



Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers - SA

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Annual Foster & Kinship Carer Survey Summary

2023-24



ABOUT CF&KC-SA

Connecting Foster & Kinship Carers - SA (CF&KC-SA) is the peak representative advocacy body for South Australia's family-based carers (commonly known as foster and kinship carers) who are approved under the *Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)*. We are a not-for-profit, non-government and membership-based organisation that provides a free advocacy service to our entire SA family-based carer community. Our purpose is to carry out two ongoing roles: individual advocacy and systemic advocacy.

CF&KC-SA provides individual advocacy by working with family-based carers who are experiencing challenging matters related to their foster/kinship caring role, and systemic advocacy by lobbying for systems changes across government and non-government organisations. Both tasks aim to improve outcomes, experiences, and conditions for foster and kinship families, and our mission is to ensure all priority partners hear the carer voice and uphold their rights according to legislation, practice, policies, and the South Australian Statement of Commitment with foster & kinship carers.



THE ANNUAL FOSTER & KINSHIP CARER SURVEY

During March and April 2024, we invited currently approved and active South Australian foster and kinship carers (herein referred to as family-based carers or carers), including those who were approved and active in the 12 months prior, to participate in our annual foster and kinship carer survey.

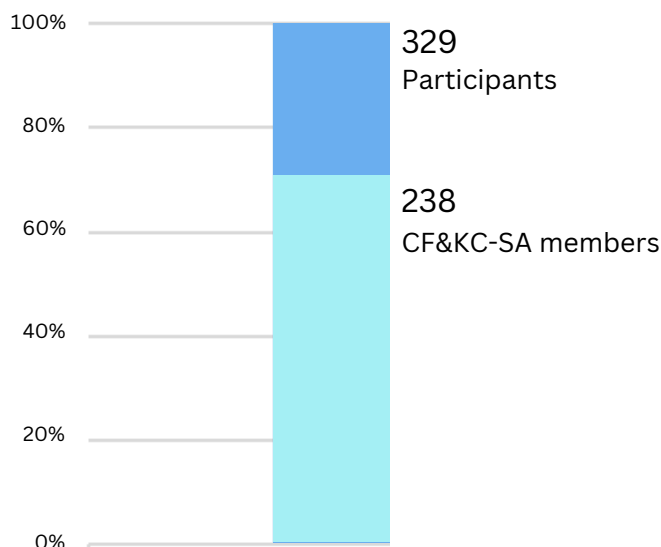
The survey was advertised with a link on our website and Facebook page and in emails to CF&KC-SA's membership. It was also shared by external stakeholders to reach carers who were non-CF&KC-SA members. Due to the generous size of the survey, carers were given 47 days to take part.

The survey gathered demographic details about the carer population, their experiences of the child protection system, information about the systemic issues they face, and feedback on CF&KC-SA's advocacy service.

Our participants:

Overall, 329 carers participated (reaching a record high). 72% of participants were CF&KC-SA members. This is a representative sample of the estimated entire family-based carer cohort in South Australia.

