



Newsletter | March 2019

**My Forever
Family NSW**

Welcome to the March edition of the My Forever Family NSW Members' Newsletter.

This month we've focused on extensive policy updates as well as parenting features. If you have a story you'd like to share, we are always looking to showcase our great carers.

We're also working tirelessly to support our wonderful carers with additional training. Please check our calendar below, we have training sessions across New South Wales, again we are always keen to have your suggestions and feedback.

Do you have a carer support group in your area? Let us know, so that we can list the group on our website. We have a list of carer support groups in New South Wales (and this list is growing every day). Visit our Carer Support Groups page.

I would also like to flag that MFF will be conducting a carer survey in the coming months to get a better understanding of what things to focus on to best support carers. Please keep an eye out for it, complete it yourself and ask your carer friends to do the same.

Thank you for being part of the My Forever Family NSW journey, and caring for kids.

Peter Goslett

Head of Operations & Advocacy



230 potential carers referred to NGO agencies and FACS

Support provided to **540** carer households

516 carers registered to attend 36 training sessions scheduled to end June 2019 – registrations still open!

Information on becoming a foster carer sent to over **800** potential new carers

533 carers registered for training sessions July 18–Feb19

41,811 people have liked the My Forever Family Facebook page

1,510 carers have joined the My Forever Family Membership Program



MFF TRAINING CALENDAR 2019

Our **training calendar** to July 2019 is now up on our website. Have a look at what training is available in your area and book your place online.

Information about Carer Support Groups around NSW is now located on our website. If you are involved in a group that we are not aware of please contact us and we can add your contact information and meeting dates.

BENEFITS FOR MEMBERS

Reap the benefits with MFF discounts!

Authorised foster and kinship carers, guardians and people who have adopted children from out-of-home care can be entitled to some great discounts when they shop!

Join today!

CHILD PROTECTION

The Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Act 2018 commenced on 4 February. What does this mean for children and carers?

The Act, and the changes it brings, are intended to more quickly identify the best outcome for each child or young person, reduce the numbers of children who come into care, and to streamline finding permanent homes for those kids who can't stay safely with their families.

How the changes help to keep kids safely at home.

By assisting vulnerable families to address their issues, more will be able to keep their children safely with them or have them restored as soon as possible. Changes include:

- prioritising access to services for families at risk
- enabling families to make their own plans to address their issues
- allowing restorations to happen more quickly if a child has been removed

What the changes mean for foster and kinship carers and guardians.

Streamlined court processes will benefit carers who wish to become guardians.

- when it has been agreed by all parties that guardianship is the best option for a child or young person, the Children's Court can now formalise a guardianship order without a hearing.

What the changes mean for kids in out-of-home care

Of course, the main purpose of the Act is to improve outcomes for children and young people. Some key changes that will impact them are:

- children and young people's views will be prioritised by the court
- shorter-term court orders mean that kids spend less time being uncertain about their future and decisions about where they will live permanently will be made more quickly
- the Court can now look at whether a child will be able to live safely at home in the next 24 months if the steps in the restoration plan are achieved
- children can now be restored to their parents up to 12 months before a court order involving restoration expires (previously it was 6 months).

What about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids and their families?

The changes are intended to enable more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids to stay safely with family, kinship groups or community.

To find out more about the new changes to the child protection system visit the FaCS website.

Watch the [video](#) of FaCS Secretary Michael Coutts-Trotter explaining the key points.

Carer
Case
Study

A RETIREMENT SPENT CARING

Connie cares for seven children – she is a single mum and a grandparent.

I became a foster carer in 2012 after a career in childcare and nursing and raising my own four children.

I was over the moon when I was asked to care for three beautiful children of African descent. I had a lot to learn and after some time I realised that things were not as rosy as I first thought. Six months after they came into my care my youngest was diagnosed with autism and global developmental delay.

I was then asked to look after another sibling group of three children, and I couldn't say no. They came with nits and scabies and covered in sores. I cried when the youngest who was one at the time was in newborn nappies and size 0 clothes – so small but now at seven has turned into a big force with ODD and ADHD.

We have done a lot of work over the years with early interventions and counselling. Seven years on the children are growing into beautiful young people who are respectful and caring.

The last year I have found very hard. My sister died, I lost two beloved pets, and my elderly mum went into a nursing home diagnosed with dementia. Not least of all I had to rebuild half my house as it had dry rot!

I am so grateful that my own adult children have stepped up to help me and to give me so much love, support and respite. I am missing out on my retirement, but I can't turn my back on the commitment I made in 2012.

* Names have been changed to protect the identity of the people mentioned.

TELL US
YOUR
STORY!

Why did you become a carer? Do you speak another language? Are you a city carer? Regional carer? Do you have a child in care or a sibling group?

We'd love to hear from you, whatever your story. Please tell us about your experience as a foster or kinship carer, guardian or adoptive parent.

We are looking for real stories from all types of people. Your story will inspire others to open their homes and their hearts to a child.

All stories will protect your identity and that of the child/children mentioned. Please send your story (up to 300 words) via evelyn.santoro@myforeverfamily.org.au

MYTH BUSTING!

Myth: Carers are not allowed to have a support person at case meetings.

Fact: In most cases, a support person may attend with a carer. My Forever Family staff can absolutely, due to the contract with FACs attend these meetings.

Usually a carer may bring a support person, but this depends on the professional judgement of the practitioner or caseworker who is responsible for the child or young person.

