and workplaces"
- "Good relationship with the agency" – "communication with DCP" – "the support given" with range of support from agency, kinship care, social workers, other Carers, family members, respite care, mentors, school, medical and other health services
- 6 of the respondents stated "OPG" with the focus on positive autonomy "I make all the decisions for the child and need no one's approval"

What gives you confidence?

- "support from all involved in care of child"
- "knowledge" and "time and experience"
- "seeing our teenager develop into a caring young person"
- "seeing the kids grow healthy and happy"
- "receiving positive feedback and seeing positive outcomes as a result of my efforts"

What is most important to you?

- "family"
- "love"
- "happiness"
- "respect"
- "good communication"
- "having the right to be heard"
- "inclusion with decisions"
- "the well-being of this child"

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

- "the child we have in our care"
- "knowing that there are children out there that need a loving home"
- "the ongoing need and positive impact we are able to have"
- "they are my family and I wouldn't have them anywhere else"

About caring: What is currently happening

Over 90% of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied that they had formed an attachment including a strong parent-child relationship with the child and/or young person in their care.

53% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the communication and collaboration with the DCP Case Worker.

36% were very satisfied or satisfied with the transparency of information provided by the DCP Worker and 34% were very satisfied or satisfied they were informed about issues affecting the child and/or young person in their care.

48% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied that they were treated as a valued member of the care team. The comments received were mainly from the 23% who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, with one Carer stating: "Short term or emergency placements I feel very much like a hotel, somewhere to dump the kid, my opinions and observations don't seem to count".

43% of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied they were provided adequate information regarding health, safety etc however comments were raised regarding not receiving essential records i.e. Medicare details.

Post 18

When asked if Carers are planning to seek support to continue to care for a young person to remain with their family beyond the age 18, 132 carers responded; with 60%

stating yes, 30% stating maybe and 10% stating no. Carer comments indicated they were encouraging of young people staying after they turned 18 regardless of support.

OPG/Adoption

Following on from responses from the 2017 survey, respondents indicated that whilst there was a high interest in OPG and adoption, it was difficult to navigate without appropriate support and information from DCP about the OPG process.

OPG 135 Responses	Yes, granted	10%
	Yes, pursuing	26%
	Maybe	42%
	No	22%
Adoption 125 Responses	Yes, granted	0%
	Yes, pursuing	10%
	Maybe	55%
	No	35%

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

- The ability to access appropriate health and therapeutic services for the children/young people
- The ability to maintain appropriate connection with birth family and significant others
- 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 support young person to access recreational & extra-curricular activities
- Information about care concerns
- Training opportunities made more available/accessible particularly in regional SA
- Information about independence and transition from care planning
- Support for the young person regarding transitioning to independence

About caring: What are the challenges

Most challenging:

- "violence"
- "challenging behaviour"
- "access visits"
- "lack of information from DCP"
- "consultation with DCP"
- "communication with DCP"

Greatest worries:

- **"care concerns"**
- "the future"
- "we have no legal rights to our child"
- "the kids being taken away"

About the future

The top 5 preferences for training and information over the next 12 months:

- Behaviour management (including managing challenging behaviour) 69%
- Helping young people to reach their full potential 60%
- Dealing with the impact of trauma 56%

- OPG and adoption 56%
- Carer Self-care 42%

65% expressed interest in meeting regularly with other Carers in an informal manner for general conversation, with 24% indicating that they are already doing so.

Comparison to 2017 Survey

The 2018 survey indicated both similarities and differences compared to the previous year. Responses from rural and metro locations were consistent between 2017 and 2018, with 49% from rural and remote and 48% from metro. The top 3 preferences for training and information remained the same between surveys.

In the 2018 survey, more kinship carers responded than foster carers compared to 2017. This year the proportion of Carers living with a disability and/or chronic health condition has greatly increased.

Final Notes

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

“Children are hard. Taking on someone else’s part grown children is harder. Taking on children who are also traumatised is harder still. Not knowing what traumas they faced makes you feel like you are walking through a minefield. The kids are living with someone new, in a new house, in a new area, often going to a new school, so they are not only traumatised, they are lost and confused and don’t know what’s going to happen next. As a carer, that’s hard, then you’re dealing with a school or two that you may not have dealt with before, explaining to people that you have children living with you know. If you’re kinship, your family may be divided over the situation, and feel the need to tell you all about it. And whilst all this is going on, people from DCP are assessing you as a carer, and the kids. A judge you’ll never meet needs months to get assessments of everyone involved, to decide if the kids are staying with you or not”

Thank you to all the foster and kinship carers who took the time to share their views in this year’s survey. We have already shared:

- your views on respite with Child and Family Focus SA (CAFFSA) who are undertaking a project; and
- data relating to care for children from 18 to 21 to the Chief Financial Officer at the Department for Child Protection; and
- some of your quotes on ‘what motivates you to keep caring’ and ‘what is working well for you and your family’ in a presentation for our official opening and launch, and to be shown again at this year’s Recharge Event.



Foster & Kinship Carer Survey 2018 Summary

We look forward to bringing your views to our work over the coming 12 months.

Best wishes to you and your families.