

Annual Report 2020-2021

Annual Report July 2020 - June 2021

The Foster Care Association of Victoria presents a year in review. As the peak body for foster carers, the Foster Care Association of Victoria's mission is to build Victoria's recognition, respect and resources for foster carers, the volunteers who every day and night make a difference in the lives of Victoria's children and young people. We advocate for the value of carers.



The Foster Care Association of Victoria is the peak body for Victorian foster carers. Established in 1992 by a small and passionate group of foster carers, we are a not-for-profit organisation working towards better outcomes for foster carers and the children and young people in their care.

Foster care is the backbone of the Victorian response to protective intervention for children and young people at risk. Foster carers are the volunteers providing a home, family life and care to children and young people who are unable to live with their birth family for a variety of reasons. Many of these children have suffered traumatic events and the role of our foster carers is critical and complex in providing a safe and healing environment for children and young people to reach their full potential.

The Foster Care Association is here to provide information, support and advocacy directly to all Victorian foster families. Our work directly impacts the care provided to the thousands of Victorian children and young people in foster care by providing:

Carer Information & Support Service - free, independent advice and support to foster carers

Advocating on behalf of foster carers to government, their agencies and in the community.

Community building - as the only centralised body for all foster carers in the state; providing forums and carer events.

Providing **carer news** and updated **information** through our comprehensive website & regular newsletters

State-wide learning & development opportunities for carers throughout Victoria through Carer KaFÉ

The Foster Care Association represents all foster carers across Victoria. In tandem with support we provide to individual foster carers, our role as a membership Association is to advocate for vital improvements to the foster care system. Our current member base consists of over 5,500 carers and the wider sector and community.

The Foster Care Association of Victoria aims to strengthen Victoria's investment, respect and resources for foster carers, the volunteers who every day and every night make a difference in the lives of children and young people in care.



fcav
**foster care
association
of victoria**

President's Report

Tori Smith

President of the Board of Directors



It was my privilege to take carriage of the president role on the Board of the Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV) at the last Annual General Meeting in September 2020, having been a member of the Board since 2014. I am grateful to my co-board members and the legacy of governance left by my predecessor, Toni Hetherington. I thank Toni for her handover and the fantastic work she did as president.

I come from a professional background in community service organisations in various roles including as a foster care case manager and team leader. I have also been a foster carer myself since 2007.

I want to thank you, our **5,100 carer members**, for your collective and individual voices that form the FCAV's priorities. Through surveys, calls to our team, meetings, morning teas, events and online forums, you deliver the strong mandate on priority issues for foster carers. These include improved relationships with our agencies and the new Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and improved support for our role in the community and in the lives of the children and young people in our care.

Carers have demonstrated amazing **adaptability and resilience** throughout the pandemic. I am acutely aware that many of you have taken on additional tasks, such as facilitating online family contacts and supporting children with remote learning with reduced access to your usual support networks, difficulties accessing counselling and supports for the young people in your care and increased financial pressures and employment instability within carer families.

This year, significant progress has been made in areas that have long been high priorities for carers.

I trust you will enjoy reading this **Annual Report** to learn more about FCAV's provision of high-quality phone support, events, counselling, advocacy and training for carers.

However, there remains much more to be done to improve the foster care system as a whole and the carer's experience within it.

The FCAV's priorities for the coming year include advocating for: ongoing funding of all our current services; improved access to and transparency regarding funding through the **DFFH Client Support Funding Framework** to meet the needs of children in care; improvements to the CIMS process to reduce delays and better inform carers; sufficient funding to fully implement the state's **Carer Strategy**; growing **cultural safety** across the foster care system and support for carers to transition to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations where they are best placed to provide case management for young people in care; increased independence of review processes when **case planning decisions** are disputed; and easier access to Medicare cards and passports for children in care.

These improvements will assist in retaining happy and fulfilled carers with the acknowledgement that our greatest method of recruiting new carers is the word of mouth of carers already in the role.

The FCAV would not function without the dedication of numerous individuals. I wish to acknowledge and thank the entire **Board of Directors**, and especially the executive who donate many hours of their time to the good governance of the FCAV. I thank **Sam Hauge**, our CEO for her tireless work over the past year, much of which occurs out of sight and all too often, out of hours.

I particularly want to thank the **FCAV staff** for their professionalism, enthusiasm and dedication as they have worked hard to provide uninterrupted support to carers over the past year despite often having to work from home and a full office relocation. Indeed, some of our newer recruits worked for some time before they were finally able to meet all their colleagues in person!

Finally, I want to acknowledge the Hon. Luke Donnellan MP, Minister for Child Protection, and publicly welcome the new Secretary of DFFH, Sandy Pitcher. Ms Pitcher came along to our Board meeting in February, just days after commencing her role. The FCAV is grateful for the strong working relationship we share with DFFH and the individuals who work there.



The Foster Care Association of Victoria is funded through the state government of Victoria, agency subscribers, foundation grants, fundraising campaign donors and the generous volunteer support of individuals and organisations.

CEO's Report

Samantha Hauge

Chief Executive Officer



Well, we have all done it again! Carers have had another year adapting to a fluctuating care environment primarily due to the pandemic. Carers have cared through numerous periods of lockdown and varying restrictions that has been challenging and unpredictable to say the least.

To that end, the FCAV has flexibly adapted our services over the year to maximise support for our carer members both during and after hours,

year-round, when they have needed us most.

We established our **Carer Assistance Program** – offering targeted and therapeutic counselling to address carer mental health and well-being issues, in addition to our telephone support. The program has been exceptionally well-received and utilised by metropolitan and regional carers and is assisting with addressing the declining carer retention rates. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Australian Communities Foundation for their financial support as well as the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

In addition, we have made significant ground, and had some major achievements, on some of our biggest carer supports this year:

- The DFFH has implemented a new policy and procedure for obtaining **birth registrations** for children and young people in care in a timely manner.
- Carer KaFÉ received ongoing funding as well as funding to expand the program to include **permanent carers**.
- **The Home Stretch** funding and support has been expanded to include all young people in care.
- A state-wide **Carer Census** has been undertaken for the first time.
- Regular **'morning tea with the CEO'** sessions have been established for carers as well as separate sessions with Community Service Organisations that has brought to light key issues we will press forward with into the coming state election year.

During the year I accepted Victoria's place on a pioneering **National Collective** of peak kinship and foster care bodies around Australia for collaboration and enhanced leverage across our state jurisdictions as well as towards commonwealth goals for all carers in Australia.

This alliance meets monthly to discuss and action shared advocacy goals such as Medicare and Centrelink issues, priority vaccinations and common interests for our carers, including sharing knowledge, resources and projects. Despite the frustrating commonality of issues for carers around the country, it has been a pleasure to work with my counterparts in other states and territories and I thank them for their collegiate work.

My heartfelt gratitude extends to all the FCAV staff who have continued to work relentlessly and flexibly to support carers with information, support and advocacy while continuing to provide training and **learning forums** for carers throughout the year. This has included developing **podcasts, webinars** and hosting **carer retreats**, one of which I was honoured to attend. We have also relocated offices during this time which was challenging and proudly signed the **Embracing Equality Pledge**.

My appreciation also extends to our skilled Board of Directors including President, Tori Smith, who give their own time and expertise to guide us in the right direction and ensure **good corporate governance** at all times.

And to our carers who work tirelessly to provide a **safe and nurturing home** for the children and young people in their care – we value and respect you. Your dedication has been exceptional in so many ways, especially during Victoria's lockdowns. So many of you have become teachers, 24-hour nurturers and facilitators of online contact; solely responsible for the social, physical and emotional well-being of the children or young people in your care. You've done this all under the heightened anxiety of a health crisis and many of you have faced financial and isolation pressures. **Your commitment is phenomenal.**



Above: Samantha Hauge (right) with the staff of FCAV and Carer KaFÉ during the Operation Strategic Planning day in March 2021.

Our Agency Subscribers

Thank you to our Community Service Organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations who formed our subscription base for 2020/2021.

- **Anchor Foster Care**
- **Anglicare Victoria**
- **Baptcare Family Services**
- **Barwon Child, Youth & Family**
- **Berry Street**
- **Brophy Family & Youth Services Inc,**
- **Child and Family Services Ballarat**
- **Gippsland & East Gippsland Aboriginal Cooperative**
- **Key Assets**
- **Life Without Barriers**
- **MacKillop Family Services**
- **Mallee Accommodation & Support Program**
- **Mallee District Aboriginal Services**
- **Mallee Family Care**
- **OzChild**
- **Quantum Support Services Inc**
- **Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-Op**
- **Uniting Care**
- **Upper Murray Family Care**
- **Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency**
- **Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-Operative**



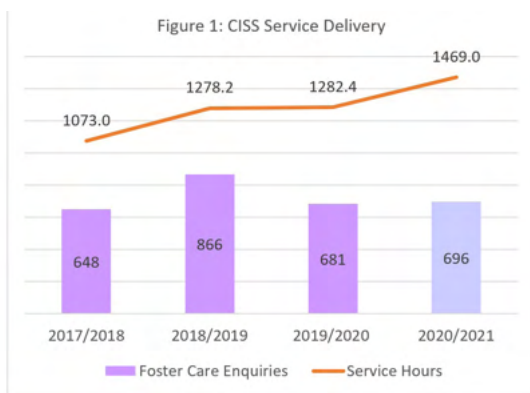
Carer Information and Support Service Report

Tessa Hughes, Team Leader

From the period 1 July 2020 – 30 June 2021, the Carer Information & Support Service (CISS) responded to and closed **696** foster care enquiries, delivering **1469** hours of service.

One of the highlights of the last 12 months has been the establishment of the Carer Assistance Program (CAP). This service provides therapeutic emotional support to carers and has worked closely with the CISS program to ensure a comprehensive service to carers.

Many of the carers accessing the CAP have been involved in a Client Incident Management System (CIMS) investigation.



FCAV has continued to provide a quality service, while staff have predominantly been working from home and managing the unique challenges associated with the pandemic. The hours of service continue to increase annually, reflecting the complexities faced by carers in Victoria.

