



## Monday 14 September, 2020 Media Release

As foster carers around Victoria celebrate Foster Care Week this 13-19 September 2020, they are continuing their vital work to bring stability and joy into vulnerable children's lives during lockdown across the state.

With all the challenges of 2020, foster carers have continued to offer their hearts and homes to more than 2,300 Victorian children and young people. Carrying on in times of great challenge is part of their DNA.

**Belinda Fairleigh** is a foster carer in Point Cook Victoria. She and her husband are caring for siblings, one of whom was born during lockdown and so has only left the house a handful of times in her life. Belinda quit her job to take on the full-time care of the two young boys in 2019. With the initial lockdowns Belinda says their regular, busy routines were missed, but as time went on, she has adapted and recognises some real benefits.

"The boys have thrived. At first, we missed all their activities but the opportunity to just be together every day has had a positive impact on them. It just goes to show that stability and consistency is at the heart of wellbeing for children. Spending one-on-one time with me without the swimming lessons, kinder and extra appointments has meant I get down and play with them more and our bonds have never been stronger."

"Having my husband working from home means his commute time is now time spent with them and they have definitely connected with him more."

**Elicia Briggs** is a fulltime teacher from Craigieburn Victoria. She and her husband are foster carers of two school-age children. Elicia has drawn on her resourcefulness as a carer to make the best out of this challenging time.

"I've got to know who the children are, and they've got to know us. The extended time together has meant closer bonds as a family. Being there with them remote schooling has meant that I've also got to know them as learners which has further strengthened our bonds."

"The lockdown has meant we are facilitating remote access visits with families and the children have both had heightened fears due to COVID-19 and what that might mean for their biological parents."

"Where I'd usually be able to take a break by heading to the hairdresser or making an appointment to see friends, lockdown has meant finding time for myself that is non-negotiable. I've been doing the online art groups with FCAV as a time just for me where I'm accountable to show up to spend time with other carers.

It's really nice that they're not people I work with and they're other carers so I don't have to explain to the group just how much goes into working fulltime on top of being a fulltime foster carer.

“Foster carers sit in that place between being responsible for every decision and care of these little people with complex trauma, but none of the rights of being the parent, so it’s great to be in a “zoom room” with other carers who understand the particular challenges and joys of being a foster carer.”

Minister for Disability Ageing and Carers, Luke Donnellan thanked foster carers for always going above and beyond what is expected of them.

“Every day, you make a significant contribution to the lives of children and young people who come into your care, and I know it’s more difficult than ever before. This Foster Care Week I’d like to thank you for opening your hearts and homes to ensure Victorian children and young people can thrive and remain connected to their education, particularly during this time.”

“Foster carers take on one of the most complex and important roles in our community. Never has a safe home, support to education and wellbeing been more important for our children and young people.” **Samantha Hauge, CEO, Foster Care Association of Victoria (FCAV).**

Featured foster carers are available for interview and photograph opportunities (children in care must remain unidentifiable in any images).

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