

FCAV: Voice of Carers



Overview

On 12 September 2014, The Foster Care Association of Victoria held their Annual General Meeting (AGM) which served to celebrate the remarkable service foster carers provide while also enabling creative conversations about the future of foster care.

On this day, foster carers and the community sector shared the day with politicians and inspirational speakers to engage in spirited discussions about how to best improve the foster care system.

Attendee Snapshot:

Of the **126** attendees there were:

- 56** FCAV Members/Carers
- 8** Children and Young People
- 62** Industry/Political Representatives

In support of the discussion, AGM attendees were invited to write comments in response to the following questions:

- ***What is the single biggest thing that needs to change about how we provide foster care in Victoria?***
- ***What one thing are you proudest of from your time as a foster carer?***

79 total comments were made, **72%** of which were in response to changing how we provide foster care in Victoria.

22 comments were made in response to the question below; here is a sample of the response:

When asked... "What one thing are you proudest of from your time as a foster carer?"

To watch children become proud and confident in themselves. They arrive blank faced but with normal family routine and interaction seem to find themselves and that they can still smile and laugh.

Being able to provide a safe, stable, and sensitive environment for my foster children and seeing them thrive and be happy as a result.

Paying for a lawyer and going to court to fight for a child.

My family acceptance and ability to provide a soft place to land for kids in crisis.

Lasting in the system for over 28 years and still enjoying fostering.

My own strength and courage to be a single carer and remain a carer whilst having children full-time and working full-time, always working to overcome any financial issues/lack of funds to consistently give a more positive experience and provide for the children in my care.

Giving stability and a loving family for as long as the children need it. (Forever!)

Being able to get through the rough periods to provide a stable long term home.

That I know the investment I'm making into children and young people is something that makes lasting and generational positive changes.

Witnessing the positive change and development of a child's behaviour, academic performance and

When asked... "What is the single biggest thing that needs to change about how we provide foster care in Victoria?"

SYSTEM CHANGE:

The child needs to be the main priority not the parent.

Stop leaving children to drift through their childhood. Stability and a permanent home is what every human needs.

The amount of time children float in the system without an end in sight.

Why is FCAV so closely aligned with Berry Street? Shouldn't it be impartial and represent all carers and foster care agencies?

More streamlined administration requirements for workers, creating increased opportunity to provide more therapeutic and practical support and more relationship building with kids in care.

Foster carers are valuable, talented figures - let's use them in the re-unification process "no more access visits at McDonald's or the agency" - let's have them with carers.

Difficult placements. Realistic expectations of placements/carers by DHS.

To stop allegations on carers that are not true while continuing to look into things. Maybe DHS should see what the carer goes through.

Less talk - more action. We have talked and identified the problems long enough - let's start taking action. Let's go!

We need to stop hiding behind the shame that there is around our "out of home care problems" then ask the State to "acknowledge" the problem and start making changes.

Be supported when there are allegations about them and they know the carer is in the clear but they still have to go through investigation that takes weeks and puts them under stress.

Foster organisations need to inform carers of clever avenues for getting support to assist special needs for children in care. i.e. less time and red tape in providing aid funding in schools.

DHS. [Written from a child in the foster care system.]

Listen to us!!! Better communication.

Facilitation of continuing contact/relationships post placement.

Decisions made immediately about ongoing care needs of children, NOT five years down the track of repeated placements and changes.

DHS. Child Protection workers need to be better resourced and trained to effectively and competently manage case loads.

Legislative changes that adequately recognise and support foster parents and their foster children.

Even though I believe children always need to know where they come from, we need more focus on how often access occurs. Trauma and stress to children impacts on how their home life is with foster carers.

MORE CARER SUPPORT/APPRECIATION:

Carers need to be valued, supported and reimbursed!

Foster carers need to be treated as professionals not as volunteers. What volunteers work 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week working with traumatized children in a role that impacts upon every aspect of carers lives?

More emotional support and practical support from agency. I have three kids in care - I would take more however I cannot afford a bigger car/house, space for extra children, etc.

The carers voice [advocating] for the child needs to be heard, validated and action to be taken by DHS.

Be treated as a valuable part of the care team.

FUNDING/FINANCIAL SUPPORT:

Better financial support and for DHS workers to listen to carers opinions more. We know the children the best!

The foster care system needs a higher priority and additional funding from government.

Financial support and better reimbursement rates.

More funding for foster care managers. The smaller our case load is the more we can provide support to carers, be mentors to the children and focus on long term planning (rather than crisis driven).

Why do we pay the unemployed parents whose kids are in foster care but they don't have to pay for the costs of their children in care?

Foster care reimbursements to reflect needs of change and young people.

All foster care needs to be funded to be therapeutic foster care. Bums in beds is not good enough.

An appropriate level of reimbursement does not exist.

Foster care is an enormous financial and emotional cost to carers and families. This is neither properly reimbursed or fully understood.

As soon as a child comes into care, they need to receive their own Medicare and health care card automatically along with the first pay check.

IMPROVE COURT/LEGAL SYSTEM:

Judges should be able to rule what is in the best interest of the child. Legislation change to give judges the freedom to rule without being restricted and quicker rulings for permanent care.

The adjournments happening constantly for straight forward cases over and over for the same child.

Judges need to set realistic accesses that fit in with foster carers.

Making the child the primary focus in the court system rather than the parents.

We need to improve our court system and have children's cases heard without adjournments.

IMPROVE PERMANENT CARE SYSTEM:

Providing post legal support on conversion to permanent care.

The length of time it takes for a child to be put into permanent care and the courts being very pro parent and not very pro child.

Timely transition/decision making for children to permanent care & open up adoption possibilities.

Placement stability. Kids need to stop being passed around from carer to carer.

By the numbers...

System Change:	32%
Improve Funding/Financial Support:	28%
More carer support/Appreciation:	18%
Improve Court/Legal System:	12%
Improve Permanent Care System:	10%

Being able to provide a safe, stable, and sensitive environment for my foster children and seeing them thrive and be happy as a result.

Less talk - more action. We have talked and identified the problems long enough; let's start taking action. Let's go!

Witnessing the positive change and development of a child's behaviour, academic performance and general overall health.