* An enquiry can involve multiple calls, emails and meetings to support the carer.

Outcome

Of the 696 foster care enquiries, the CISS team provided **advice** to 245 enquiries (434 hours), **information** to 189 enquiries (126 hours) and **advocacy** to 127 enquiries (646 hours).

Advocacy is a significant component of the work provided to carers, evidence of a reduced confidence in working with their agencies and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH). Often relationships with professionals are broken and FCAV is mediating on behalf of carers and advising them of their rights in the out of home care (OOHC) system.

Person Type

Most enquiries are from foster carers, however agency and DFFH workers also contact the service for information and advice, along with permanent carers and kinship carers.

The CISS team refer kinship and permanent carers to relevant organisations. There are discussions at senior level with the other services in relation to appropriate referral processes to ensure all enquiries are responded to adequately.

Individual Engagement

Of the 696 foster care enquiries, 401 individuals contacted the service. 263 individuals had one enquiry, 126 individuals had 2 – 5 enquiries and 12 individuals had between 6 – 12 separate enquiries. This highlights that, in most instances, the FCAV is able to respond and answer enquiries adequately. Of the individuals with 2 + enquiries, 31 accessed the CAP service in addition to support in other matters.

Mode of Contact

An enquiry can involve multiple calls, emails and meetings to support the carer. Of the 696 enquiries, 3734 separate contacts were made.

Email and phone contact continue to be the most popular form of communication, however in the past 12 months online platforms have been used more frequently to support carers. This is often the platform where FCAV staff are present to support carers during a formal CIMS investigation. The use of online platforms for attending investigations has meant FCAV has assisted many more carers across the state when involved in these challenging matters.

Emotional Support Provided

Of the 3734 separate contacts, emotional support was provided in 1008 instances (639 hours).

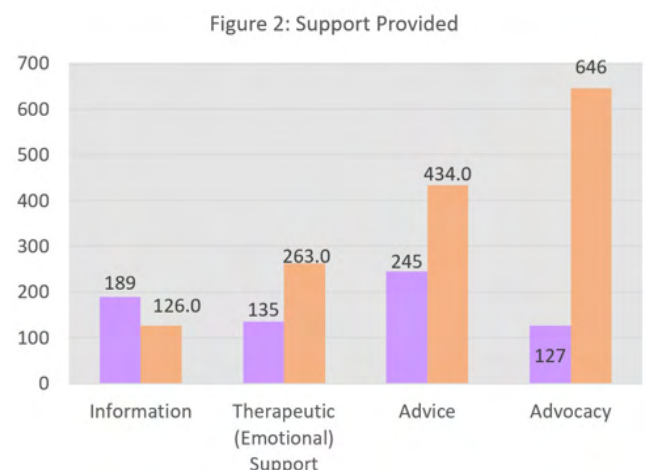
These figures are somewhat of a contrast to the previous year's results due, primarily, to carers experiencing less upheaval than was the case during the first and prolonged lockdowns and also due to the referral opportunity with the commencement of the Carer Assistance Program.

Issues Raised

Of the 696 enquiries, 726 issues were raised. The majority of time spent supporting carers was in relation to CIMS investigations, issues with Agency and issues with DFFH.

Client Incident Management System (CIMS) Issues

The CISS team provided support to 92 CIMS enquiries, delivering 425 hours of service. CIMS continues to require significant input by the CISS team, providing initial advice and information regarding the investigation process, to Section 81 investigations and Suitability Panel hearings.



Investigation delays have been particularly concerning over the past year with lockdowns and restrictions. Carers have experienced delays of up to 6 months for police interviews.

In addition to the emotional toll these delays have taken on carers, there are further repercussions on their ability to apply for employment or voluntary work (community organisations, sporting clubs) due to uncertainty regarding their Working With Children status. The CISS team has supported several carers in these situations throughout the year.

The removal of children in their care during an investigation remains a key concern for carers that has been exacerbated by investigation delays.

FCAV is represented on the *Community of Practice Working Group* with the DFFH. This forum will provide an opportunity to inform and debate practice standards to best meet the needs of carers.

Agency Issues

The CISS team provided support to 117 enquiries (212 hours) relating to agencies. Complaints, lack of communication, planning and support, and insufficient advocacy by agencies to DFFH on behalf of their carers have been key issues throughout the year.

Due to the pandemic, there has been a reduced capacity to connect with agencies and take up issues in an online environment. The CISS team has continued to liaise with agencies online and promote the service, including new initiatives such as the Carer Assistance Program. FCAV will resume regular attendance at team meetings as well as carer support groups to promote service as restrictions allow.

DFFH Issues

The CISS team responded to 89 enquiries (332 hours) relating to DFFH. Complaints regarding policies and procedures, case plans appeals and the removal of children in care to other placements have been a priority concern for carers this past year.

This continues to be a challenge for carers and the CISS team provides and facilitates carer access to training opportunities such as webinars and podcasts to inform them of their rights and responsibilities.

In addition, there were many cases related to interruptions to implementation and review of case plans. For example, carers have reported that due to COVID-19 there have been reunification plans that have been either accelerated or placed on hold. This presents uncertainty leading to increased stress for carers.

During the last 12 months, FCAV has initiated forums with the CEO to provide a space for carers and agencies to raise relevant issues.

One of the most poignant issues raised was the lack of respect felt by carers. Many commented that they have not been invited to attend case planning meetings. Following the chat session, FCAV has established a working group, developing information resources for carers including a revision of the case plan template established by the northern Carer Advisory Group. This will be further developed.

The CISS Team also attends regional team meetings with the DFFH to discuss FCAV services and the needs of carers in the system.

COVID-19 Enquiries

The CISS team responded to 32 enquiries (50 hours) relating to COVID-19. The majority of this time was spent responding to carer concerns regarding access arrangements with birth families, carer support needs, financial assistance and respite needs.

Summary

As evident from this data, FCAV continues to provide a quality and well-utilised service to carers in Victoria. It has been a ground-breaking 12 months for the service with the initiation of the Carer Assistance Program. The program is uniquely placed to offer carers individualised support, often resulting in them being able to remain a carer in the OOH system.

Another significant strength of the service this year has been its increased advocacy position. There have been high levels of individual advocacy, as well as the newly established forums for carers and agency staff. With high numbers of participants attending and speaking openly about their experiences, the forums have been a well-received and enlightening process both for carers and agencies, raising representative issues of the carer experience across Victoria. The FCAV's capital investment in facilitating these forums then feeds back into organisational insight and builds the FCAV advocacy mandate.

Analysis of the full range of issues has highlighted a continuing theme of a lack of respect towards carers and their role. FCAV will facilitate a carer group to develop resources and articulate what a quality service that respects and supports carers would entail, so that educational information can be relayed to professionals in a number of forums including network meetings, sector forums and the divisional Carer Advisory Group meetings.

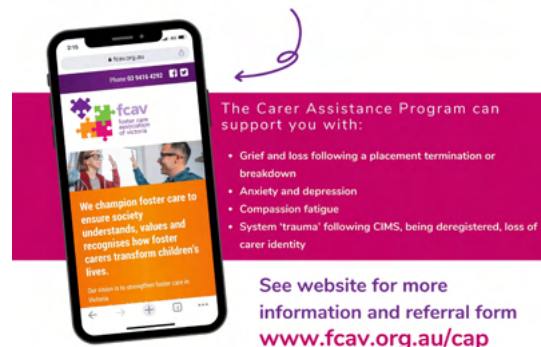
Another ongoing theme of concern is the CIMS process that has heightened anxiety for carers during the past year. FCAV will bring this to the *Community of Practice Working Group*.

We look forward to reporting on further development of these activities in the next 12 months.

Carer Assistance Program



LOOKING FOR SUPPORT AS A FOSTER CARER?



- the neglect by the system to adequately support foster carers, as well as their biological children, in navigating transitions and their feelings of grief and loss;
- compassion fatigue experienced by carers and its impacts on their own mental health (increased anxiety, burn out and depression);
- the impact of CIMS beyond the 'expected' distress to carers, including depression and increased risk of self harm.

The Carer Assistance Program (CAP), was first launched by the FCAV in September 2020, in response to the evident need of Victorian foster carers for increased emotional support within the sector.

With the rising stress in carer households during COVID-19, the FCAV sought and successfully secured, an initial grant from the **RO Sub fund of the Australian Communities Foundation**. This grant was key to the FCAV being able to undertake research to identify carer support needs during COVID-19, develop a program model and advocate for the funding to establish a pilot program of therapeutic support that was then funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

The ACF RO Sub fund has generously granted a second round of funding for 2021/22, which will be used to evolve and enhance our carer well-being and support services.

The DFFH has also announced further funding to continue to provide foster carers with this essential additional support until March 2022.

The value of the CAP service has been proven from the outset and is consistently praised by foster carers and those who work with them for its focus on providing:

- Therapeutic input to support the mental health and well-being of foster carers.
- A sector specific, targeted support.
- An integrated service of parallel support, alongside the FCAV's Carer Information Support Service (CISS).

The CAP currently offers two days a week of direct service and to date, has delivered **263** hours of support to **84** Victorian foster carers. Referrals have been made based on a range of issues. Emerging themes include:

- intense grief and loss experienced by foster carers when a placement (particularly long term) breaks down or is terminated as a result of change in case plan, lack of system support, behavioural challenges by children (in some instances placing carers at direct risk of harm);

CAP Evaluation

Carers value a service with **sector specific knowledge** and expertise. **100%** of respondents expressed they felt heard and acknowledged and would recommend the CAP to other foster carers. Similarly, 100% of respondents stated they valued the sector specific knowledge and support.

"This is a vital service, as it is industry specific. I've only had my first session and it's made a world of difference. Thank you".

"It was great to talk to someone that already knew the system. I didn't have to explain anything extra and I felt understood in a better way than a regular counsellor outside of the system".

"Was wonderful to talk to someone who already understood the complexity of carer issues. Really helpful".

