Welcome to Edition 9 of our Carer Newsletter

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Foster Care Update

Once again, a very big welcome to all new members. We love making new friends especially those who are new to this fostering journey. So this edition newsletter is especially dedicated to you by explaining some background information in some of the mechanics of the foster care system. Please take note of the acronyms. These are often used in our newsletters.

Now that the Department of Community Services (DoCS) has been re-branded Family and Community Services (FaCS) the recommendations in the Wood report 2008 are being implemented. This means that the responsibility for managing children in care is moving from the government to the Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

Community Services (CS) has made some Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between a few of the largest providers to assist in the process of transitioning children from government care under DoCS to private providers within the timeframes expected. CS has put in a lot of work to make this transition happen quickly and smoothly, and over a thousand foster children and their families have been transitioned in the past year.

Foster Care Association NSW (FCANSW) is in existence to help carers from all organisations as we know there has been a need for information and peer support for carers. Every month as more and more children are moved into care in the private sector, we have more and more support requests from carers.

The same requests from carers that have been consistent for the past decades are the requests we get; most of them are around communication and relationships with case workers and bureaucracy and most of them are solved with a simple phone call to a supervisor or manager. We thank the organisations we have worked with in this last month as they have welcomed us to participate and to iron out misunderstandings. We approached the “working with children’s check” at the department of child protection and they confirmed that
section 16 of the act supports us advocating for carers due to the fact that it is in the ‘best interest of the child’.

To promote foster caring for all agencies including private, the government has funded ACWA to launch a campaign to recruit more volunteer carers from the community through a website, online survey and online links to information.

FCA would welcome an invitation to work in collaboration on future projects at regional level as we continue to push for the same recognition as other organisations in the community that have volunteers such as the SES and Life Surfing. We have many families on our mailing list who have potential carers in their family and friends. We help educate carers through advocacy, our web site and our many meetings and conversations with carers all over NSW. Thank you to all our carers for support and following are some of the successes we have had in advocating this month for carers from all regions in NSW.

**Advocacy Update**

**Firstly what is a Good Advocacy outcome?**

Persistence and respectful pursuit of a resolution are fundamental to good advocacy; in all our conversations and meetings we should be left feeling that we were listened to, and that carers’ views are respected, with a sense of acknowledgement and with the important relationships of the care team intact, so that the ‘best interests of the child’ surface as the highest priority.

Last month, FCANSW supported a couple who had false allegations made against them and their foster children removed from their care late last year. FCANSW representative advocated for the carers and joined them in a meeting with their NGO. The outcome was that the NGO acknowledged that leaving the carers without any support or information for 4 months after removing their children, while the investigation was on was a fruitless and painful way to operate. The NGO offered to consider setting up an internal system where carers are supported within the NGO, but separate to the investigation, just to check on how the carers are travelling and to update the carers even when there is no news regarding the progress. This proposed support for carers, even if by if

phone, is much welcomed by FCA and we fully support this NGO that has taken the feedback on board and with a positive action proposed. The wonderful news in this carers’ case is the children desperately want to meet with them, and the NGO has offered to enable that process and see it through. What a wonderful outcome from a terribly painful situation for these foster parents; we believe that much of the anxiety and pain around this case was preventable with a little more communication and confidence in the carers they had selected and who served in their organisation for so many years.

FCA also supported another family who had a child investigated by CS at the child’s school, pulling the child out of class, and interviewed the foster family later regarding a child’s comment. In this case, the NGO was supportive of the carer, as the investigation had proved to be a response to call to the help line without due diligence to find out the circumstances of significant harm was actual or alleged. FCA advocated for the carer by supporting them at the meeting and the carer requested that the NGO enlighten the school that they had been fully cleared as carers and that the placement would remain intact. We thank and support the NGO for this action to help the foster care family recover from this traumatic and embarrassing event, and the NGO also offered the family training to help them cope with the specific trauma the children in their care are suffering. We believe that this whole scenario was preventable had “significant harm” been ascertained first; as trauma is accumulative and such dramatic reactions only compound the child’s trauma, and the carers’ anxiety. The NGO in this case had no control over the incident and they supported the carer as much as they could to help them recover, which was lovely to see.