2023-24 Annual Survey



KEY TAKEAWAYS

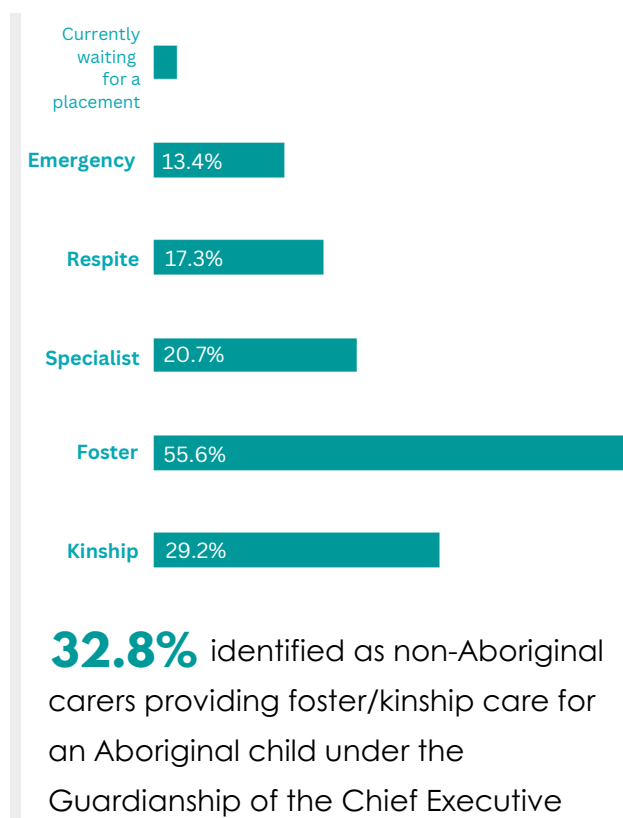
- Nearly half of carers are dissatisfied with the overall child protection system.
- About 3 in 4 carers claimed their carer support payment for the child did not cover the full cost of direct care for their foster/kinship child.
- The most commonly reported household income for carers is between \$18,201 and \$30,000, less than half of the Australian median household income.
- 78% of carers reduced their employment in order to provide the level of care their foster/kinship child needs and close to a quarter of carers are unable to work due to their foster/kinship child's high needs.
- 67% of carers said their superannuation has reduced because they are a carer, with 65% concerned about their superannuation for retirement.
- The majority of carers (58%) would not recommend becoming a carer to friends and family.
- 32.8% identified as non-Aboriginal carers providing care for Aboriginal foster/kinship children.
- Nearly 90% of primary foster/kinship carers are female.

THE TOP 5 SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARE ACCORDING TO CARERS INCLUDE:

1. Low carer support payments (71%).
2. Unmet carer mental health needs (69.8%).
3. Inaccessible respite care (58.9%).
4. The care concerns process (54%)
5. Reduced superannuation (53.6%).

About Foster & Kinship Carers

Types of carers



Age

The most common age of a carer is between **50-59**



Highest Education Level

35.8% tertiary (university)
 31.8% tertiary (non-university)
 20.7% some of high school
 11.6% completed year 12



Gender

89.4% female
8.8% male
1.8% gender fluid or other or did not disclose

Most carers had partners and most partners were approved carers. Gender represented in the survey suggests that primary carers are mostly female