"Amazing service and would highly recommend to other carers needing support."

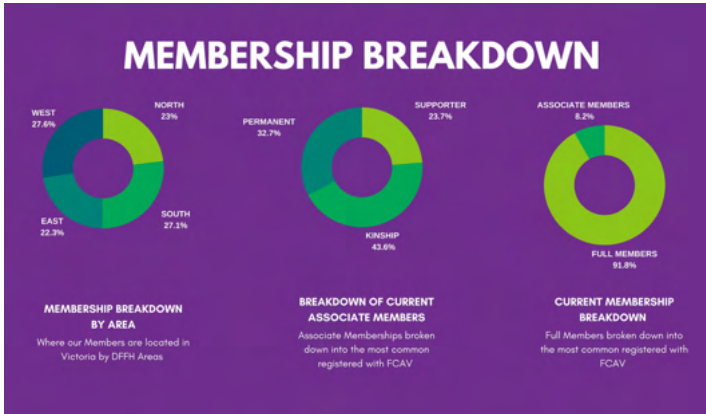
Many carers experienced **increased stress** in their role as foster carers during COVID-19 lockdowns with **63%** of respondents indicating a significant increase in their stress and mental health concerns, as a direct result of COVID-19;

Carers feel a service like CAP can assist in **retaining foster carers** within the system as **90%** of respondents stated they believed this support could assist with overall carer retention.

The FCAV is proud to have secured extended funding for the CAP until March 2022 and is hopeful to be in a position to continue to expand on existing support in this area, in recognition of the critical role support plays in caring for our carers.



Membership Report



These membership numbers are very positive in light of continuing challenges facing the foster care sector and particularly, the ongoing impact of COVID-19. Membership feeds into the advocacy work of FCAV. By broadening our membership base, we can more accurately represent the foster carers of Victoria.

We look forward to continuing to grow our membership and expanding the range and delivery of pivotal supports we provide to FCAV members. This aligns with our mission to strengthen foster families and enhance the well-being of the children in their care.

Types of Membership offered by FCAV

Full Memberships for:

- Current foster carers
- Former foster carers
- People over the age of 21 who have been, or are, in care

Associate Memberships for:

- Kinship Carers
- Permanent Carers
- Supporters

Foster Care Association of Victoria Membership offers carers the opportunity to become a part of a special community of carers and their supporters. FCAV strongly encourages all agencies to promote membership to their newly accredited foster carers.

The Foster Care Association of Victoria is pleased to welcome **451** Full Members and **64** Associate Members to the organisation who have joined in the past year, bringing our total membership to **5,685**.

Carer Snapshot Report 2021



The Foster Care Association of Victoria has conducted an annual review of the state of foster care in Victoria for 11 years. Community Service Organisations (CSOs) including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide data based on the carer households affiliated with each of its offices. Typically data is collected within a two week period in March.

The data shows that although the number of carer households has risen, the increase in non-active households is of concern and is likely to have been impacted by the pandemic.

The snapshot shows a net loss in the number of foster carers available to take placements over the period and fewer in the accreditation process than at the same time last year.



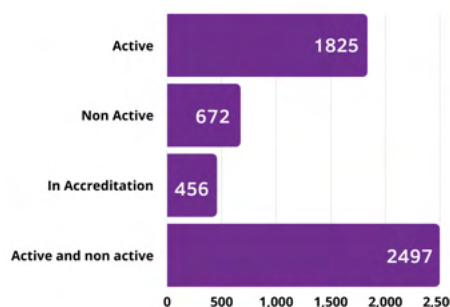
FCAV Membership

Membership is free! Join now to enjoy member benefits, connect with like-minded people and keep up to date with sector news.



Read the FCAV's 2021 Carer Snapshot on the FCAV website under publications and policies. www.fcav.org.au/images/2021_Carer_Snapshot_Report_FINAL_.pdf

2021 CARER POOL



IN ACCREDITATION

Has started the accreditation training and assessment process

NON ACTIVE HOUSEHOLDS

Is on 'hold' or on a break

ACTIVE HOUSEHOLDS

Has a current placement or is available for a placement referral

Engagement

Research Partnerships

The FCAV is pleased to partner with leading researchers in the field of child protection and home-based care research. This year, we facilitated carer involvement in:

- August 2020 - Monash University: **'Exploring Out Of Home Care and SEL: Stakeholder Experiences'**. Enhancing the educational experiences of children in out of home care.
- October 2020 – Monash University: **'Impact of COVID 19 on the social, emotional and educational well-being of children/young people in out of home care (OOHC) in Australia, through the lens of the carer experience and challenges'**.
- November 2020 – March 2021 - Ernst & Young EY, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing: **'Home-based Carer Census'**.
- March 2021 – Federation University: **'The Well-being of Foster Carers: The Role of Empathy, Resilience and Coping Self-Efficacy in Caring for Traumatized Children'**.
- June 2021 - Charles Sturt University: **'Trauma Informed Care Scale for foster/kinship/Adopted carers and residential youth workers'**.

Sector Partnerships

We've been honoured to work closely with counterparts across the sector on several important projects in the 12 months.

- National Peak Collective for foster and kinship care organisations around Australia.
- Permanent Care and Adoptive Families
- Kinship Care Victoria
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare Child - Healthcare, Adversity and COVID-19.
- CREATE Foundation - Peak body for young people with a care experience.
- Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP).
- VACCA and the Nugel Program.

Newsletters

The FCAV produced and distributed 10 newsletters and several supplementary communications, comprising foster care news, updates, legislation changes, events, training and carer giveaways in the 12 months.


The FCAV invites contributions from sector organisations to share information and opportunities with foster carers such as Raising Expectations, CREATE Foundation and Commission for Children and Young People as well as regular contributions from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

FCAV's news, opportunities and updates are accessible online, stored and searchable on our database for future reference.

Back issues available here: www.fcav.org.au/newsletters

 www.linkedin.com/company/foster-care-association-of-victoria

 twitter.com/vicfostercare

 www.instagram.com/fostercarevic

 www.facebook.com/fostercarevictoria

Social Media

Due to the continuing restrictions imposed by COVID-19, online interaction with and, for carers, has continued to be the most important engagement mechanism.

During the last financial year, our Facebook page followers increased from 6,524 to over **7,000**.

The activity of the page has included an increase in posts and also interaction from administrators.

The FCAV Twitter account has **898** followers. The FCAV Instagram account has risen to over **300** followers. The FCAV LinkedIn account has **266** followers.

Website

In the 12 months, there were over **26,000** visits to the FCAV website, with around **32,000** page views. Of these users, **85%** were new visitors and **15%** returning



visitors. The most visited pages were Carer Allowance, Carer Information and Support Service, Carer Assistance Program, Memberships and What we do. The majority of page hits originated from social media, with quite a number originating from organic reach via search engines. Peaks occurred following the mailout of each newsletter, indicating those originate from links to articles.

New articles and information include over 36 news articles, new and updated information sheets, Emotional Regulation Toolkit, support information, Get Involved, advocacy, survey forms, registration forms, newsletters, training, fundraising, webinars and updated CISS team, CAP and Board of Directors biographies.

Carer Gifts and Giveaways

- 2 x \$50 gift vouchers to the Art Shed
- 2 x \$100 self-care pamper experience
- 50 quilts donated by Australian Quilters Association
- 1 ticket for NAIDOC art workshop
- 1 deadly colouring book + 1 Young Dark Emu Book
- 2 x Deadly Culture Diaries from VACCA
- Sukin beauty packs donated by Pinchapoo
- Wooden Toys donated by Waverley Woodworkers
- 2 x \$100 Home and Garden Project giveaways
- 4 x \$50 Gift Vouchers to Magabala Books
- 3 x \$30 Hoyts movie vouchers Easter giveaway
- 3 x \$60 Woolworths Gift Vouchers
- 3 x Aboriginal Art Colouring Books by Iluka Designs

FOSTER CARE WEEK

13-19 SEPTEMBER 2020

The Value of Carers

#fostercareweek20 #valueofcarers #fosteringvalue

We had an amazing week celebrating and recognising the incredible resilience of carers who continue to make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people, which is more important than ever before.

Our successful first online Carer Celebration and Annual General Meeting was held on Friday 11 September 2020 via Zoom, with **148 attendees** (106 being foster carers).

The event was launched with a Welcome to Country by Sue-Anne Hunter, followed by speeches from Minister Luke Donnellan, Principal Commissioner Liana Buchanan, an interview between our Board President, Toni Hetherington and carer Justine Barbosa, and a speech from our Board Treasurer, Luke Sapwell, about his care experience.

We thanked carers, children and young people, sector organisations and agencies for recognising the *Value of Carers* during Foster Care Week. Let's work together to ensure their dedication to the children and young people in their care is better supported, especially while caring through COVID-19.

All attendees received a gift and all foster carer attendees received a gift voucher as a thank you.

Highlights of Foster Care Week 2020

- Agencies supporting and celebrating carers with events and gifts across the state.
- Official Launch of our new Carer Assistance Program.
- A wonderful carer Belinda speaking on ABC News Breakfast.
- Another fantastic foster carer, Elicia interviewed on 3AW.
- Active engagement on social media. #FosterCareWeek2020

Watch our recorded Carer Celebration and AGM here: www.fcav.org.au/news/fcw-2020

CEO Sam Hauge speech: www.fcav.org.au/news/sam-fcw-2020-speech

FCAV office move

The FCAV and Carer KaFÉ moved office in May 2021, to accommodate our growing team and continue to meet all our member's support needs in line with COVID-safe requirements.

The new office address: Ground Floor, 2 Greenwood Street, Abbotsford VIC 3067.

All other details remain the same. Please update us in your databases and contacts lists.

www.fcav.org.au

www.carerKaFÉ.org.au



“ I would like to thank you for the FCAV celebration this year!”

In the face of challenges of having it remotely, it was a huge success.”

I was very touched by all the speakers, including Samantha's very articulate, professional and very accurate reflection of the challenges of the system and her strong advocacy of carers in Victoria!”

