

As the **peak representative body for foster and kinship carers in South Australia**, Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers – SA Inc (CF&KC-SA) seek support for the following pre-election commitments ahead of the upcoming 2022 South Australian state election.

We believe South Australia *must* return to the premise that children & young people under Guardianship of the Chief Executive are the priority for all systems within our state. South Australia can and must do more to provide secure, safe and responsive care for the growing number of children & young people under guardianship– including the families who care for them. The only way to achieve this is ensuring the Carer workforce is supported, trusted, consulted and retained as crucial leaders in the better outcomes for children & young people.

We call for:

‘Systems that work’

COMMITMENT 1

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO ADDRESSING TO THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER GUARDIANSHIP

COMMITMENT 2

ENSURE FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARER PAYMENTS ADEQUATELY PROVIDE FOR THE FULL FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

COMMITMENT 3

PROVIDE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE, FLEXIBLE, REGULAR FORMS OF RESPITE SUPPORT FOR CARER FAMILIES

COMMITMENT 4

EXTEND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR CARER FAMILIES TO AGE 25

COMMITMENT 5

AMEND THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (SAFETY) ACT 2017 (SA) TO INCLUDE PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS AND CARE CONCERNS AS A PRESCRIBED FUNCTION

COMMITMENT 6

FUND RESEARCH INTO FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARE; SUPPORT INNOVATION AND BEST PRACTICE

COMMITMENT 7

COLLABORATE WITH THE PEAK REPRESENTATIVE BODY FOR FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARERS

For more information or to discuss, please contact CF&KC-SA:

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What we are asking for	Why we are asking
<p>COMMITMENT 1 WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH TO ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER GUARDIANSHIP</p>	<p>South Australian Carers report ongoing stress in navigating multiple systems and government policy to access the required supports for their children & young people. We call for each jurisdiction across state government to focus on priority access for early intervention and prompt access to services for children and young people in family based care.</p> <p>Adequate financing, resourcing and training is required for employee/specialist retention across each government department. It is fundamental to ensure rapid response and priority access to services for children & young people under guardianship.</p> <p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. all departments (i.e. Education, Health) to provide priority access to services and resources for children & young people under guardianship; 2. all departments to be trauma informed & prioritise consulting with family based Carers; 3. increased interagency communication across government departments as fundamental practice in the successful provision of early intervention and support to children and young people under guardianship. <p>We are aware the current Minister for Child Protection meets regularly with caucus to progress areas of mutual support and collaboration for young people under guardianship. We call for an increase in this commitment throughout all departments <i>with</i> Carers as vital stakeholders.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT 2 ENSURE FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARER PAYMENTS ADEQUATELY PROVIDE FOR THE FULL FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR RAISING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE</p>	<p>South Australian Carer Payments are still insufficient in comparison to the full cost of caring for young people in family based care when benchmarked against other states and territories. Carers report feeling exhausted and devalued; fighting for basic needs for their children and young people. There is a severe lack of transparency of reimbursements and entitlements and a lack of awareness by decision makers regarding the direct and indirect financial impact on Carer families.</p> <p>We call for immediately honouring the emotional, financial and psychological commitment Carers willingly and openly develop when they raise children and young people on behalf of the state.</p>

	<p>Carers report that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reimbursements must be paid in a timely manner so that financial strain is minimised; • current reimbursement delays impact the wellbeing of children - particularly in accessing timely services and support; • there is persistent, pervasive stigmatisation they are "doing it for the money"; • information regarding the payment process & decision making is not transparent or easy to understand; • children are missing out on crucial support and services in their formative years due to an inappropriate assessment and special needs loading tool. <p>Increasing the reimbursement of the base level payments will help with the retention of Carers and the future recruitment of new Carers.</p> <p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. an increase in base level carer payments across all ages ranges to either meet or exceed the National average; 2. the commissioning of research to ascertain the true cost to Carers caring for children and young people under guardianship; and 3. the DCP Complex Assessment Tool and Special Needs Loading Tool to be age appropriate in its function; ensuring children and young people are receiving adequate supports as soon as required in their formative years, linked to objective assessment results and clear recommendations for therapeutic support. <p>We are aware the review of these aforementioned tools are listed in the "every effort for every child" strategy as a forward agenda phase 3 piece in 2022.</p> <p>We call for this to be bought forward for the immediate benefit for children and young people and their needs.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT 3</p> <p>PROVIDE ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE, FLEXIBLE, REGULAR FORMS OF RESPITE SUPPORT FOR CARER FAMILIES</p>	<p>South Australian Carers are not receiving adequate, appropriate and consistent respite support for their children and young people.</p> <p>Carers report that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they are not receiving respite in a timely manner • there is ongoing stigmatisation when accessing respite • the current formal respite arrangements are often inaccessible and/or inappropriate. <p>Carer families ask for alternatives that fit with their lifestyles and are inclusive of all the children and young people in their family.</p> <p>Provision of services that support foster and kinship carer families to have a break or help relieve pressure (e.g. babysitting, cleaning, gardening, holidays) would be more suitable and support the retention of healthy carers.</p>

