

JUNE 2024

FCAV CARER CENSUS 2024

SURVEY OF FOSTER CARERS
BY ORIMA RESEARCH
ON BEHALF OF



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Background and Objective

Foster Care Association Victoria (FCAV) is the peak body for Victorian foster carers. This research, commissioned by FCAV, aims to **gather insights into the experiences of Victorian foster carers** to inform advocacy, engagement, policy and service development.

Methodology

The quantitative research consisted of a voluntary **online survey** of **current and former Victorian foster carers** drawn from an FCAV member database. Prior to the commencement of fieldwork, primary approach letters were sent to all FCAV members, providing background to the project, key dates, information about privacy and confidentiality, and an opt-out process for those who did not wish to be involved in the process. **Unique links** to the survey were distributed by ORIMA Research with **n=754** providing at least one response beyond screening questions. Fieldwork was conducted from **March 15th to April 28th, 2024**.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The FCAV acknowledges the unceded sovereignty of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge their continued connection to Country, lands, waters and cultural knowledges and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We are the united voice and advocate for all foster carers across Victoria, and we aim to continually develop our knowledge and act with respect to First Nations sovereignty.

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OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

The FCAV conducted a carer census in April/May 2024. Over 750 respondent carers participated.

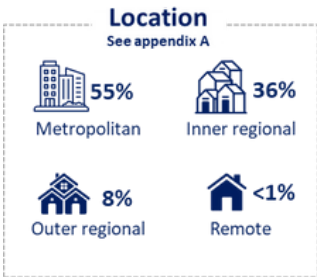
The excellent response rate to the survey allows FCAV to better understand carer's experiences and demographics, as well as advocate to address the challenges and needs outlined by the foster carers in Victoria.

As carers navigate the complexities of providing care for children in Victoria, the insights gained from this census will inform both FCAV service delivery and our advocacy on carers' behalf. This includes advice on improvements to the services, resources and respect that carers can expect to be provided within the home-based care system.

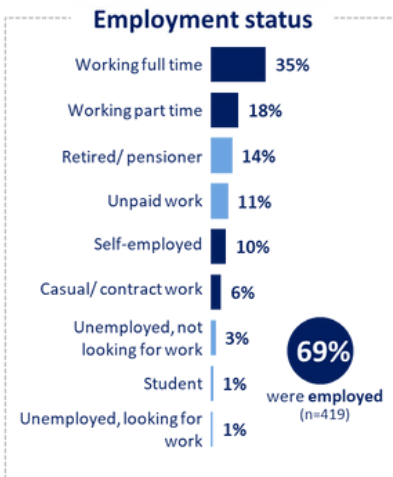
Along with demographic data on the diverse pool of carers, the census also provides attitudinal data, informing relationships and wellbeing aspects of the carer experience within the home-based care services of their agency, the Department and Child Protection.

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FOSTER CARE DEMOGRAPHICS

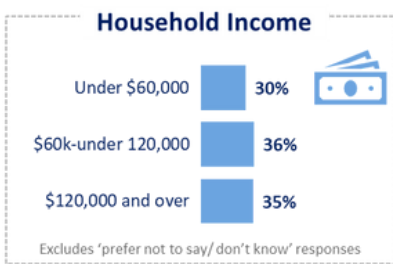


Respondents represent a fairly equal spread of those who live in metropolitan and regional areas of Victoria.

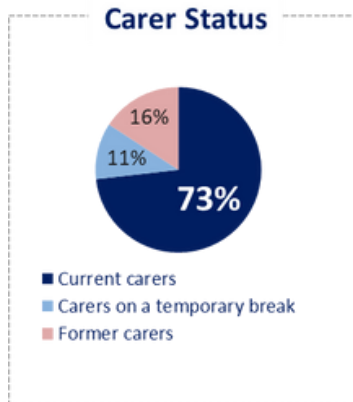
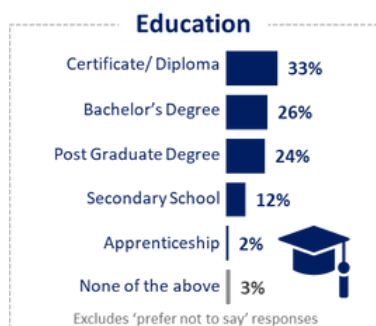


Carer’s social and economic participation is high with **83%** of carers having an educational qualification including bachelor’s degree (**26%**), post grad degree (**24%**) or diploma (**33%**).