For example, the mother of a carer who is involved in the child or young person's life would usually be considered an appropriate person to attend a case plan meeting. A friend of the carer who is not actively involved in the life of the child or young persons may not be considered suitable.

Confidentiality is also a key factor. Any support people who attend a case meeting must show that they understand that information they hear during a meeting is confidential.

My Forever staff can absolutely attend these meetings though due to resource limitation in covering NSW there would need to be exceptional circumstances for us to attend by phone or in person.

Can a support person attend a reportable conduct investigation?

Carers are entitled to have a support person attend any interview about an allegation. A support person must only observe and not interrupt the interview. The suitability of a person also needs to be considered. For example, a witness in the investigation would not be suitable.

PARENTING FEATURE

Talking with schools

The impacts of childhood trauma and attachment difficulties are still not well understood in the wider community and this includes at school. As a carer or parent, you can advocate for your child. Help teachers understand why your child or teen finds school so hard, and what strategies can help them to learn.

The first step of course is to learn about the impacts of trauma and attachment difficulties yourself. You will learn a lot at one of our training sessions such as Understanding and responding to trauma or Parenting a traumatised child. See our training calendar for more information.

We've listed some resources to help you understand the effects of trauma. Read them yourself and pass them onto the school principal or your child's teachers.

Safe Spaces, Safe Faces Safe Places: Trauma Resources for schools

Resources introducing the concept of trauma and outlining the key areas of trauma-informed teaching practice.

[Find out more](#)

Calmer Classrooms: A guide to working with traumatised children

This booklet encourages teachers and other school personnel to forge those attachments through two key mechanisms: understanding traumatised children and developing relationship-based skills to help them.

[Download pdf](#)

Making Space for Learning: Trauma informed practice in schools

Understanding and responding to traumatised children and young people at school.

[Download pdf](#)

CAMPAIGN UPDATES

This month, we've asked every primary school in New South Wales, to run recruitment notices in their school newsletter looking for wonderful foster carers in their communities.

We've had great success, with many of the schools happy to take part. We'd like to take this opportunity to give a special thanks to Fingal Head Public School, Goulburn East Public School and Ironbark Ridge Public School, they were the quickest to get back to us and the very first schools to run our ad!

If you've seen our advertisements in your child's school newsletter, drop us a line and let us know! We'd love to thank all schools taking part.



Help others to consider the foster carer path, we have over 17,000 children and young people in the foster care system in New South Wales.

Please download our posters and pin them on noticeboards in your local community groups. We also have ads you can include in school, community groups and local council newsletters. Grassroots action is the most effective!

If you need ads in picture format (jpg) please email us.

CULTURAL SUPPORT PLANS



Helping Aboriginal kids stay connected to culture

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids should have a Cultural Support Plan. A good plan takes a bit of time and effort to put together, but both the process and the final plan are great tools for supporting a child to stay connected to their culture and be proud of who they are.

A Cultural Support Plan is updated year to year as a child grows and their needs change. It can sometimes be confused with a Cultural Care Plan. The Cultural Care Plan is submitted to the Children's Court together with a child or young person's Care Plan and doesn't change over time.

Developing a Cultural Support Plan is a joint project with the child or young person, their family and community, and other support people including their carers and caseworker.

A Cultural Support Plan should:

- include all the information that is known about the child or young person's culture, family, kinship group, Country and community
- describe how you and other people in the child's life will support them to have a strong connection with their culture, community and Country and to understand who they are
- link children in with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical and education services and community groups
- list specific activities, and how you and others will help the child or young person to participate in them
- be appropriate to child's developmental stage.

The following suggestions for creating a developmentally appropriate Cultural Support Plan come from the AbSec* run Cultural Connections Workshop.

We recommend that anyone caring for Aboriginal children or young people attend one of these workshops for more in-depth information. See our training calendar for upcoming workshops.

0-4 years

Safe connections and relationships with family and other significant people are a priority. These could include parents, siblings and community Elders. Activities could be:

- attending an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander playgroup
- reading Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander story books
- going along to community events.

4-8 years

Support kids to continue to see family and build on connections already made. Focus on helping them develop more knowledge and pride in their culture. This is also a stage for kids to explore and become more independent. Activities can include:

- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander art, dance and music
- learning their language
- attending community events like NAIDOC, Sorry days, and football matches.

8-13 years

Continuing to spend time with family and other significant people, children will develop confidence and an interest in learning about their culture. This is a good time to help kids learn about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander history, and family history. Along with continuing the activities mentioned in the previous stage, children would benefit from:

- attending Cultural camps
- sporting groups and competitions
- hobbies

They can also be supported to learn about their Culture and family by:

- watching documentaries
- learning about the Stolen Generation
- speaking with Elders and family about their culture and Country
- researching their family history and making a family tree.

13-17 years

Encourage young people to develop independence in their relationships with their family and community. This is the stage for them to strengthen their identity and establish their own place within their community. They will want to spend more time with their own friends. They need you to be positive about who they are, to listen to them and allow them to ask questions.

Activities could include any of those previously mentioned. You also can support their independence and sense of self-worth by encouraging them to:

- develop new friendships and relationships in their community
- volunteer in the community. For example, refereeing or coaching, or helping to organise community events
- get involved in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander youth programs, such as leadership programs or cultural camps.

* AbSec are the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation. Learn more about what AbSec do.

