

Tuesday, 13 November 2018

MEDIA RELEASE: No commitment on funding despite evidence

There has been no commitment made by either party in the lead up to the election, to cover the cost deficit faced by home-based carers of Victorian children and young people. The Foster Care Association is urging them to take the opportunity to address the disparity in the carer allowance that means the lowest two levels of basic care are underfunding carers by at least \$70 per week, per placement¹. This is on top of the loss of income earning capacity that comes with meeting the needs of children and young people who've experienced trauma, neglect and abuse. On top of this shortfall, reimbursement to carers for expenses on things such as speech therapy can take weeks or even be refused. So often, the carer just pays out of pocket to avoid the children in their care missing out and the stress; many cannot afford to keep doing that.

"I was paying \$180 for speech therapy sessions for my six year old. As soon as he came to me I recognised that he needed them. When I finally got hold of a worker I said, 'you cannot send him to school like this'. "The response came back no, they wouldn't fund speech therapy. He was at risk of falling behind from day one, so I organised and paid for an appointment myself. In that first session he improved. The agency and the DHHS eventually gave permission for his therapy but with the caveat that I continue to pay for it myself." **Kerryn Heazle, foster carer.**

Financial strain is consistently the highest priority in the fight to retain good foster carers, as reflected in the responses to the FCAV's CarerLife surveys².

The FCAV asks for:

- The immediate adjustment of the two lowest levels of carer allowance (levels 1 and 2), to increase the basic carer allowance by an average of \$70 per week to meet Foster Care Estimates.
- Increase the client expense reimbursement fund and make it an easy process for carers to cover all extra necessary costs for the young person in care such as therapy, health needs, extra curricula activities, sport uniforms and additional travel.

Foster carers and their supporters have sent over 400 letters to MPs via our campaign, calling on them to show their support to these valuable volunteers by funding care properly and supporting their efforts bring young people a sense of worth and security in their lives.

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¹ McHugh, M. 2017). Victoria's declining foster care allowances: a comparative analysis (SPRC Report 2017). Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia.

http://futurefostercare.org.au/images/documents/Marilyn%20McHugh_FosterKinship%20Conference%20Melbourne%202017.pdf

² FCAV CarerLife Survey- <https://www.fcav.org.au/images/CarerLife/CarerLife4Results.pdf>