The majority of carers are working with **69%** of carers employed and **35%** earning over \$120,000 per year and another **36%** earning \$60,000 to \$120,000 per year.

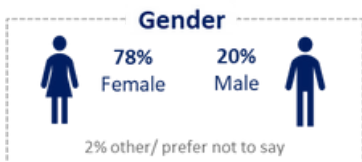


73% of respondents currently have a child/ren in their care. Carers score highly on the Life Satisfaction Index of **79%**.

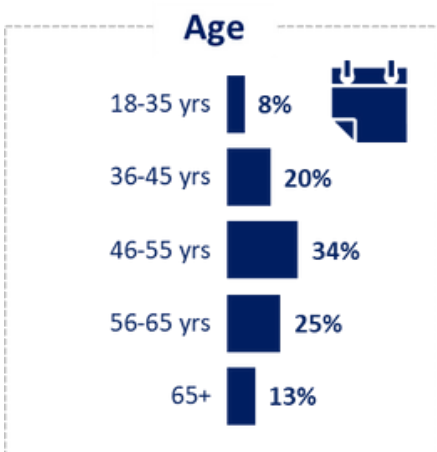


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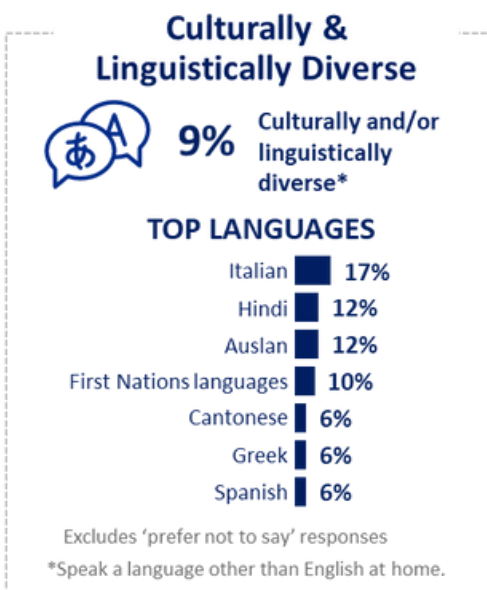
FOSTER CARE DEMOGRAPHICS



The findings show that **78%** of carers are female.

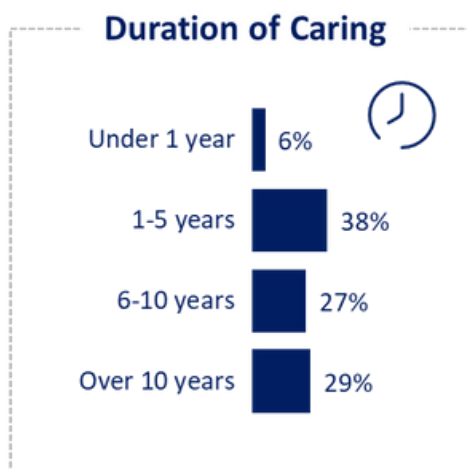


The largest cohort are aged between 46-55 years (**34%**) with **80%** between the ages of 36-65 years. Only **8%** are under 36 years of age.



9% of carer households identify as culturally and/or linguistically diverse. **17%** are Italian with Auslan and Hindi the next most prevalent language group at **12%**.

38% of carers have been providing care for 1-5 years and **70%** for between 1-10 or more years.