Partnership Status

60.3% married or de facto
 31.1% single
 3.7% in a relationship
 4.7% other

93.8% of carers' partners are approved carers

Cultural Identity

5.3% identified as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Carers

5% identified as First Nations Carers

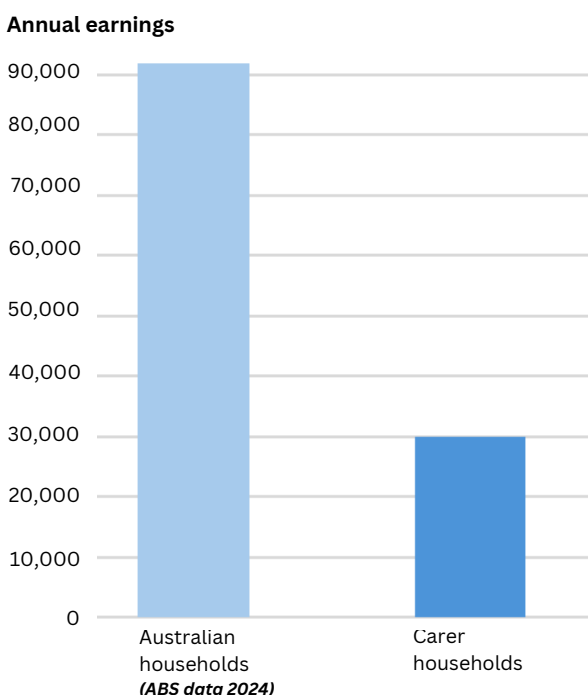
Carer role duration

Carers had provided foster/kinship care for an average of **6-9 years**



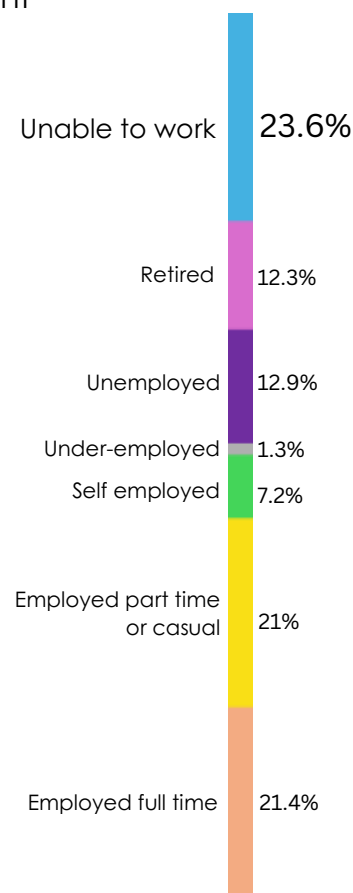
Carer household earnings

The most commonly reported carer household income (dark blue), is considerably less than the Australian median household income.



Carer employment

Close to a quarter of carers are unable to work. Caring for children and young people with high needs was specified as the leading reason for ceased paid employment



Carer support payments & reimbursements

74.2% indicated that their carer payment did not cover the whole cost of providing foster/kinship care

83.1% were not reimbursed for all foster/kinship care related out of pocket costs

Hidden financial costs to carers:

78% had reduced their employment in order to provide the level of care that their foster/kinship child needed

67% indicated their accumulation of superannuation was reduced because they are/were a carer

TOP 5 SYSTEMIC ISSUES IN FOSTER & KINSHIP CARE ACCORDING TO CARERS

1 Low carer support payments 

2 Unmet carer mental health needs 

3 Inaccessible respite care 

4 The care concerns process 

5 Reduced superannuation 

ABOUT THE TOP 5 ISSUES

1

74.2% of carers indicated that their **carer support payment** for the child did not cover the whole cost of providing care for them.

Only 16.5% of carers were reimbursed for all out of pocket costs for their foster/kinship child.

2

37% of carers wanted professional **mental health** support to help with carer-related issues.

51% of these carers did not receive professional mental health supports.

Reasons why carers did not access mental health supports included:

- Fears their foster/kinship children would be removed.
- Not being able to afford it.
- Wait times being too long.
- Concerns their therapist would not be informed enough about foster and kinship care to properly address the issues on hand.

3

70.2% of carers who asked for **respite care** were told it was not available.

48.8% of long term carers would willingly provide respite care for other carers from their local community.

4

37.1% of of carers had experienced a care concern.

23.5% of carers who received a **care concern** were not invited to discuss the allegation and respond to it.

65% of carers who received a care concern were not provided written documentation and updates about the care concern.

5

65.3% of carers are concerned about their **superannuation**.

67.7% of carers indicated that their accumulation of superannuation is reduced because they are/were a carer.

7.6% of carers had used their own superannuation to cover out of pocket expenses for their foster/kinship child.

Why Foster & Kinship Carers Do What They Do

What attracted carers to foster?

- They wanted to make a positive difference to a child's life.
- They were inspired by friends, family, and community.
- They held a sense of social responsibility to directly care for a child in need.
- They wanted to start a family of their own.

“To provide a child with a safe and nurturing environment, and to give the child the best chance of a fulfilling life.”

“Because we knew the need was astronomical and because we believe every child deserves a safe home to grow up in.”

“Wanting to do something, to help, [and] try to change a young person's life.”

What motivates carers to continue their foster/kinship role?

- They love their foster/kinship children and consider them to be family.
- They love watching their foster/kinship children grow, thrive, and reach their potential.
- They want their foster/kinship children to feel loved and safe.
- They find the role to be rewarding and meaningful.

“I love the child in my care as if she was my own.”

“My love of kids [and] desire to show them they are safe and loved. To help these children [get] to the next stage of their lives.”