I was very touched by the carer's story and also Luke's story. Very inspirational. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. What an amazing organisation you are!” ”

Foster carer feedback from the 2020 FCAV Carer Celebration and AGM

Being Heard

Advocacy Program

The FCAV has continued to develop and pursue a broad-based advocacy program during the pandemic that responded to the range of systemic issues that many carers face as well as the issues that have arisen as a result of the pandemic.

Key issues include:

- Improving access to funds through the **Client Support Funding Framework**.
- Advocating for a more streamlined process to deal with **CIMS investigations** for carers to address poor process and delays.
- Developing guidelines for carers to **appeal DFFH decisions**.
- Working closely with the National Peak Collective to strengthening advocacy on **national issues** for carers.
- Improving timely access to **Medicare registration**.
- Advocating for better **carer recognition** from DFFH and agencies.
- Ensuring the **Carer Strategy** commitments are enacted.
- Working to address the **declining rate** of carers.
- **Birth registrations** and **birth certificates**.
- **Funding** for health, education and recreation services.
- **Transport** issues.
- **Education** access issues.

Advocacy Successes

- **Home Stretch** funding and support has been increased for all young people up to 21 years of age.
- A state-wide **Carer Census** has been undertaken for the first time.
- Regular 'morning tea with the FCAV CEO' sessions have been established for carers as well as separate sessions for community service organisations which has brought to light key issues we will press forward with into the coming **state election** year.
- DFFH have implemented a new policy and procedure for obtaining **birth registrations** for children and young people in care in a timely manner.

The Home Stretch Campaign

The FCAV has long supported **The Home Stretch campaign** and was proud to advocate for the critical extension of care for all young people in care in Victoria. The Victorian Government announced funding for **universal** care for all young people to the age of 21 in Victoria in November 2020. #HomeStretch #madeit21.

The FCAV was also thrilled with the announcement in May 2021, that the Home Stretch packages would be extended to include young people in **Permanent Care**.

Sports Grants

The FCAV wrote to the Minister about the restrictive eligibility criteria for the *Get Active Kids Sports Voucher Program* which had the unintended effect of excluding many children in care. This is because to access the program a health care card and Medicare card were required. Many carers do not have access to either of these documents. Following the FCAV complaint *Get Active Victoria* (that administers the program) modified the application process.

Access to vaccination for foster carers

The national collective of foster care peak bodies engaged in a joint request for all foster carers around the country, regardless of age, to be considered eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations as a priority cohort, due to the frontline, interpersonal, volunteer role that they have,



continuing to take in children and young people, facilitating face to face contacts, meeting appointments and access visits. Unfortunately, the response from the Federal Minister for Health, Greg Hunt was that foster carers would remain ineligible for priority consideration.

Access to on-site learning during pandemic

Early in the pandemic lockdown of 2020, Minister for Education, James Merlino, responded to FCAV concerns and clarified that all children in foster care were entitled to on-site learning. This was reflected in subsequent official advice that was distributed by the DFFH. This occurred after the FCAV received complaints from foster carers that some schools were refusing to allow children in foster care to access schools on-site during the lockdown.

Carer Assistance Program

COVID-19 funding was provided following FCAV advocacy and has been used in conjunction with philanthropic funding to establish the Carer Assistance Program (ref pp.6).

Retrospective carer overpayment recovery

In March 2020, the Department suspended overpayment recovery because of the hardship it would potentially create during the lockdown.

In June 2021, the FCAV was advised that the Department had decided to review its earlier decision to suspend recovery action and intended to make all recovery action retrospective. The FCAV complained to the Department about the decision and retrospective overpayment recovery action was suspended.

Carer Strategy

The Department has reactivated its Carer Strategy following its suspension during 2020 because of the pandemic. Following its reactivation, the Department has reviewed its priorities and action plan in consultation with working group members. The new action plan has now been approved by the RIMAG. The FCAV is currently co-chairing the Carer Strategy Working group.

Birth Registrations

The FCAV has had an ongoing advocacy focus on birth registrations. This is because a high proportion of children in care have unregistered births (when compared to the general population). The FCAV had meetings with both the Minister and Secretary of the DFFH and as part of an agreed process, forwarded cases where carers were unable to get the births of the children registered in a timely manner. As part of this campaign, the FCAV also received a number of cases from CSOs. Because of the number of cases the FCAV was able to identify, the DFFH sought legal advice and worked with the Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages to streamline the application process. Key features of the new process include:

- DFFH has now clarified they have the power to register the births of all children in care regardless of the court order;
- Child protection will automatically request a copy of a birth certificate for all children who have been in care for longer than 21 days;
- An application to Births, Deaths and Marriages for a birth certificate will be made within 30 days;
- Where a birth has not been registered, DFFH will work with parents to register a birth; and
- Where parental cooperation is not provided, DFFH will proceed independently to register the birth.

Home-based Carer Census

The FCAV successfully advocated for a survey of carers to obtain key attitudinal and demographic data so that the carer population is better understood.

The FCAV prioritised a carer survey as it believes that, without understanding carer attitudes and issues, it is difficult to respond to carer concerns. The data will be a key input into the development of priority actions under the Carer Strategy.

DFFH commissioned Ernst and Young to undertake the Carer Census which was conducted from November 2020 through to March 2021. The Carer Census data has since been released.

CARER CENSUS STATEWIDE DATA SURVEY

59% of foster carers regularly use their own funds to pay for other expenses for children in their care such as medical, dental, therapies & sport

Census commissioned by Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and conducted by Ernst and Young, 2021. Thanks to nearly half of all active foster carers in Victoria who completed the survey. Data reports available: <https://www.dfh.vic.gov.au/publications/strong-carers-stronger-children>



NEW COSTS

- Minimum wage increase (+2.5%)
- New Superannuation requirements (+0.5%)
- New Long Service Leave obligations (+1.6%)

The Victorian Government is preparing to offer social service groups a funding increase.

But it's offering less than what it now costs to deliver services.

That's a funding *cut*.

Thanks isn't enough.

Funding must increase with the cost of delivering services.

Logos for VCROSS (Victorian Council of Social Services) and fcaav (Foster Care Association of Victoria) are present.

'Thanks isn't enough' Campaign

The FCAV joined Victorian Council of Social Service (VCROSS) and other social service organisations around Victoria in 2021, calling on the Government to reconsider its indexing rate, impacting funding for the state's social service groups and frontline charities, a move that would have impacted FCAV's ability to retain its current staff and services. The advocacy resulted in Government recognition which stopped-gapped the funding fallout, but loss of funding revenue remains a threat.

Impost on Women Campaign

This International Women's Day, 8 March 2021, the FCAV recognised that the women who have provided foster care over the last 12 months have borne a high social and economic cost because of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on top of existing stressors in the system.

Women make up over **83%** of volunteer foster carers in Victoria and this frequently requires women to work part-time on a reduced salary, accept lower paying jobs to ensure they have the flexibility to support the placement of high needs children, or cease paid work altogether.

Workplace supports such as childcare are frequently unavailable or difficult to access, making work force participation even more challenging.

Foster Carers International Women's Day 2021

Women make up over **83%** of volunteer foster carers in Victoria. Volunteering for foster care frequently requires women to work part-time on a reduced salary, accept lower paying jobs to ensure they have the flexibility to support the placement of high needs children or, cease paid work altogether. The sectors that have been hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic include the education, health and hospitality sectors which all have high levels of female employment and have been impacted most by unemployment due to the pandemic.

Impacts of COVID-19 on women

- Majority of the casual workers unable to access JobKeeper are women
- Well over 200,000 women lost their jobs in Victoria. Most jobs lost in part-time and casual roles
- 8.1% women currently unemployed in Victoria compared to 5.9% for men
- Women depleted their superannuation at a higher rate than men when withdrawing emergency COVID-19 funds
- The payroll impact on women has been greater than men across many industries.

"Spending time trying to rectify injustices within the system takes away time to provide the care, love, support and therapy these children need."

This IWD, the FCAV advocates for adequate funding for placement supports that will assist women carers to participate in the workforce and community and an increase to the Care Allowance to reach parity with NSW.

Carer Forums and Events

Self care and Well-being

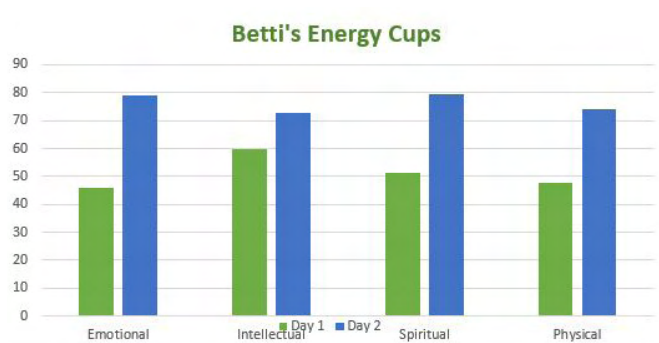
Victorian carers experienced varying levels of lockdown, remote learning and loss of personal support during the past year. The FCAV Carer COVID-19 Survey showed that over **70%** of carers had experienced increased stress due to heightened behavioural and trauma-based responses from their children and young people as well as managing their own mental health. The FCAV's CISS Programs has focussed on responding to that increase by offering the CAP sessions, hosting well-being retreats and art therapy sessions, webinars, information and forums to assist carers through this difficult time.

Carer Retreats

FCAV managed to fit in two Carer Retreats despite restrictions this year, funded through the Carer KaFÉ Program.

The first was a Carer Retreat at Findon on the Mornington Peninsula in May 2021, attended by 25 foster and kinship carers. The two-day Carer Retreat supported and celebrated the resilience of carers and provided carers with an opportunity to reflect on their caring journey through shared learning and networking.

Carers participated in the professional development sessions, which also focused on self-care to enhance their feelings of safety, health and happiness through a variety of practices including mindfulness. Feedback from carers was that they felt replenished and resourced for their return to caring for the child/ren in their care.