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CHILDREN IN CARE

Children in Foster Carer Households

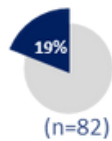


of current carers presently have a child in foster care living in their household (n=340)

594 total number of foster children living in foster carer households



of current foster carer households include carer's **own children**



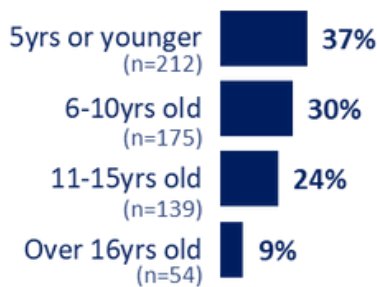
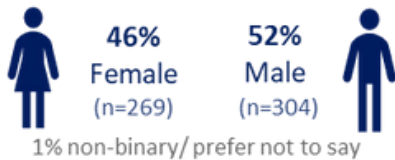
of current foster carer households include children in **permanent care**



of current foster carer households include **other types of children**

Note: Base size ranges from n=414-445.

Profile of Children in Foster Care

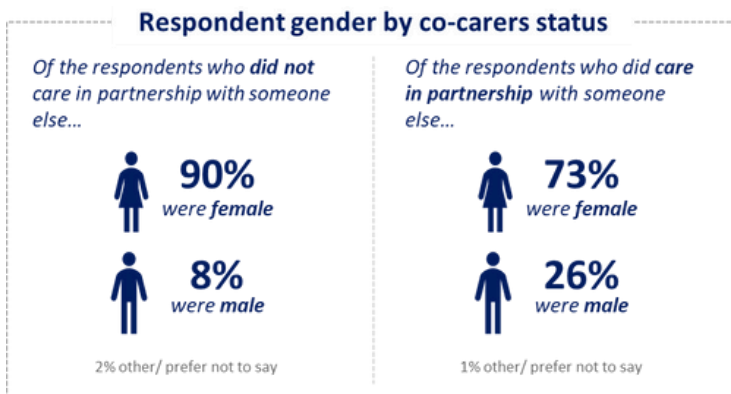
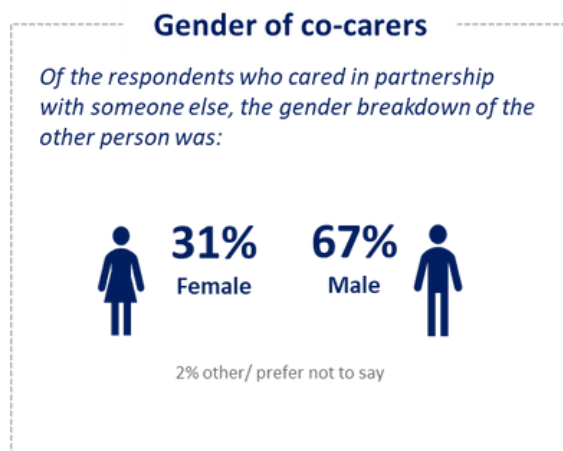


There are **594** children or young people living in foster carer households.

62% of respondents identify having a child or young person with a physical or intellectual disability or impairment.

CO-CARER STATUS

35% of carers are sole carers and of those, 90% are women.



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THE CARER EXPERIENCE

KEY MOTIVATIONS

“I felt I was in a good position to give back by providing loving care to children who need it.”

Among current carers who have had a good/very good experience as a foster carer:

79% plan to **continue** foster caring;

8% plan to change to provide a **long-term or permanent care** arrangement;

5% plan to take a **temporary break** from foster caring;

1% plan to **stop foster caring**; and

7% were **not sure** what they'll do in the next 12 months.

86% of respondents report positive change and growth in the child/ young person as the most rewarding aspect of their role as a foster carer. Contributing to the community is also a significant reward.

Many foster carers express a deep commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of the children they care for. Despite the challenges, they find fostering to be a rewarding experience, particularly when witnessing the children's growth, happiness, and positive outcomes.