Sadly not all agencies are operating as per the guidance of the standards, one child was forcibly removed from her home of 5 years during an access visit. The child ran away during the night and this was dangerous in every way. Luckily the child is old enough to self-select her placement with her carer in the only “home” she has known. Why the agency would operate this is beyond anyone’s understanding, however we expect that those responsible will be answerable to the Office of the
Guardian. Sadly the police had to be involved, however the good news is the child is safe with her family in her home. If any child is removed without a proper plan, there are things you can do, and processes that should be in place. If you have any difficulty or threats such as this please seek help and guidance immediately.

Got a carer who needs help and friendship? Then forward them this newsletter.

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Discipline Ideas of Children in Care
Five Discipline Ideas to remember by renowned child educator- Michael Grose

I’m often asked how to discipline kids when their behaviour infringes on the rights of others, or they plain won’t co-operate. Here are five ideas to help make your sure discipline is effective and doesn’t harm your relationship with your kids:

1. Relax: Angry parents don’t do much of a job of teaching their kids to behave better. So before you say or do anything of consequence take a breath. Most of us rush in or act in anger. Do the opposite. Pick your time and the place for discipline.

2. Resist: How many chances do you give your child before you put a consequence in place? How often do you repeat your message to kids? “I’ve told you 1,000 times don’t annoy your sister?” Kids usually learn from explained action so act rather than repeat yourself.......or yell.

3. Relate: Try to relate the consequence to the behaviour. If kids won’t look after the computer as they should then withdraw their right to use the computer. Don’t take pocket money away. That makes little sense to kids whatsoever.

4. Respect: Make sure your kids keep their dignity intact in the discipline process. Putting them down in front of their mates shows lack of respect and will invite lack of cooperation. Stay away from put downs, guilt, shame and other negative forms of discipline. Ask yourself, “Could I cop this if I was a child?” If so, then there’s a good chance you are being respectful to your child.

5. Restore: Don’t stay mad at your child. Once the discipline process has finished make the first move to mend any bridges that may have been harmed. “Hate the behaviour, but love the child’ is the idea here.

For more practical ideas to help you raise happy kids visit www.parentingideas.com.au

FCA events - Burwood Festival, General Meeting, Catholic Care Hunter
FCA’s involvement at Burwood family festival

What a fun and successful day it was! Key Assets and Phoenix Rising gave us their information materials to promote. Within the first 2 hours, hundreds of their flyers and promotional items were given out, our volunteered staff members were busy directing potential carers to their services. Our lucky dips were selling like hot cakes, donations of support were coming in left, right and centre. It was wonderful seeing the community embrace our services.
This event would not have happened without Burwood Council’s support. A very special thank-you to Tracey Sweetman and Bei Wang. The FCA is very grateful.

It was wonderful talking to many of our members on the day too. Thank-you for dropping by and say hello. Even the weather was kind to us!

Reminder
Sharon sent an email to members to attend FCA’s next General meeting to be held at:
When: Monday 6th May 2013
Time: 10.30am-12.00pm
Where: St Peters Parish Church
52 Banks St, Maitland East
For catering purposes; please email Sharon to confirm your attendance shaz@fcansw.org.au
Or ring Sharon on: 0409 994 243
We hope to see as many of you as possible. We need your input as well. This is your chance to make a difference in the fostering journey. Your thoughts, voice and ideas count. We need all the help we can get. Many hands make work light.
An agenda will be sent shortly.

FCA’s Online Forum
The FCA NSW has developed a PUBLIC forum available on our website at WWW.fcansw.org.au

What is the purpose of this Foster Carer Forum?
The purpose of the Foster Carer Forum is to allow for open discussion of issues relating to the placement and care of children in foster families or other out-of-home care. This forum is open to the general public. Everyone is welcome to post messages no matter where you are or whatever your interest is in the care of children in foster homes. Please post your messages into the appropriate topic section. Members of the forum must register before they can post a topic or reply to a topic. This helps prevent spammers from posting junk.

There is also a section created especially for agencies to use. They may wish to use the carer forum to announce special events or support services to the general public.

Who runs the Foster Carer Forums?
This forum is run by the Foster Care Association of NSW Inc., a non-profit organization that represents foster carers in NSW. If you have questions about this forum, please email the forum administrator at admin@fcansw.org.au.

What and where is the FCANSW member’s area?
There is a special private section of the forum just for members of the FCANSW. Only FCANSW members can see the topics and post messages in this private area. If you are a guest or general registered user - you cannot access the FCANSW section. If you are a FCANSW member but do not see the additional topics, then email the forum admin with your name. In the email, mention that you need access to the FCANSW forum area, and we’ll get you added.
Contact Between Child and Former Care Givers

Over the past few weeks, the FCA received many frantic phone calls of children being removed without proper investigation taking place, we fail to see how this is in the “best interests of the child” and we call for stepping up of case worker training to help plug the gap in the “protection” mentality which is actually having an adverse effect on children and on Foster families and ‘protects’ no one.