Above: Self-evaluations at day 1 and Day 2 show significant improvements in well-being of participants

The second Carer Retreat was for Inter-Country Adoptive Families where FCAV provided a consultative service, offering the Carer Retreat package to the Permanent Care & Adoptive Families peak body, after they heard how successful the carer retreats have been. Tessa Hughes and Deb Collard facilitated the Friday night and weekend retreat at the RACV Healesville for 33 inter country adoptive parents.



Foster Carer and CSO Morning Teas



During early 2021, the FCAV conducted a series of **Agency** and **Foster Carer** forums providing an opportunity for our CEO, Sam Hauge, to speak directly with carers and agency staff in **virtual morning tea sessions**, to provide connection and discuss issues that require advocacy.

As well as a great opportunity to engage with stakeholders and learn more about our members and the people working with them, clear themes emerged from the sessions from both carers and agency staff:

- The need to ensure foster carers are **valued and recognised** for the significant role they play within a system that includes government and agencies who should work together to support their volunteers.
- **Inadequate communication** was a priority for carers, especially with court involvement. The issue being further compounded by a **lack of access** to support such as counselling and respite. During COVID-19 there was an expectation that carers do most transports and facilitate access visits.
- There was unanimous agreement that regardless of the intense workloads, there needs to be more **collaboration** between agencies and Child Protection.
- To improve the foster care system, there is a need for all carers to be trained in **therapeutic models** and able to manage the impact of cumulative harm.
- **The Client Incident Management System** was a point of major concern requiring advocacy on issues such as time delays and carers leaving the system during or after, regardless of outcome. Agencies feel they have a **conflict of interest** in completing investigations when they are meant to be supporting carers. Carers feel **devalued** and are often left in limbo, sometimes for months.
- **The court system** is another major issue of concern. The length of time it takes to make decisions where children remain in care and bonds are developed and **attachments made** with the carer, only to be moved to the next stage (often without any real transition), has an impact on both the carer and the child.

Thank you to the carers and staff who attended and their candid and detailed discussions that gives FCAV first-hand experiences to add to our advocacy on some known issues, as well as identify new issues to pursue in FCAV's broader advocacy work.

Podcasts

Funded by Carer KaFÉ and facilitated by the FCAV, the Carer Information and Support Service developed two new podcasts on the following topics:

Suitability Panel podcast with expert guests Anthony Kolmus, Director, Human Services Regulator at DFFH and Peter Harris, Chairperson, from the Suitability Panel.

Peter and Anthony spoke about the process and role the Suitability Panel plays within the system and provided much insight into what happens following a referral to the Suitability panel and the rights of a carer.

Culture in Care podcast on "How does a child or young person in care gain strength from being connected to their culture and how do we maintain these connections" with guests Tarlisha, a young person who recently left care and Uncle Trevor Gallagher, a proud Gunditjmarra man who supports community in the Darebin area.

Tarlisha is exploring her Aboriginal heritage having learned of her ancestry at age 15. She is slowly trying to find out more as her own mother was in care from the age of 12 in NSW and lost all connection to her birth family.

Uncle Trevor is an Elder and teaches Aboriginal traditions in the inner Melbourne parklands to the community and supports Aboriginal young people at Santa Maria College, a secondary school where he first met Tarlisha and provided education and support to her. Both talk of what helps children and young people to really connect and gain strength from their culture. Podcasts are available through the Carer KaFÉ website.

National Foster and Kinship Care Conference

FCAV had the opportunity to offer 5 carer delegate tickets to attend the **2021 National Foster & Kinship Care Conference** held virtually on 11th and 12th June 2021.

There was a range of informative sessions across the 2 days and the feedback from our carers was very positive, especially in relation to being able to connect with other carers and the quality of the presenters.

The FCAV extends thanks and congratulations to our counterparts in South Australia, for adapting and providing an informative and engaging NFKC Conference in exceptional circumstances.



School Essentials Packs Program

FCAV was so pleased to work with Backpacks for Vic Kids (B4VK) - a Victorian based charity which launched a new program in January 2021, offering school-aged children in out of home care much needed school supplies and stationery. B4VK's new School Essentials (SE) Packs Program offers stronger support to children in out of home care with their school readiness through the provision of much needed stationery, lunch boxes and other essential school supplies. Many FCAV members ordered the packs for the children in their care which aided their return to school engagement and a feeling of equality. backpacks4vickids.org.au



FCAV makes the Embracing Equality Pledge

The FCAV proudly joined with other peaks and sector organisations to sign on to the **Embracing Equality Pledge** which aims to end **LGBTIQ+** discrimination in Victoria. FCAV is a representative of a large number of LGBTIQ+ carer members and others who are caring for LGBTIQ+ young people who experience increased instances of vulnerability in relation to mental health, employment, education outcomes, homelessness and suicide. The FCAV passionately embraces our responsibility for safety, recognition and inclusiveness for our LGBTIQ+ community.

Read more about the Embracing Equality Pledge:

www.fcav.org.au/news/fcav-makes-the-embracing-equality-pledge

We will broaden our anti-discrimination policies as a peak body and extend our commitment to offering safe and inclusive practises to all our members.

This involves reviewing language use and reducing assumptions in relation to gender and sexuality, exhibiting the pledge banner in our materials and use of inclusive pronouns in our forms and materials.

Kinship and Foster Care Education

Carer KaFÉ's raison d'être is to meet the learning and development needs of Victorian kinship and foster carers, predominantly through face-to-face training delivered in wide-ranging geographical locations across Victoria.

COVID-19 severely impacted operations during the past year with months of restrictions across Victoria and extensive periods of lockdown (Melbourne experienced lockdown conditions for almost **40%** of this financial year). Attendances at organised sessions were affected by 'snap' lockdowns where carers were no longer able to participate due to the restrictions.

Despite the very difficult year operationally, Carer KaFÉ delivered a solid 2020-2021 financial year with **68** training events, **56** as Interactive Online sessions delivered to **1102** attendees. Over **800** participants represent our funded cohort (**637** Accredited foster carers and **166** Statutory kinship carers) reflecting a strong performance and adaptability amid a year of pandemic conditions when compared to **736** funded attendees in the previous financial year with only 5 months impacted by COVID-19.

Carer KaFÉ funding was due to expire on 30 June 2021. An overarching evaluation of the program was tendered in May 2020 to support a new funding submission. The in-depth analysis was conducted by Ernst & Young (EY) in July – September 2020. Key findings from the EY evaluation include:

- Carer KaFÉ program contributed positively to improving outcomes for foster and kinship carers in Victoria.
- Carers reported generally feeling better equipped to support the children in their care after accessing Carer KaFÉ training and educational resources.
- Carers felt more confident in undertaking their caring role as a result of attending Carer KaFÉ sessions.
- More cultural training opportunities were needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and carers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Carer KaFÉ welcomed the commitment to our valuable carers by the Victorian State government with the announcement on 20 May 2021 of ongoing funding for the program and the expansion to include the permanent carer cohort.

"To have ongoing funding for Carer KaFÉ is fantastic for carers and the expansion of the program to include permanent carers is also a positive step. Carer KaFÉ looks forward to engaging now and into the future with Victorian carers with quality training and educational resources as well as invitations to a variety of carer events such as retreats, camps and conferences."

Paula White, Program Manager, Carer KaFÉ.

Face to face sessions/events

There was only a small window of opportunity to get carers together in person from March to May 2021 which was difficult for carers who typically prefer training that provides in-person connection.

We were fortunate to be able to hold two carer retreats for **56** carers at **Peppers Resorts Fingal 1st - 2nd May and at RACV Healesville 25th -27th June.**

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees highlights the immense value retreats provide with regard to carer support and well-being.

In 2021, Carer KaFÉ launched a new format for face-to-face sessions for regional Victoria, creating an 'event' focus with the Bendigo Training Expo. This involved holding **3** different sessions over 2 days including an evening session. The success of this approach is evidenced by the **50** plus carers who attended and the **4** carer households who independently organised to stay overnight at the All Seasons Resort (at their own expense) for a 'mini-break' and thus were able to attend all 3 sessions. It was also heartening to observe the interactions and sense of connectedness amongst the carers.

The Mildura Training Expo was scheduled for June where we hoped to see similar success but had to be postponed due to imposed lockdown restrictions.



Above: Story-time for siblings benefiting from the onsite childcare at Carer KaFÉ's Bendigo Training expo April 2021.

Online Interactive Sessions

The majority of Carer KaFÉ training and education was forced online due to pandemic conditions. A positive outcome from this was the extended reach into rural and remote areas due to accessibility of online sessions.

Carer training content has been influenced by COVID-19. A clear need has arisen for a focus on carer well-being and improving mental health. Many of our training providers adapted their original content to include supports for dealing with the unique circumstances of COVID-19 such as remote schooling, isolation and loss of connectedness.

Feedback from those attending our Online Interactive sessions shows carers were surprised about what they could gain and how well they could connect online.

"The training was surprisingly engaging despite being online and did provide an opportunity for connecting with other carers"

Chris, Foster Carer, Croydon

5 WAYS CARER KAFÉ ADAPTED AND INNOVATED IN 2020-2021

1. Enhanced customer service and communication channels ie. reminders prior to sessions, mobile number for text notifications.
2. Implemented a 'wait list' to counter the high dropout rate for the limited spaces for Nikara's Journey cultural training and grew the average attendance level from 9 to 13 attendees per 2-day workshop.
3. Extended access to a range of online educational resources to equip carers with self-study / independent learning streams.
4. Instigated a system upon completion of a training session for carer training certificates to be also supplied to their agency case worker to support quality and audit requirements.
5. Carer KaFÉ staff helped carers with digital literacy (ie. accessing platforms such as Zoom) to support their training needs and keep connected.

One of the most popular sessions, bringing over **40** carers together online, was by international industry expert Richard Rose who stayed up to 2am United Kingdom time to deliver *Therapeutic Parenting with the Challenging Child*.