THE CARER EXPERIENCE

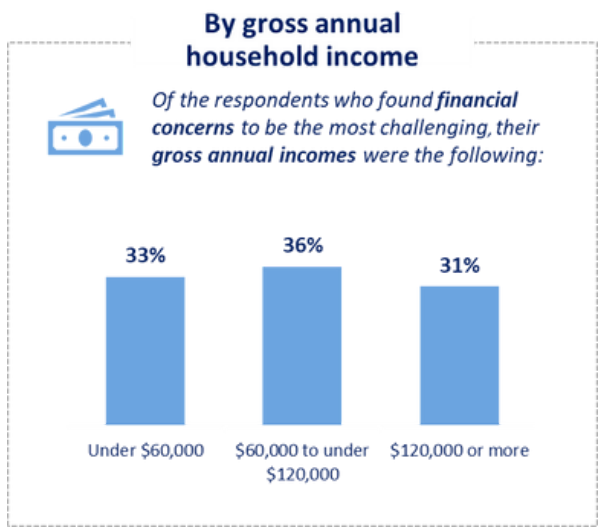
KEY CHALLENGES

"My motivation has changed from providing a nurturing home to also include tenacious advocacy."

Stand out data shows that, besides the obvious complexities of caring for children and young people, financial supports such as inadequate care allowance and inadequate funding for child/young person's expenses, are the most challenging aspect of the role, regardless of the carer's household income.

Inclusion and respect within care teams features as one of the three most challenging aspects of providing care.


- 32% identified a **carer role-related** aspect to be most challenging ▲
- 30% identified a **system-related** aspect to be most challenging ●
- 18% identified a **financial impact-related** aspect to be most challenging ■
- 15% identified a **social and wellbeing impact-related** aspect to be most challenging ★





THE CARER EXPERIENCE

45% of current carers planning to **stop or unsure of their future** foster caring reported that their **motivation had changed**.

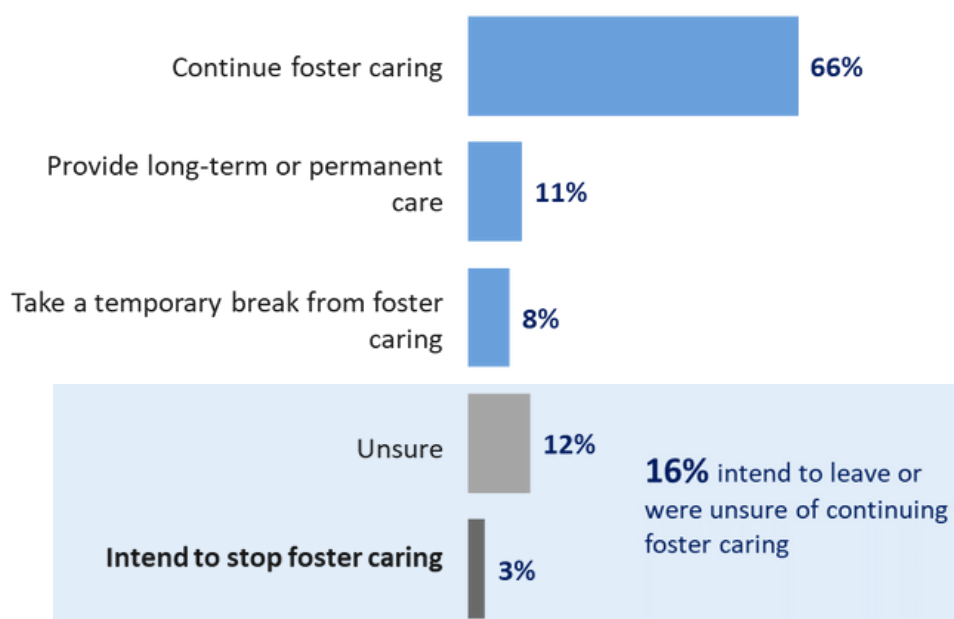
In comparison:

 39% planning to change to provide a **long-term or permanent care** arrangement reported that their motivation had changed;

 18% planning to take a **temporary break** from foster caring reported that their motivation had changed; and

 23% of current carers planning to **continue** foster caring reported that their motivation had changed

Over the next 12 months, which of the following are you most likely to do?