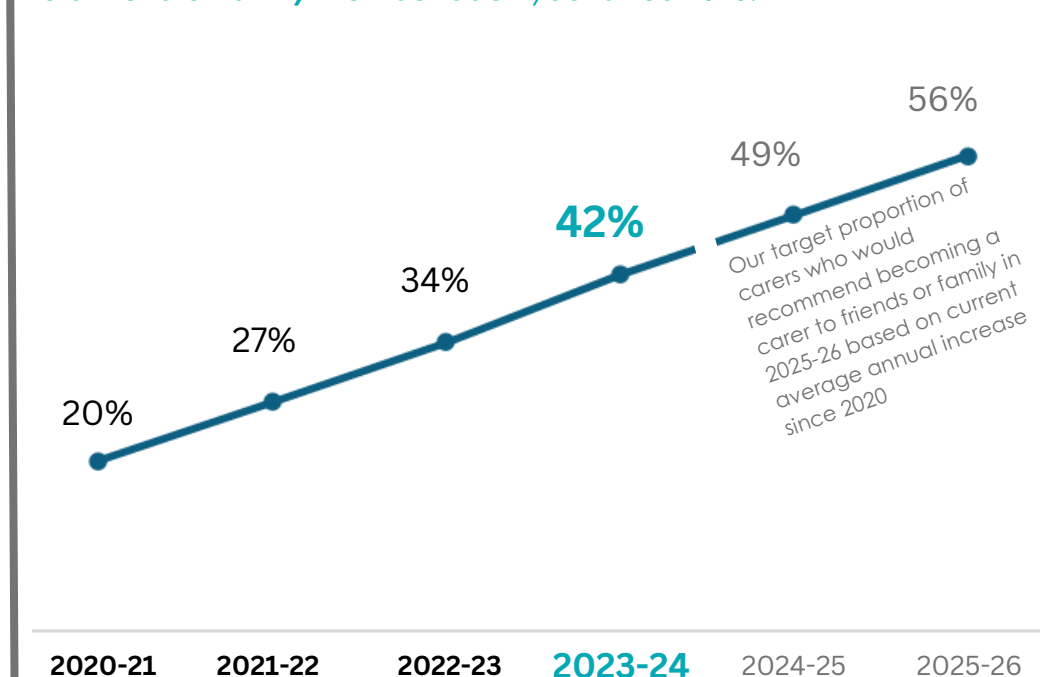
“Incredibly rewarding and an opportunity to be able to provide love and care to a child joining our family either long term or short term.”

Foster & Kinship Carer Perspectives

Despite the rewards of being a carer, most (58%) would not recommend becoming a carer to friends or family

However, the proportion of carers who would recommend it has steadily increased since 2020. If this trend continues, we estimate reaching 50% or more of carers making recommendations to friends and family by 2026. We know that a carer's recommendation is an effective way to recruit new carers.

Proportion of **family-based carers** who would recommend becoming a carer to a friend or family member each year since 2020.



Carers' thoughts about their foster/kinship child's education:

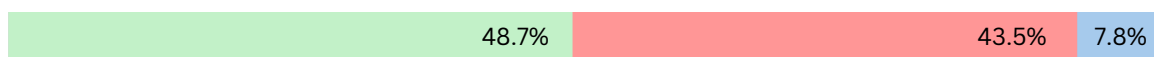
64.8% of carers were concerned about their foster/kinship child's education.

58.6% think education outcomes for children and young people in foster/kinship care is an area that needs systemic advocacy.



Carers hold mixed opinions on how they think the public view family-based carers

- Positively
- Negatively
- Both



CF&KC-SA is committed to building the reputation of foster and kinship carers and reducing stigma associated with foster and kinship care. This is achieved via our systemic advocacy activities.