Carer KaFÉ continued to invest in the provision of online resources for carer self-study in response to COVID-19 impositions. Overall, there was a significant increase in the number of carers accessing these educational resources – over **400** compared to around **100** carers utilising Carer KaFÉ online resources in 2019-2020.

2021 National Conference

As part of its commitment to carer education, Carer KaFÉ offered 100 delegate tickets to carers to attend the 2021 National Foster & Kinship Care Conference held virtually on 11th and 12th June 2021. There was a strong take up rate with just under 90 delegate tickets allocated to carers.

There was a range of informative sessions across the 2 days and the feedback from our carers was very positive especially in relation to being able to connect with other carers and the quality of the presenters.

"The virtual presentation via zoom was extremely helpful in ensuring I could attend, particularly with the current situation of not being able to get together in person"

Foster Carer, Dromana

"I received a free delegate ticket via Carer KaFÉ and just wanted to say thank you so much for that. It was a wonderful experience with some inspiring and practical takeaways. I really appreciate the opportunity!"

Natalie, Foster Carer, Werribee

In June 2021 Carer KaFÉ received external recognition, being shortlisted for the 2021 Victorian Protecting Children Awards – Education category. Finalists will be announced in August and the winner will be celebrated at the September 2021 event.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing released the findings from the home-based carer census conducted early in 2021. Of note, many carers had accessed some support or training and of those who had

51% of foster carers had listed Carer KaFÉ as a source of support. This was much lower for kinship carers (**22%**) and represents an opportunity for the program to engage more with this cohort. Pleasingly, those who had most interaction with Carer KaFÉ felt it contributed positively to their skills as a carer.

CARER CENSUS STATEWIDE DATA SURVEY



Census commissioned by Department of Families Fairness and Housing and conducted by Ernst and Young, 2021. Thanks to nearly half of all active foster carers in Victoria who completed the survey. Data reports available: <https://www.dfh.vic.gov.au/publications/strong-carers-stronger-children>



Cultural Engagement

Carer KaFÉ increased access to cultural training to both meet carer demand driven by requirements to be culturally competent prior to having an Aboriginal child placed in their care and, to better equip carers already caring for Aboriginal children.

"The training was very insightful. I came to the training thinking I knew something about the Aboriginal culture. I walked away realising what I knew hardly even scratched the surface and the course gave me better information. Thank you very much for such an enlightening session!"

Foster carer, Mount Waverley

Newly adapted to online delivery, additional sessions of *Nikara's Journey* were commissioned and **15** sessions of the 2-day workshop were delivered to over **180** participants in 2020-2021.

In November 2020, Carer KaFÉ entered a partnership with *Your Mob Learning*, a suite of online resources for carers to access as independent study to enhance their cultural awareness. Around **100** carers accessed this online education resource this financial year.

Throughout this financial year, across all our sessions, **321** carers of Aboriginal children and **45** Aboriginal carers engaged with Carer KaFÉ.



Fundraising

The FCAV operates on limited funding from the Victorian Government through the DFFH. This funding does not cover the full provision of all FCAV services and we have always relied on our fundraising efforts to meet costs.

Without vital donations, the FCAV faces real risk of losing services. Since the advent of the pandemic, our capacity to fundraise has been severely impacted but we are so grateful for the generosity of organisations and individuals, philanthropists and donors who believed in the FCAV and the difference their donation makes to the children and young people in care across Victoria during the year.

This year, we have been so grateful for the generous donations made during several fundraising campaigns:

October 2020 – beneficiary of the **ACF - RO Sub Fund**

December 2020 - **Giving Tuesday** Fundraising Drive

December 2020 - **Premium Yarra Valley Wine offer**

May 2021 - **Volunteers Week** social media drive

June 2021 - **EOFY** Fundraising drive - Supporting Care, Supporting Childhoods

www.fcav.org.au/get-involved

SUPPORT THE FCAV THIS EOFY



FCAV IS A REGISTERED CHARITY WITH DEDUCTIBLE GIFT RECIPIENT STATUS. YOUR VALUABLE DONATION FEEDS DIRECTLY INTO THE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS WE PROVIDE TO THE FOSTER CARERS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG

Thank you to all the donors who made a contribution to the FCAV during our End of Financial Year fundraising drive in June 2021.



In December 2020, the FCAV took part in **Giving Tuesday**, an international fundraising campaign.

Birthday and other Fundraisers

Throughout the year, we are fortunate to receive donations from people celebrating their birthday by raising funds in our name on Facebook.

This is a simple and effective way to support foster care and the FCAV. Thank you so much for choosing us!

If you'd like to be part of it, the FCAV is a registered charity and you can select the Foster Care Association of Victoria as your beneficiary of choice on your next special day.

Alternatively, there are many other ways to fundraise for FCAV. Head to the [Get Involved](#) section on our website for more information about hosting an event or easy ways of fundraising on our behalf.

Does your workplace have a community giving scheme or a charitable foundation? If so, consider nominating FCAV as your chosen charity. Our Fundraising Prospectus is available to support your proposal.

Thank you. Your donation has a direct impact on the work of the FCAV and our support to foster carers and the children and young people in their care.



Premium Wine Fundraiser

November - December 2020

Thank you to everyone who purchased premium Yarra Valley wine via our fundraiser. Some buyers also made a donation to the FCAV on top of their purchases, for which we are so grateful.



Local Matters

With thanks to Grill'd South Yarra, who nominated FCAV in their 'Local Matters' fundraiser in March 21 which we won! While the amount won was small, it all adds up to more support, and was a good opportunity for local foster care community awareness raising.

Treasurer's Report

Zoe Sredovic

Treasurer



The Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV) ended the fiscal year with Net Assets of **\$266,812**, which is an increase of **\$36,207** from the previous year.

FCAV total Income was **\$1,738,996**, (2020: **\$1,967,639**.) Funding provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) to 30 June 2021 was **\$1,585,450** and Other Income of **\$153,546** from Carer Subscriptions, Donations and Fundraising activities was allocated to support Carer Information and Support Services (CISS), Carer Assistance Program (CAP) and project activity of the Carer KaFÉ program, which provides learning and development opportunities for Victorian statutory kinship, accredited foster carers and permanent carers.

A substantial portion of FCAV's revenue is activity-based funding delivered by the Carer KaFÉ program. Due to COVID-19, the Carer KaFÉ could not deliver all face-to-face program activity. Despite this, the DFFH provided grant funding through this period to ensure FCAV remained financially viable and in accordance with the agreement with DFFH, **\$816,659** in additional funding will be set aside for the Carer KaFÉ program in FY22.

Expenditure for the financial year to 30 June 2021 was **\$1,702,789** which was **8%** lower than the previous year. This decrease is primarily due to COVID-19 which impacted expenditures relating to the delivery of learning and development programs for carers. In addition, FCAV management expenditure increased. The primary driver of the increase was the appointment of a permanent part time Finance Manager and Fundraising Officer as well as office relocation expenditure.

Finance plays an important role in partnering with management and staff to identify opportunities to streamline processes or create efficiencies. The Fundraising Officer is currently a vacancy placed on hold till further notice.

FCAV works diligently to deliver high quality services to our carers. On behalf of the FCAV Board, I'd like to thank the DFFH and our donors for their support and thank our staff for their hard work and ability to be flexible, adaptable and stay committed during these unprecedented times.

Financial Report

(Full financial report available on the FCAV website)

Profit and Loss

Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc

Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2021

		2021	2020
	Note	\$	\$
Revenue	4	1,738,996	1,967,639
Employee benefits expense	5	(1,053,900)	(858,943)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	5	(62,725)	(45,544)
Consultancy fees		(429,794)	(707,054)
Administrative expenses		(15,112)	(41,859)
Carer and event expenses		(19,309)	(47,650)
Office expenses		(53,687)	(45,244)
Occupancy expenses		(20,381)	(54,170)
Operating expenses		(45,103)	(35,355)
Finance costs		(2,778)	(4,561)
Surplus before income tax		36,207	127,259
Income tax expense		-	-
Surplus for the year		36,207	127,259
Other comprehensive income, net of income tax			
Revaluation changes for property, plant and equipment		-	-
Total comprehensive income for the year		36,207	127,259

Balance Sheet

Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc

Statement of Financial Position

As At 30 June 2021

	Note	2021	2020
		\$	\$
ASSETS			
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	6	1,348,063	621,184
Trade and other receivables	7	45,421	70,857
Prepayments		-	1,603
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		1,393,484	693,644
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, plant and equipment	8	-	6,583
Right-of-use assets	11	78,718	56,526
TOTAL NON-CURRENT ASSETS		78,718	63,109
TOTAL ASSETS		1,472,202	756,753
LIABILITIES			
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade and other payables	9	1,044,073	429,885
Lease liabilities	11	51,087	46,031
Employee benefits	10	58,457	37,234
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		1,153,617	513,150
NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Lease liabilities	11	31,366	10,977
Employee benefits	10	20,407	2,021
TOTAL NON-CURRENT LIABILITIES		51,773	12,998
TOTAL LIABILITIES		1,205,390	526,148
NET ASSETS		266,812	230,605
EQUITY			
Retained earnings		266,812	230,605
TOTAL EQUITY		266,812	230,605

Auditor's Report

McConachie Stedman

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Clayfield, Q 4011

Auditor's Independence Declaration To The Responsible Persons Of Foster Care Association Of Victoria Inc

In accordance with the requirements of section 60-40 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, as lead auditor for the audit of Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc for the year ended 30 June 2021, I declare that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, there have been:

- (a) No contraventions of the auditor independence requirements as set out in section 60-40 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 in relation to the audit; and,
- (b) No contraventions of any applicable code of professional conduct in relation to the audit.



Mr Benjamin Horner
Chartered Accountant; Registered Company Auditor
Director
McConachie Stedman Audit and Assurance Pty Ltd
619 Ruthven Street
Toowoomba Qld 4350

31 August 2021

Statement by the Board of Directors

Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc

Directors' Declaration

The responsible persons declare that in the responsible persons' opinion:

- there are reasonable grounds to believe that the registered entity is able to pay all of its debts, as and when they become due and payable; and
- the financial statements and notes satisfy the requirements of the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012* and the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012*.