	<p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a commitment to respite care as a necessary, legitimate and skilled form of care that promotes children's wellbeing; 2. an increased commitment to recruiting more respite carers across all of South Australia; 3. formal acknowledgement that Carers have the right to respite, which is not to be stigmatised as a reflection on their level of skill, commitment and love for their child or young person; 4. facilitating respite opportunities proactively for Carers, to preserve placements and retain healthy Carers. <p>We are aware the DCP are committing to flexible respite as part of the existing departmental recruitment and retention taskforce, of which our organisation participates regularly.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT 4 EXTEND SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR CARER FAMILIES TO AGE 25</p>	<p>Research indicates young people who leave care at an early age have a higher instance of substance abuse, homelessness, unemployment and poor educational outcomes. Support for young people in care past the age of 18 helps reduce uncertainty and the risk of homelessness</p> <p>Current initiatives offered through the DCP provide support to 21 in specific instances where particular education & employment parameters are met by the young person in family based care. Whilst these young people are engaged in education, there is concern the arrangement is not meeting the needs of this vulnerable group of young people in the areas of accessing and retaining housing, daily living skills, financial management and psychosocial support.</p> <p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The extension of carer support payments to assist Carers to continue to care for young people under the age of 25; for those who are not yet ready to leave care i.e. pursuing further education or apprentice based qualifications, and to assist in the long term establishment of financial, education, psychological support needs and accessing/maintaining housing <p>Extending support for young people and their Carer families to age 25 based on their individual needs would allow young people the additional time to grow from a secure family base, hopefully reducing the odds of homelessness, interaction with the judicial system and reliance on further government issued financial supports.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT 5 AMEND THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE (SAFETY) ACT 2017 (SA)</p>	<p>Currently the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (CYPS Act) and the associated Amendment Bill, does not include procedural fairness or the care concerns process as a prescribed function. Carers report frustration with the lack of transparency and procedural fairness within the legislation, specifically with regard to decision making that adversely impacts</p>

<p>TO INCLUDE PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS AND CARE CONCERNS AS A PRESCRIBED FUNCTION</p>	<p>Carer families. The Care Concerns process is not prescribed, therefore not considered a reviewable decision, leaving Carers without the ability to request external binding oversight to this decision making process.</p> <p>Amendments to the CYPs Act will improve rights for foster and kinship carer families, and help improve retention rates.</p> <p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the inclusion of care concerns as a prescribed function and the extension of the definition of 'reviewable decision' to include a decision related to 'care concerns'; 2. the development of clear legislative requirements to direct the conduct and scope of the Care Concerns Investigations Unit (CCIU), expressly setting out the purpose and ambit of a CCIU investigation, the nature and extent of the unit's powers and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of those it investigates; 3. the embedding of the right to procedural fairness for Carers within the legislation. <p>We are aware the Department for Child Protection will consider the inclusion of care concerns as a prescribed function in the scheduled legislation review in October 2022. We request this be brought forward as a separate urgent amendment.</p>
<p>COMMITMENT 6</p> <p>FUND RESEARCH INTO FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARE; SUPPORT INNOVATION AND BEST PRACTICE</p>	<p>There is a crucial need for current, local academic resources identifying national and international approaches to family-based care and sustainable, healthy placements for children and young people. Research will support innovation and justify a range of system improvements, with the potential to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduce multiple placements for children and young people in the care system; • increase stability and security for children and young people with their Carer families; • support new initiatives in pilot/trial project capacity (for example: exit interviews for foster and kinship carers delivered by peak representative body; applying early intervention research learnings and outcomes to Family-based Care; mental health and wellbeing support for Carers); and • support Carer families to better manage a range of issues, including challenging behaviours and appropriate responses to trauma. <p>We therefore call for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a commitment to fund ongoing research into foster & kinship care specific to South Australia, commissioned or auspiced by CF&KC-SA to ensure its relevance and to directly address the support needs of Carers, children and families within state care.
<p>COMMITMENT 7</p> <p>COLLABORATE WITH THE PEAK REPRESENTATIVE</p>	<p>As a voice for foster and kinship carers, CF&KC-SA offers an informed position on matters that impact Carer families in a collaborative, assertive framework.</p> <p>Through collaboration with our peak representative body, the child protection system can</p>

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better involve Carers and their fundamental roles, and further build and enhance protective factors around children and young people in care through legislation, policy, procedure and practice

Acknowledging Carers as the experts in their families will allow them to seek support, communicate more effectively and to be the best parents they can be for all the children and young people in their care

We therefore call for:

1. early consultation with CF&KC-SA, and the Carers we represent, in the development of all legislation, policy and process that impact foster and kinship Carer families; and
2. the automatic free membership for foster and kinship Carers to the peak body, to ensure all SA carers are aware of their rights and responsibilities, from the beginning of their caring journey.

CF&KC-SA endorses the [HomeStretch Campaign](#) and supports [Family Matters](#), along with the Charter of Rights for Children & Young People. We are an active member of [South Australian Council of Social Service \(SACOSS\)](#), [SNAICC](#), [Reconciliation SA](#) and [Child and Family Focus SA \(CAFFSA\)](#).