Carers want to learn more about the following topics:

- [Helping young people to reach their full potential](#) (55.3%)
- [Managing complex behaviour and needs](#) (54.5%)
- [Managing and responding to trauma](#) (45.9%)
- [Carer payments, superannuation, and financial management](#) (42.1%)
- [Self-care for carers](#) (38.7%)
- [Future proofing \(who will care if I can't?\)](#) (35.7%)
- [Pursuing Long Term Guardianship](#) (34.2%)
- [Encouraging protective behaviours](#) (33.8%)
- [The National Disability Insurance Scheme](#) (29.3%)

Each year, the peak body responds to these interests by arranging information sessions, workshops, and publishing carer guides.

Nearly half of carers are very dissatisfied/dissatisfied with the overall child protection system



20%

Very
dissatisfied



28.9%

Dissatisfied



22.9%

Neutral



17.7%

Satisfied



10.1%

Very
satisfied

Most kinship carers are satisfied/very satisfied with their kinship care worker



7.1%

Very
dissatisfied



4.7%

Dissatisfied



16.6%

Neutral



20.2%

Satisfied



51.9%

Very
satisfied

Most foster carers are satisfied/very satisfied with their support agency worker



5.6%

Very
dissatisfied



5.1%

Dissatisfied



15%

Neutral



27%

Satisfied



47.2%

Very
satisfied

Most carers are satisfied/very satisfied with their child's DCP case worker



10.4%

Very
dissatisfied



15.8%

Dissatisfied



18.4%

Neutral



23.2%

Satisfied



33.2%

Very
satisfied

Less than half of carers think their support worker or kinship care worker and child's DCP case worker keep them informed of and up to date on their rights and entitlements

Why carers would or would not consider Long Term Guardianship:

2 in 5 surveyed carers would consider becoming their foster/kinship child or young person's Long Term Guardian to:

- Reduce DCP's involvement.
- Ensure their child has a secure 'placement.'
- Ensure their child has a stronger sense of belonging.



About 1 in 5 surveyed carers would not consider becoming their foster/kinship child or young person's Long Term Guardian because of:

- Too many issues trying to navigate the application process.
- Needing the support from the DCP in order to provide the level of care their foster/kinship child needs.

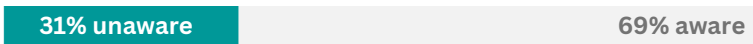
Many carers face challenges with the NDIS, including:



- Difficulty understanding and navigating the scheme.
- Inadequate funds for the child's therapeutic supports.
- Limited collaboration with carers, as decisions are made with the DCP worker, not the carer due to legal guardianship being with the Chief Executive.
- Lack of access to the child's plan, as it is only available to the DCP worker.

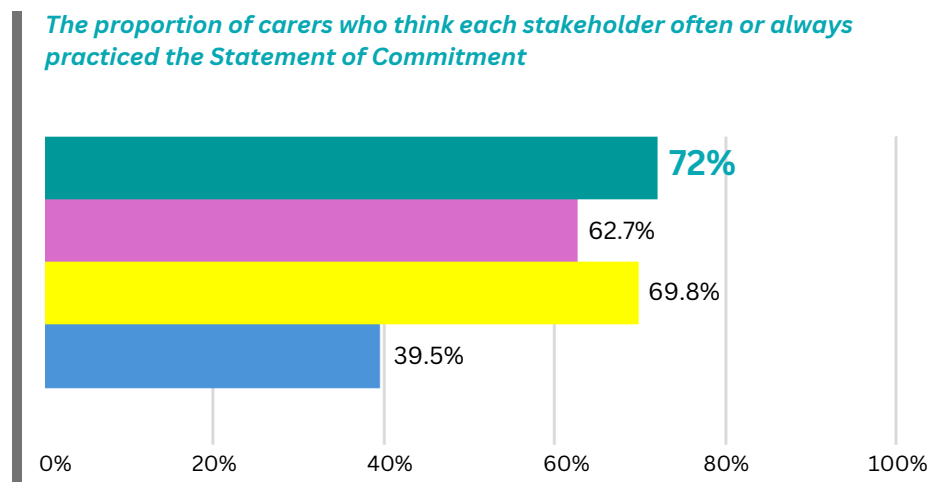
Carer thoughts on the South Australian Statement of Commitment with Foster and Kinship Carers

31% of carers were not aware of the Statement of Commitment (SoC) before participating in the survey. Those unaware were informed about what the SoC via a description provided above the survey question.



