

STEVE & SUE

CARER GOOD NEWS STORY 1



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My name is Steve and I'll soon be celebrating my 9th wedding anniversary with Sue, my beautiful wife. Sue has a 20-yr daughter and a 19-yr son and two grandchildren. I have a daughter, aged 25. We've worked very hard to get to where we are today, and we're fortunate to live in a nice home. Sue and I are kinship carers for our 10-year-old niece and 9-year-old nephew, who are both under the guardianship of the minister until they're 18.

Sue and I are studying to complete our sace, as mature students. I left school in year 9, Sue in year 10. We find it very interesting to be back in an education environment. Studying helps Sue and I understand what the kids are doing in their schoolwork and we can help them better. You are never too old to learn! We're enjoying the new challenges.

My personal goal is to make a difference in our community. I'm driven by my passion to make a change in the lives of young people. Sue and I are working towards gaining qualifications as youth workers. The reason for our passion for making a difference is our experience as children in care.

Sue grew up in the foster care system and residential care facilities. We feel that having experience of what a young person feels, and understanding the challenges they face, is an advantage. As well we can help in navigating various government systems to find the best options for a young person's needs.

I believe it's vital for children to have a stable family-based home environment to grow up in. I didn't want the children to be placed in foster care and be moved around in the system. These children are family.

Sue and I became Kinship carers about 10 years ago. Our niece came to live with us at the age of one. Shortly after that our nephew came to live with us, just after he was born. Other immediate family members were not able to have both children and we didn't want them to be separated.

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The children know we are their aunt and uncle. At the time we became kinship carers we had a 10-y-o, a 13-y-o and a 15-y-o in the home. Our then 15-y-o daughter would try to be 'mum' to the baby. By defining roles better our kids were able to help more, especially at bath or meal times. We would say 'this is what the mother does, this is what a sister/ brother does'. Now our eldest daughter has children of her own and she's doing a great job.

Our niece and nephew have limited contact with their mother. We have explained that the reason they live with us is decisions their mother has made. Sue and I have outlined our personal and family goals in a 5 and 10-year plan. This enables us to provide the stability the children require.

The motivation to begin kinship care was having had experience of the state foster care system. We experienced being moved around in the system, with little permanency. I didn't want that for our niece and nephew.

I didn't want them to change schools or find new friends as they grew up. Sue and I wanted to provide a long-term, stable, home-based environment for the children to grow up in and reach their full potential.

Another immense challenge we had to overcome was the unexpected removal of our niece and nephew. The children were in our home for almost a year and things were going well, or so we thought. Then Families SA, now DCP, removed the children.

The social worker told us there was an identified risk to the children. A pair of extended family members had had their children removed from their care. Families SA told us that if these family members remained in our lives all the children would be removed. Permanently. We didn't realise it was an issue as those people never had one-on-one time with the children, only at group family events. Therefore, Sue and I decided to remove these people from our lives for the safety and wellbeing of the children.

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Sue and I needed to prove to the department that we were willing to make the positive changes necessary. We fought for our niece and nephew to remain in our care. We attended support groups and therapy offered by the department. We felt supported by the department to assist us with the changes to occur.

We love our niece and nephew and they are definitely part of our family. We love their bright smiling faces. Our kinship care arrangement works well for our family unit.

A further challenge is having five children with five different biological parents. The children try to play the parents off one another. If they don't like the answer from one parent, they'll ask another. It's interesting to see the children's behaviours and moods reflecting parents' traits.

I'd be a kinship carer again in a heartbeat. Maybe tweak a few little things, but we're child-focused and put our niece and nephew's interests first. Always.

The way the children interact with one another is very special to me. They have their good days and bad days, just like adults. We love them more each day. One child is very curious, she is always asking who is on the phone, what are you talking about and what is the conversation about. She wants to know everything, which is a wonderful trait to have. I hope she keeps asking questions and learning throughout her life.

The children have taught me to be more open minded. Growing up for me was very different as children were seen and not heard. My parents were the authority in the house. The hard authority figure doesn't work well for my family. I am more sensitive to their needs, using a compromising style of parenting.

The most special thing about my family is that we're all unique. The children are special in their individual ways. They have this spark about them that keeps us going through the bad days. I wouldn't change them for anything in the world.



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I love my family and wouldn't change it. We are fine just the way we are.