16% of respondents intend to leave or are unsure of continuing to care and carers who had been caring for a year or longer reported having a greater change in motivation to continue providing care.



Carers who had been caring for a **year or longer** reported having a **greater change in motivation** (37%), compared to those who have been caring for less than a year (18%).

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THE CARER EXPERIENCE

MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF BEING A FOSTER CARER



The census asked carers to more fully articulate their own experiences, motivations and needs.

Foster carers in Victoria have shared a range of experiences, highlighting both positive and challenging aspects of their roles.

The following pages show summaries of the key themes based on their feedback.

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THE CARER EXPERIENCE

LACK OF SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION

- **Inadequate Support:** Carers often struggle with insufficient support from care teams, particularly in managing challenging behaviours and meeting general care needs. This lack of support leads to significant stress and frustration.
- **Poor Communication:** Many carers feel excluded from decision-making processes due to poor communication, which leaves them feeling uninformed and isolated.
- **Delayed Assistance:** There are frequent delays in receiving necessary resources or guidance, contributing to increased stress and ineffective care.

FINANCIAL STRAIN

- **Inadequate Reimbursements:** Foster carers report that allowances and reimbursements often do not cover the full costs of care, leading to financial strain.
- **Out-of-Pocket Expenses:** Carers frequently have to use their own funds to cover children's needs, impacting their financial stability.
- **Lost Income:** Many carers experience a loss of income due to reduced work hours or job loss related to their caregiving responsibilities.

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EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

- Emotional Toll: The emotional strain of managing complex behaviours, dealing with trauma, and experiencing loss significantly impacts the mental health of carers.
- Family Strain: The responsibilities of fostering can create tension within the family, affecting relationships and the wellbeing of biological children.

IMPACT ON PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL LIFE

- Work-Life Balance: Carers find it challenging to balance caregiving duties with work and personal life, often leading to disruptions in job performance and personal time.
- Health and Wellbeing: The physical and emotional demands of fostering can negatively affect carers' health and overall wellbeing.

CHALLENGES WITH CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND BEHAVIOUR

- Complex Needs: Caring for children with complex needs or behavioural issues can be overwhelming, especially without adequate support and resources.
- Safety Concerns: Carers frequently deal with safety concerns, such as children running off or exhibiting aggressive behaviours, which require constant vigilance and contribute to stress.

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THE CARER EXPERIENCE

SYSTEMIC ISSUES

- **Inefficiencies and Injustice:** Carers often feel frustrated by systemic inefficiencies and a perceived lack of respect from agencies and Child Protection, contributing to a sense of injustice.
- **Lack of Respect and Inclusion:** Many carers feel undervalued and excluded from important decisions affecting the children in their care and their own roles.
- **Varied Outcomes:** Most carers express positive relationships with the children and young people in their care and certain agency and child protection staff, while others deal with challenging situations that overshadow the positives. This inconsistent level of support and differing experiences across placements and workers results in a diverse range of outcomes.
- **Push for major improvements:** Foster carers are calling for significant change. They want for an in-depth review of the foster care system, including funding increases and a focus on putting children's needs first. Offering stronger support to carers, and ensuring the system genuinely works in the children's best interests was a strong theme expressed throughout carer responses.

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EVIDENCE FOR CHANGE

While some carers have positive experiences with the children, their agency and Child Protection, others face negative situations that overshadow the good. This inconsistency in support and experiences across different placements and workers contributes to a mixed overall experience.

There is a strong desire among foster carers for systemic reform in foster care, focusing on prioritising children's needs, better supporting carers, and ensuring the system genuinely acts in the best interests of the children.



Thank you to the carers who participated in the census, providing an important evidence base for carer needs and experiences in Victoria.

Thanks to Orima Research for conducting the fieldwork, analysis, and reporting to complete the census survey.



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