We asked carers to indicate the extent to which each stakeholder (their support agency/kinship worker, DCP workers and CF&KC-SA staff if they used our service in last 12 months), practiced the Statement of Commitment (SoC).

- Kinship worker
- CF&KC-SA staff
- Support agency
- DCP workers



More than 7 in 10 carers think CF&KC-SA often or always practiced the SoC

What carers think is going well for their foster/kinship family:

“While it did have its challenges, I am glad we were able to become a kinship carer. Having a kinship support worker made all the difference. Being able to reach out to someone who understands the processes and procedures so we could better understand why certain decisions are made was a great help to us.”

“My grandchild is thriving, she has made many friends, is very smart, and she is caring and healthy.”

“The interactions between our biological child and respite care children have been great to see. It opens pathways for discussions about what children need.”

“My child is settled and loved, and is developing in all areas, despite expected setbacks.”

“I have watched this young man, from 21 months, grow and develop even with all his diagnoses and challenges. To see him become the young man he is fills my heart.”

“Wonderful attachments have been built and we feel support by the DCP and agency [whilst] her needs change as she grows.”

“I can see how settled he is, and he finally feels he belongs somewhere and has a family. It’s very fulfilling. I love seeing the changes already made that have happened naturally with him being part of a family and out of residential care.”

“I’ve been able to build a good relationship with the DCP, [our] support agency and bio mum, which helps me to better advocate for my child in care.”

DID YOU KNOW?

50%

of carers indicated that their foster/kinship child was on an NDIS plan



70.5%

of carers expect to continue providing care for their foster/kinship young person at age 18 and older

8.8% already do



14.8% of carers' foster/kinship children had experienced a school expulsion

43.3% had experienced a school suspension

Carers use the following sources to find information about their role as a carer:

- Who can say ok? (booklet)
- Carer Reference One - Who pays for what? (doc)
- Carer Support Payments Carer Handbook
- The Charter of Rights for Children and Young People
- *The Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017 (SA)*
- The South Australian Statement of Commitment with foster and kinship carers
- Department for Child Protection's documents list
- The Department for Child Protection
- Support workers
- Other carers
- Carer support groups
- CF&KC-SA website and communications



59.9%



of surveyed carers said their foster/kinship child's school work collaboratively with them as carers

36.8%



of surveyed carers are interested in the subsidised Diploma of Community Services offered through CF&KC-SA

67.3%



of surveyed carers attended an education/training workshop related to foster/kinship care in the 12 months prior

Foster & Kinship Carer Feedback on CF&KC-SA

Majority of surveyed carers who used CF&KC-SA's individual carer advocacy service in the 12 months prior (n=34) were satisfied



17.6%

Satisfied



47%

Very satisfied

41.8% of surveyed carers (n=246) are satisfied with CF&KC-SA's systemic advocacy work



24.8%

Satisfied



17%

Very satisfied

50% of surveyed carers were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with CF&KC-SA's systemic advocacy work. This indicates that carers may not be fully informed about our systemic advocacy efforts and achievements.

To help carers form an opinion on our systemic advocacy work in the future, CF&KC-SA has committed to improving the way we showcase our efforts and achievements to the membership and stakeholders.

We want all members to be and remain informed about the latest updates and changes that impact carer-families. This also includes working toward boosting our reputation to increase our carer-based membership.



“Thank you for what you all do.”

“CF&KC-SA are trustworthy. I’m a very transparent person [but] trusting completely, being a foster carer, is scary sometimes ... ”

“Great organisation, very supportive and always offering support and courses.”

“I loved doing the diploma – was great to connect with other carers.”

“Thank you for the work you do to advocate for us!”



Dear SA Foster & Kinship Carers,

Thank you to all who took the time to participate in our survey. We extend our sincere appreciation to all foster and kinship carers for your invaluable contribution to children and young people in care, the community, and child protection system more broadly.

Thank you,

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