

In November 2019, we asked South Australian foster and kinship carers (Carers) to provide us with frank and fulsome feedback regarding the challenges and barriers they face, together with the successes and rewards experienced from providing family-based care to children and young people who cannot live with their birth families.

210 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

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| Age group | 84% of respondents were aged between 35 and 64 |
| Gender | 86% female |
| | 14% male |
| Region | 45% rural and remote |
| | 55% metropolitan area |
| Registered Carers in household | 64% have a partner who is a registered Carer |
| | 36% are single/sole Carers |
| Other caring responsibilities | 18% have other caring responsibilities (e.g. for a close relative) |
| Employment status | 50% employed |
| | 4% looking for work |
| | 56% not employed, retired or not able to work |
| Cultural status | 5% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander |
| | 91% non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander |
| | 13% born overseas (majority from U.K. & NZ) |
| Health status | 11% managing a disability |
| | 26% managing a chronic health condition |

About your caring role

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| Type of care | 75% Foster care |
| | 22% Kinship care (including Specific Child Only) |
| | 3% both |
| How Long | 17% 0 – 1 years |
| | 30% 2 – 4 years |
| | 24% 5 – 9 years |
| | 17% 10 – 14 years |
| | 12% 15 + years |
| How many children and young people | More than 1,800 with 11 reports of care for over 50 children and young people |
| How many currently living in your home | 203 Carers responded, with 331 children and young people in their care the previous evening |

14% of Carers do not intend to continue as a registered Carer beyond 5 years.

38% would recommend to a close friend or family member they become a Carer, 21% would not recommend it, whilst 41% maybe.

About the child protection system

49% felt they had a good understanding of the child protection system in South Australia, and 47% 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 54%
- Foster care agency support worker 61%
- DCP Case Worker 69%
- DCP communications 50%

45% believe they know their rights & responsibilities as outlined in the Child & Young Person (Safety) Act 2017, 52% responded 'in part'.

37% feel foster and kinship care is viewed positively by the general public. 27% feeling it is negative and 33% were neutral regarding this question.

25% report they are not informed or kept up to date re entitlements, 44% in part, while 31% responded yes.

53% do not believe there has been any impact on their caring role over the past 12 months as a result of system changes. 26% responded yes to this question, and 21% responded 'maybe'.

Comments included:

- "I can now go to the annual reviews"
- "we are now entitled to a copy of the case plan for each child"
- "post 18 support"
- "requirement for all friends to have a Working With Children Check has adversely affected social connections"

About caring: What's going well

What is working well for you and your family?

- "our relationship with our agency SW (support worker)"
- "helping our child be the best version of himself"
- "having DCP be open with us and keeping us updated"
- "open communication, being able to discuss concerns"
- "stability and consistency in case management"
- "good relationship with agency and open communication"
- "the fact that my grandchild is now safe"

- “having regular respite (every 3 weeks) has enabled me to maintain my self-care and remain buoyant to be the best possible Carer”

What support do you access to help you?

186 Carers responded to this question with 67% stating family & friends as their main support. 61% were accessing their agency for support and 60% their DCP case worker.

Three other sources of support accessed by Carers included:

- 46% school & education settings (including child care)
- 38% CF&KC-SA
- 37% therapeutic services

What gives you confidence?

- “knowing we have supports”
- “knowledge and understanding”
- “a good support team”
- “DCP trusting me to make decisions”
- “seeing my foster daughter reach another milestone”
- “seeing my child in care positively progress”

“Child development and growth” in addition to “building confidence in Carers” was a common theme across the responses.

What is most important to you?

- “care & safety”
- “health”
- “family”
- “respect”
- “communication & honesty”
- “being respected for the role we play”
- “my child’s well-being”

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

- “to bring up children who are in a supportive and loving environment who know they can achieve whatever they set their mind to”
- “to make a difference in the lives of children in need”
- “to give our young people a better life”
- “strong family ties”
- “being able to provide a stable environment for a child in need”
- “seeing my child thrive and be happy”
- “the joy of seeing positive change in the children in my care”
- “making a difference in the lives of the children we care for, and their families”
- “to give a child a home, not just a house to live in that will always be there for them”

Becoming a carer

Through the process of becoming a Carer, respondents were asked whether they were satisfied with the level of information they received on various aspects of caring

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| Foster or Kinship care | 48% satisfied | 21% dissatisfied |
| The assessment process | 60% satisfied | 20% dissatisfied |
| The approval & registration processes | 53% satisfied | 19% dissatisfied |
| Orientation & induction processes | 50% satisfied | 16% dissatisfied |
| Meeting the needs of vulnerable children or young people in your care | 43% satisfied | 29% dissatisfied |
| Each child or young person's history | 17% satisfied | 56% dissatisfied |
| Trauma & accessing therapeutic support | 27% satisfied | 44% dissatisfied |
| Where to go for help | 37% satisfied | 32% dissatisfied |
| How to make a complaint | 37% satisfied | 32% dissatisfied |

Comments included:

- "I think no-one can prepare you for how hard it is to care for children with trauma
- "the training fails to give you the real life tools needed to support trauma children"
- "Continual learning is required"

Relationships

Respondents were invited to rate their levels of satisfaction with key relationships:

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| DCP Case Worker | 51% satisfied | 22% dissatisfied |
| DCP Kinship care team support worker | 27% satisfied | 11% dissatisfied |
| Foster care agency support worker | 63% satisfied | 13% dissatisfied |
| Birth family | 25% satisfied | 28% dissatisfied |
| Other family members | 42% satisfied | 26% dissatisfied |

About caring: What is currently happening

Over 93% of respondents were satisfied that they had formed an attachment including a strong parent-child relationship with the child and/or young person in their care.