Signed in accordance with subsection 60.15(2) of the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission Regulation 2013*.

Responsible person *Tori Smith*
Tori Smith

Responsible person *Zoe Sredovic*
Zoe Sredovic

Dated this 31st day of August 2021

Reconciliation Action Plan

Our Vision for Reconciliation

The Foster Care Association of Victoria's (FCAV) vision for reconciliation is a nation that acknowledges historic truths and their current impacts and where First Nations' cultures are recognised, understood and celebrated by all, as part of our community and country's identity.

The FCAV advocates for a Child Protection system that ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are safe and connected to their family, culture and community. We support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination in all areas of the care of children and young people.

Our RAP

The FCAV proudly launched our second Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in June 2020 to support growth towards excellence in cultural safety within our organisation and to promote the principles of reconciliation within our membership of foster carers across Victoria. The RAP provides the platform for the FCAV to recognise, monitor and increase the integration of cultural awareness, safety and support into our relationships and membership support. This includes developing our relationships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) colleagues and subscribers to support communities' focus on self-determination and healing. The FCAV is committed to Aboriginal Child Placement Principles and the Wungurilwil Gagapaduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement.

Activities and Events

There have been many valuable opportunities for staff as well as carers in relation to our Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan this last year, 2020-21. Despite working from home we have managed to continue the momentum and provide rich opportunities for learning and developing greater awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

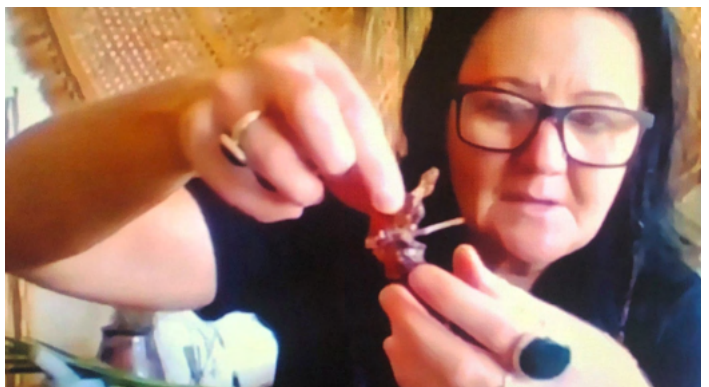
There have been many highlights. One particularly enriching experience was listening to Cassie Leatham spend an online session with the CISS Team. Cassie welcomed staff to a two-hour session where we explored Aboriginal art symbols and used paints to draw our own personal stories. The team shared their stories with each other using painting and Aboriginal symbols. It was a very engaging and relaxed session and provided rich knowledge and information through art.

Each team member used significant symbols to tell their own personal story about their family and connections. It was a rich learning experience to reflect on what each person brings to the role at FCAV as we support foster carers and the children in their care.



Above: Cassie showing us wild river mint that grows along rivers, inhale the minty smell to alleviate tension and anxiety, or you can chew on it for fresh breath!

Below: Cassie showing us sap from the Wattle tree that she suggests can be eaten as a treat, pour over hot water to turn it to jelly! It can also be used as a natural waxing strip!



Cassie Leatham is from the Taungurung people from the Kulin Nation. She is an Indigenous artist, designer, master weaver, traditional dancer, bushtukka woman and educator.

www.wildblakarts.com.au/

Art Therapy Sessions for Carers

The FCAV provided opportunities for foster carers to enhance their knowledge and learnings during the past year and despite having to be online we decided to offer Art Therapy Sessions for Carers. The sessions ran for a six week period. Fifteen carers were invited to participate in a two-hour weekly art therapy session. In one of the sessions, Cassie Leatham was a guest presenter and she ran a basket weaving session for the carers. She provided rich knowledge and information about the significance of basket weaving in her culture. The group were engaged and made some beautiful woven items over several weeks.

Emma Bamblett, was also a guest presenter at one of the sessions and focused on rock art. She too provided rich information and knowledge and the group was engaged in the activity.



Above left: The FCAV/ Carer KaFÉ delighted to be hosting the Carer Cultural Walk at Cranbourne in Bunurong country on this sunny day.



Above right: Outside meeting with thanks to Kylie Ponchard from VACCA attend a training session for all FCAV to discuss Nugel and the section 18 Act.

There were several carers who had Aboriginal children in their care and had questions answered in relation to providing information and cultural connection for the children in their care. An interesting issue was raised in relation to gender and what can be shared and taught to children in care by their carers and other Aboriginal Elders.

All the carers had sought information and advice from the sector in relation to providing rich knowledge and culture to the Aboriginal children in their care.

Following these offerings for 2021, we are hoping to engage with a male Aboriginal artist to provide more knowledge and learning to the groups of carers we work with.

Cultural Events

The FCAV and VACCA, with support from Carer KaFÉ, were delighted to host over **75** kinship and foster carers and the children in their care at our first face to face event that was a Carer Cultural Walk at Cranbourne in Bunurong country during the school holidays on 8th April 2021.

Our tour leader, Jaffa, did a water acknowledgement and guided our group to each plant a Midgen berry plant that is one of the most delicious bush tucker plants and we learned that it is similar in taste to the blueberry, is ripe in summer and can be eaten fresh or in pies or jams.

We also learned about tools and the seasons. Some are used seasonally such as eel traps. Eels are caught during the autumn season. We also held a possum skin that was incredibly soft, learned about traditional medicines and then walked to the Woodland Picnic area for a wonderful BBQ. The children enjoyed some traditional art and craft activities, such as bead making with their carers. Carers had a great time and were able to mingle with each other and catch up with staff from both FCAV and VACCA.

NAIDOC Week Celebrations



**HEAL
COUNTRY!**
4-11 JULY 2021

FCAV staff got involved in the Clothing The Gap Walk/Run event for NAIDOC Week that celebrates the theme "Heal Country" for this year! #HealCountry

Other Learnings

We were so grateful to have VACCA staff, Brent Ryan and a representative from the VACCA Nugel team, Kylie Ponchard, come along to one of our only in-person events for 2021 to speak about Section 18 and Transition of children and young people in care out of the Child Protection system and into Nugel. They presented the Review of the Family Matters Report, 2020.

The FCAV celebrated National Reconciliation Week as a staff and broadly with carers, attending a variety of events including National Sorry Day at Whittlesea Council on 26th May, 2021.

Guiding Principles for working with ACCOs

The FCAV developed Guiding Principles in partnership with VACCHO as one of our RAP initiatives. These principles are designed to guide FCAV staff in developing positive relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, to engage and work together to deliver services and initiatives in the out of home care sector.

Read the FCAV RAP here: www.fcav.org.au/about/rap

With Gratitude

By investing in the FCAV, donors provide the organisation with the resources that are not covered by our modest core funding. We like to say to the FCAV punches above its weight in many ways. According to latest data, the FCAV supported over **30%** more carers than we are funded for and added to our suite of services to support, inform and advocate on behalf of nearly **2000** foster carer households across Victoria.

This work directly impacts the care provided to the thousands of Victorian children and young people in foster care. It stands to reason that the better the carer is supported, the better care they can provide for the child, thus improving their quality of life now and into the future. We rely on donations and fundraising to continue to offer and expand our services and opportunities to carers in Victoria so that those benefits of support reach all carers and the children and young people in their care. THANK YOU!

Carer Assistance Program Funding

The FCAV is grateful to the **Australian Communities Foundation, RO Sub-Fund** for the seeding grant, without which the FCAV would not have had the resources to advocate for the development of the **Carer Assistance Program**. This grant enabled FCAV to identify carer support needs during COVID-19, develop a program model and seek funding to establish and run the pilot.

The FCAV also thanks the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) which provided funding to run the CAP pilot.

Following the success of the CAP pilot, the Australian Communities Foundation RO Sub-Fund has provided a second grant for 2021/22, which will be used to enhance our carer well-being and support services.



Office Relocation Assistance

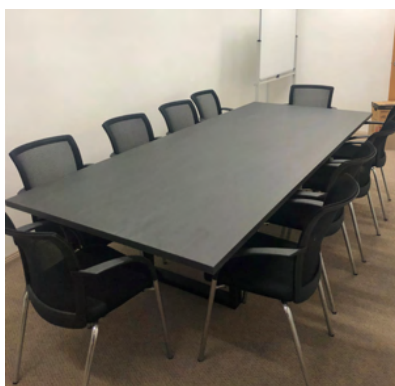
FCAV was touched to receive a donation of office equipment in memory of **Susan Weir**.

Susan's family also donated most of Susan's high quality furniture to foster carers struggling financially and in need of things such as beds, drawers, couches and dining tables to meet the needs of the children in their care. FCAV extends sincere thanks to the Weir family.



A special thanks to **Russell Kennedy Lawyers** who provided many hours advice and support to our lease arrangements in order to move premises.

Thank you to Treasurer of FCAV, **Zoe Sredovic** and her husband **Paul Mizzi** from Keni Architectural Panels, who donated the custom-made board table for FCAV's new office.



Financial Donors

Thank you to these supporters who made significant monetary donations to the FCAV throughout the financial year:

- **Australian Communities Foundation, RO Sub-Fund**
- **Amrita Bhattacharyya**
- **Clarinda Manor Pty Ltd**
- **Eddie's Backpacks**
- **Simon Castle**
- **Grill'd Pty Ltd (Local Matters)**
- **Julia Heagerty**
- **David Kennedy**
- **Joan Ozanne-Smith**
- **Justine Stuckings**

Find out about making a donation on the FCAV website:

www.fcav.org.au/get-involved/donate-now

Supporting Care. Supporting Childhoods.

The FCAV accepts with gratitude, donations to our programs providing quality support for volunteer foster carer families across the state.

www.fcav.org.au/Get-Involved



Wine Donors

The FCAV thanks these **Premium Yarra Valley** wineries who made generous gifts of wine in support of our 2020 online fundraiser.