Some children form strong bonds not only with their carers but also with the carers’ children and other family members. Consideration of emotional investment between all involved should be congradulated. Carers are not humans if they do not bond with children in their care.

The child’s new carers may have opinions about a child maintaining relationships with previous carers which may have to be recognized as well. Is it more likely for a child to settle more rapidly into a new placement if ties to the old one are severed or is the maintenance of old relationships to be prioritised?

A process that has worked with carers from CS (previously DoCs) is to have the new carers left to the new placement for a couple of months before the past carers make contact. This gives the new carers time to establish the relationship but enables the relationship for both families to blossom with the child or children.

The child’s worker and new carers may be particularly active at the time of a placement change ensuring that the practical elements of the change are put in place such as schooling. How much effort can and should be devoted to addressing the loss of a loved former carer or their family?

FCA Membership

Become a member- together we can move mountains

You also know that we are committed to unite all carers for peer support and friendship by keeping you informed of our lobbying progresses via newsletters and posts in the forum. Soon there will be lists of campaigns. This will allow us learning why carers leave .This administration requires financial supports. Via word of mouth, we have had an increased in paid memberships. We’ve been growing and expanding our Member Centre and member features and have come to realize that it is just 8 cents a day for a single membership fee (you can’t even buy a lolly pop for that). So please everyone, support us to support you.

An invitation to all agencies to join us as an associate member as well. A special application form on our website can be found www.fcansw.org.au . We hope you will come on board to recognise foster carers as part of the team. We want to work with you, not against you. Without foster carers, there is no foster care. $200 yearly membership fee is only 55 cents a day. A lolly pop at the service station is more than that! Thank-you to those agencies who have already joined, we value your recognition of our roles and will continue to praise and to support you publicly.
Launching of New Catholic Care Hunter Office.

Congratulations to Katheryn Puckeridge and team for the opening of your new premises at Maitland. It is very beautiful and hospitable for everyone concerned. We love your idea of the toy/clothing exchange library. Your contact access rooms are second to none.

Minister Pru Goward’s spoke of her passion for children in care to have permanency, childhood memories and people in their lives long term, as opposed to multiple placements in foster care that they don’t remember. We agree wholeheartedly with all of the minister’s sentiments. With this in mind, we continue to push for greater carer support to minimise placement breakdown. In these circumstances, no one wins. More pain, stress and trauma placed on children defeats the purpose of placing them in care in the first place.

We love referrals! Send a note to your favourite newspapers, magazines, radio stations, TV stations, friends and relatives, and tell them about us. Let us all unite. Fostering is something we should be proud of. The kids in our care would appreciate this. Let us all continue to make a difference in a child’s life.

We need to educate the public to “support carers to build better futures for children in need” TM.

Happy reading. Hope to see you all on Monday the 6th at East Maitland.

Best Wishes from the team.
APPLICATION FOR NEW MEMBERSHIP
or RENEWAL of MEMBERSHIP

Member 1: .................................................................
(full name of applicant)

Member 2: .................................................................
(full name of applicant)

Postal Address: ........................................................................................................................................

Postcode: ............... Phone: .............................................. (Mob): .................................................................

Email Address: ........................................................................................................................................

Which Agency are you with? ......................................................................................................................

Date: ........................................ Signed: ................................. Signed: .................................................................

Membership Category: (Please tick the appropriate box)

Foster Carer(s) ☐ Kinship Carer(s) ☐ Indigenous Carer(s) ☐

Single Membership $30.00 ☐ Dual Membership $50.00 ☐

Username: __________________________ (If you would like to use the Carer’s Online Forum and have not already
registered, please provide a username and you will be sent an email with log in details.)

All memberships will expire on the 30th of June each year.
A receipt will be mailed out.

Payment can be by direct transfer to the association’s account at
Newcastle Permanent BSB 650000 Account number: 507 065 006
or you can send a cheque made payable to Foster Care Association NSW Inc.

If paying by direct transfer please ensure to include your surname in the payment description.

Forward to: Foster Care Association NSW Inc.,
P.O. Box 895, Raymond Terrace, NSW 2324

Help and information is available at www.fcansw.org.au or by email to admin@fcansw.org.au, Mob: 0414 515 544