49% of respondents were satisfied with the communication and collaboration with the DCP Case Worker.

27% were satisfied with the transparency of information provided by the DCP Worker and 32% were satisfied they were informed about case decisions and other issues affecting the child and/or young person in their care.

47% of respondents were satisfied that they were treated as a valued member of the care team. The comments received were mainly from the 23% who were dissatisfied, with one Carer stating: "Our voice is not heard as the child's main carer".

33% of respondents were satisfied they were provided adequate information regarding health, safety etc however comments were raised regarding not receiving essential records i.e. Medicare details.

61% of Carers had a child placed in their care in the last 12 months indicated that they did not receive a child profile prior to placement, as per Regulation 20.

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, 158 Carers responded; with 58% stating yes, 25% stating maybe and 16% stating no. Carer comments indicated they were encouraging of young people staying after they turned 18 regardless of support.

LTG/Adoption

Responses from the 2019 survey indicated that whilst there was a high interest in LTG and adoption, it was difficult to navigate without appropriate support and information from DCP about the OPG process.

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| LTG 162 Responses | Yes, granted | 14% |
| | Yes, pursuing | 21% |
| | Maybe | 35% |
| | No | 26% |
| 42 Carers provided a comment only for this question including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "concerned about losing support and financial assistance" - "hasn't been raised as an option, we have no information" - "as the children get older we will be guided by them" - "my child will need all the help they can get – if I go LTG (their needs) may get overlooked if something happens to me" | | |
| Adoption 162 Responses | Yes, granted | 1% |
| | Yes, pursuing | 4% |
| | Maybe | 38% |
| | No | 28% |
| 49 Carers provided a comment only for this question including; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "concerned there is no further support" - "I think this is just as much a decision of the children as it is us, and it would be wrong of us to just assume it would be ok" - "I did not know adoption was an option" - "If the financial, health and educational assistance remained in place I would definitely adopt" | | |

Mental health support for Carers

When asked if Carers accessed mental health support in their role as a Carer (such as counsellor or psychologist support) 142 Carers responded; with 23% stated they did and 76% stated they did not.

Carers stated in their feedback a range of responses:

- "can't afford to pay the gap"
- "we'd love a family parenting coach, just a neutral check in person"
- "self-funded as required"
- "through workplace Employee Assistance Program (EAP) as needed"

About caring: What are the challenges

Most challenging:

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| - "lack of respite" | - "feeling disrespected by DCP" |
| - "challenging behaviour" | - "waiting times for support from DCP" |
| - "inadequate support for Carers from the child protection system" | - "poor communication with DCP" |

Greatest worries:

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| - "care concerns" | - "not having enough support to meet the needs of the child" |
| - "removals" | |
| - "workers making decisions without our consultation" | |

"Care concerns are unnecessarily stressful. A Carer should never have to wait 2 weeks to find out what it is (the care concern). The NGO should be able to support you over this waiting period instead of ignoring you"

About the future

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

- Behaviour management (including managing challenging behaviour) 67%
- Helping young people to reach their full potential 57%
- Dealing with the impact of trauma 56%
- Responding to trauma in children and young people 50%
- Carer Self-care 44%

66% expressed interest in meeting regularly with other Carers in an informal manner for general conversation, with 33% indicating that they are already doing so.

Comparison to 2018 Survey

The 2019 survey indicated both similarities and differences compared to the previous year. Several new questions were included in this year's survey regarding NDIS, participation in care team meetings, receiving a child profile prior to placement and recreational activities accessed by children and young people under Guardianship.

Responses from rural and metro locations were consistent between 2018 and 2019, with a 4% decrease in respondents from rural and remote however a 7% increase in responses from the metro community.

The top 3 preferences for training and information remained the same between surveys, which CF&KC-SA will utilise in the development of future education sessions and Recharge events. This information will also guide the planning for the National Foster & Kinship Care Conference in 2020 and facilitate our ongoing work to connect, inform, advocate & support our South Australian Carer community.

Final Notes

A common theme throughout the survey related to the relationship Carers have with DCP and areas where this could be improved, in addition to the need for Respite and better management of Care Concerns.

Thank you to all the foster and kinship Carers who took the time to share their views in this year's survey. This information will be used to guide:

- future planning for morning tea and education sessions for Carers during the next 12 months;
- the development of a collection of Carer Guides for the community to access as part of their Carer journey;
- content planning for the 2020 National Foster & Kinship Care Conference i.e. sourcing keynote speakers and plenary presenters and
- vital systemic advocacy to address the barriers and challenges present in current child protection policy and legislation.

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

Best wishes to you and your families.

Fiona Endacott

Chief Executive Officer