The fundraiser gave our members and supporters the opportunity to purchase premium wines at discounted prices and served as a successful fundraiser for the FCAV.

These donations were truly appreciated and essential to our fundraising success. Donations such as these make it possible to ensure foster families receive the support they do from FCAV.

Special thanks to these premium wineries for their generous donations:

- **Applecross Bicknell fc**
- **Boat O’Craig**
- **De Bortoli Wines**
- **Greenstone Vineyards**
- **Mandala Wines**
- **Medhurst Wines**
- **Oakridge Wines**
- **Punt Road**
- **Rob Dolan**
- **Squitchy Lane Vineyard**
- **Sutherland Estate**
- **Yeringberg**

Donations of Goods & Services

These individuals and/or businesses donated gifts or in-kind support to the FCAV that we were able to pass on as gifts or support to our carer members:

- [Australian Quilters Association](#), who donated over 50 patchwork quilts for children in care
- Backpack4VicKids - Back to school kits
- Baker & McKenzie - Legal
- Children First Foundation, Rotary Club Preston and IDFA, who funded free streaming access to the ‘RAZZAMATAZZ’, ‘CIRCUS QUIRKUS’ and ‘WORLD FESTIVAL OF MAGIC’ 2020 shows for children in care.
- Eddie’s backpacks - students from Parade College Bundoora - Digby Morrell from Penleigh and Essendon Grammar – Darrell Cruse
- Kate Gray - Professional proof reading services
- [Mity Digital](#) - Michael Scrusse who has provided ongoing digital and website support, including Shopify.
- Pinchapoo, who donated over 250 Sukin beauty packs for foster carers
- Russell Kennedy Lawyers
- Sue-Anne Hunter, Consultant
- Brent Ryan - VACCA

Pro Bono Support

Baker McKenzie.

The FCAV extends sincere thanks to Baker & McKenzie Lawyers who provided over **160** hours of pro bono legal advice and content for FCAV

regarding foster carers’ rights.

We thank Baker & McKenzie for the professional legal assistance to both FCAV and the carers who seek our assistance. Carers will now benefit from their legal expertise via the CISS program.

Thank you to **Michael Scrusse** from **Mity Digital** who provides ongoing service and pro bono support to our digital capacity and website.



FCAV TEAM 2020/2021

Board of Directors 2020/2021

President - Tori Smith

Vice-President - Luke Sapwell

Treasurer - Zoe Sredovic

Secretary - Sue Segar

Non executive members

Megan Sadlier

Alexis King

Kym Phillips

Malcolm McLeod

Daryl Sloan

Co-opted Members of the Board

Madeleine Kapira

Alexis King

Resigned

Melissa Davey, January 2021

Madeleine Kapira, February 2021

Jemma Caleo, June 2021

FCAV and Carer KaFÉ Staff 2020/2021

Chief Executive Officer - Samantha Hauge

Office Manager - Jennifer Galea

Office Manager - Bronwyn Hume (Maternity leave since May 2021)

Finance Officer - Jennifer Williamson

Carer Information and Support Service Team

Team Leader - Tessa Hughes

Carer Assistance Program - Tonya Bavaro

Program Coordinator - Deb Collard

Carer Support Worker - Biba Dickson

Carer Support Worker - Leigh Hillman

Engagement and Advocacy Team

Communications Manager - Anna Viola

Member Relations Coordinator - Claire Mance

Project Officer - Rowan Pulford

Carer KaFÉ Team

Program Manager - Paula White

Project Administrator - Laura Hunter

Resigned

Member Relations Coordinator - Peta Daly - February 2021

Fundraising Officer - Fiona Dickson - April 2021

Carer KaFÉ Project Officer - Claudia Colaneri - April 2021

Carer Support Worker - Cam Luong - November 2020

A Year in Reflection

The FCAV celebrates the commitment of our foster carers and the children and young people in their care.

The 2021 Foster Care Week Theme: **“Adaptability” Caring through COVID-19**, will be an opportunity to thank and congratulate foster carers and also recognise the sector’s adaptability to meet their needs. The FCAV looks forward to continuing to adapt to meet carers needs as they keep children and young people safe and connected during the pandemic, providing a vital community service, in a health crisis, as dedicated volunteers.

FOSTER CARE WEEK
12-18 SEPTEMBER 2021

Adaptability...
Caring through Covid



SELF-CARE FOR CARERS

Looking after yourself during this time is critical.

As carers, it is easy to keep giving to others and forget to nourish and care for ourselves.

Remember: you matter too!



TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY

- Look for opportunities to exercise and stretch as often as possible, such as while watching TV.
- Build physical play into the day to get your heart rate up and engage your muscles.
- If you are having trouble sleeping, use sleep story podcasts or meditation apps, or read a book before bed.

CONNECT WITH OTHERS

- Set up a video coffee date with your friends.
- Call a family member or another foster carer.
- Join online groups on topics that interest you.
- Connect with your community and ask for help when required.



LOOK AFTER YOUR MIND

- Meditate when possible, and practice mindfulness. This can be as simple as taking a moment to breathe deeply or savour the taste of something you enjoy eating.
- Listen to a podcast to make yourself laugh.
- Forgive yourself - stress is normal and you are doing your best!

ENGAGE YOUR BRAIN

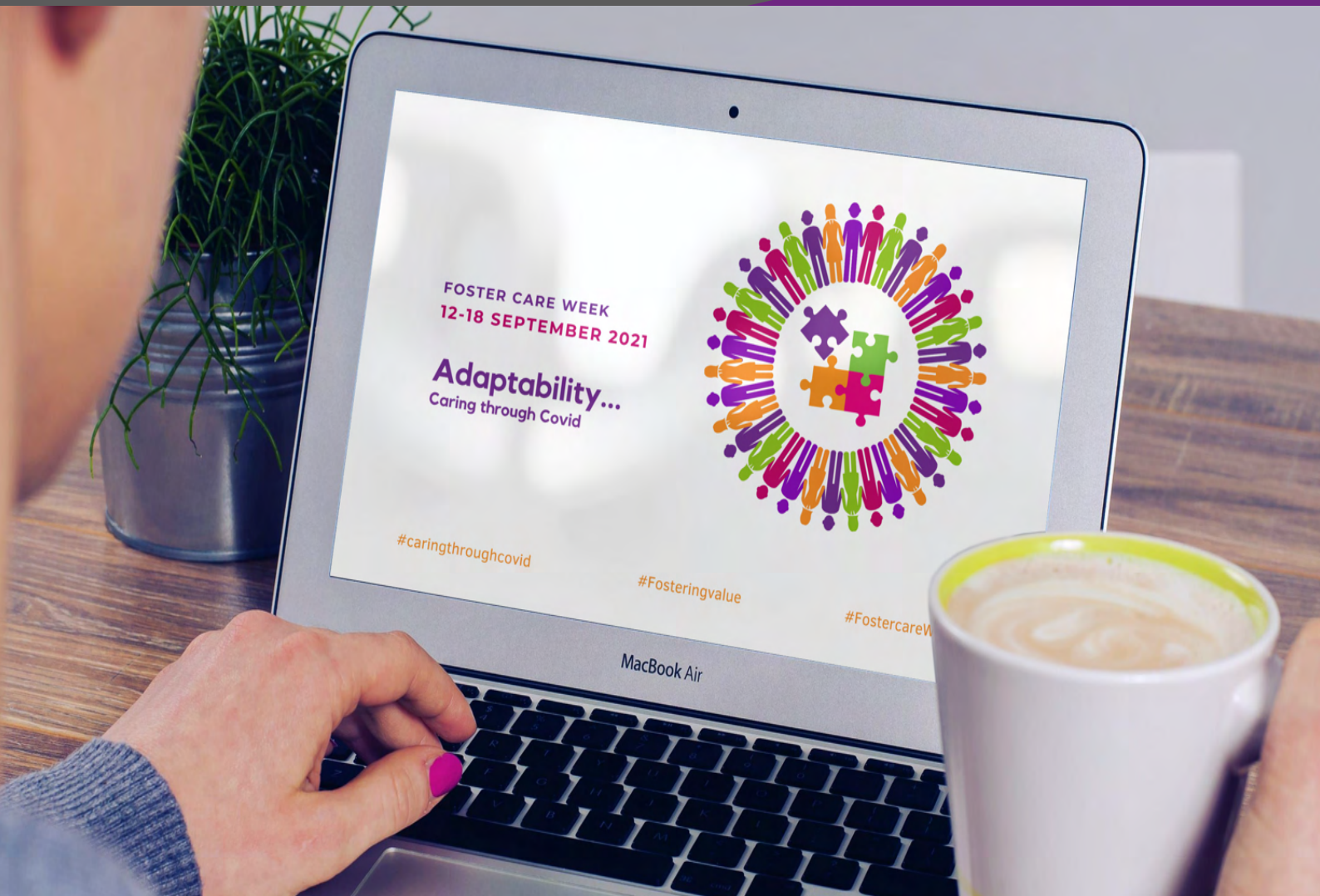
- Explore topics that interest you through reading, podcasts or streaming documentaries.
- Consider learning a hobby via YouTube videos, drawing or other creative activities.
- Try crosswords, sudoku or other puzzles.
- Learn yoga or dance routines or have fun trying!

OR TRY THESE SUPPORTS FOR CARERS

CARER SUPPORT SERVICES

- Call FCAV Carer Support and Information Service: 9416 4292
- Call or access the Carer Assistance Program online: www.fcav.org.au/carer-resources/cap
- Attend an online training session via: www.carerkafe.org.au
- Reach out to your caseworker for support





Acknowledgement of Country

The Foster Care Association of Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and live. We recognise First Nations people and their connection to land, sea and community, and pay our respect to Elders past and present.

Contact:

Foster Care Association of Victoria
Ground Floor, 2 Greenwood Street,
Abbotsford VIC 3067
Telephone: (03) 9416 4292
Email: admin@fcav.org.au
Website: www.fcav.org.au

