

The Child and Family Welfare Association of Australia Inc. (CAFWAA)

Their Lives, Our Work:
Critical questions for practice in child, youth and family services

National Symposium 2005

The Symposium will bring together international experts in the field and a range of practitioners, carers and young people to share learning, critique current practice and inform our future way of working. The Symposium aims to improve policy, practice and management, particularly for those working with high-needs (risk) adolescents. Register now.

Conference Program and Registration Brochure (PDF 588kb) at:

<http://www.acwa.asn.au/cafwaa/2005nationalsymposium.pdf>

To be held at:
Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre
Preston, Victoria

10th, 11th, 12th of October 2005

Children Know...

© Stella Quarrels

You can look in their eyes, and see by the pain,
They've sailed some rough seas, and suffered in vain;
Their spirits are broken, their faith totally shattered,
And given up hope, their little lives mattered!

They've been on the front-lines, like soldiers of war,
Fought endless battles, with no chance to score;
There were no medals of honor, pinned on their chests,
And no way to escape, life's toughest of tests!

They've carried their burdens, without speaking to others,
For the 'weight', is their own, fathers and mothers;
They've hungered far more, than there ever was cause,
Yet accepted their fate, with little more than a pause!

So remember, when one of these 'soldiers'
Are given to you,

They'll fight against everything that you try to do;
But be persistent, don't quit, just stick to your plan,
For the child in the "soldier", will seek your gentle hand!

Slowly their minds, and their spirits will mend,
When they are secure, that you're their friend;
And that is the greatest gift, you could ever bestow.
For when you give from the heart, all children know!

Information in this newsletter has been obtained from sources deemed reliable. However, we cannot guarantee accuracy; readers should rely on their own enquiries. All articles submitted are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or Connecting Foster Carers SA Inc.

Face to Face & Streams and Themes

FACE to FACE is a national partnership forum of all stakeholders involved in out-of-home care.

FACE to FACE will host a national forum supporting positive leaving care and transition experiences on **23 to 25 August 2005 in Brisbane QLD.**

The Forum will:

- Promote awareness of transition options and practice
- Highlight need for transition planning and preparation to be incorporated into casework practice to improve outcomes for children and young people
- Engage across governments child & family welfare, health, education, disability and youth justice
- Share good practice around transition services
- Learn from current research evidence
- Encourage further research

The principles of Face to Face - collaboration, participation, partnership and learning - provide a framework through which we seek a range of innovative solutions to known issues within the care system.

FACE to FACE is not a conference, but a dynamic, working forum which facilitates a process of engagement, exchange and learning in a collaborative environment.

Time:
5pm Tuesday 23rd August through to
5pm Thursday 25th.

Registration: \$495 (inc GST)
Includes for forum papers & materials, opening dinner, refreshments and lunches

Venue: Bardon Centre Mt Coot-tha, Brisbane

T 02 4572 3079
F 02 4572 3972
E sharyn@mob.com.au
P PO Box 4023 Pitt Town NSW 2756
W www.create.org.au/f2f

We wish to thank those carers who have already registered their details recently. For those carers who have yet to register, we welcome you to submit your details to us by email or mail.

Connecting Foster Carers - SA Inc.



"Together we can make a difference"

ISSUE 4 - WINTER 2005

Welcome

Hello Everyone,

The last couple of months have been busy to say the least. CFC board members continue to be very involved in areas of policy and advocacy for carers. The ongoing meetings in the drafting of the new standards framework for Alternative care has been very important for us and as foster carers we have had a significant input into those meetings to help and ensure that we as carers are being heard and that a fair and just process occurs for carers. My true belief is that we are able to provide a direct input and a strong influence into this area. It is with all the feedback we get from carers that influences our discussions, so please continue to email or write with your comments, issues and ideas.

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to our Minister Hon Jay Weatherill, Lutheran Community Care, Department for Families and Communities – Alternative care Department, Support agencies and most of all those carers who have supported us during the last year and who continue to support us, it is with great pleasure to announce after some long days and nights and stressful months that we have obtained our "incorporated" status on the 31st May, this has been such an achievement for carers in SA. We have now due to our huge success and by the support given been endorsed as the Peak Body for carers in SA, this now gives carers a real collective voice and representation in the sector.

We have arranged a meeting in July with the Hon Jay Weatherill MP, Minister For Families and Communities to discuss future directions, finance's and independent Advocacy issues for carers as we believe to be able to progress your peak body into the future, better funding arrangements will be needed to provide a more solid and direct service to carers. It is our intention to broadly influence and develop systems advocacy for carers and to give carers a clear voice in the sector to build upon collaborative partnerships and open and transparent policies. We feel it is now we as carers need to drive positive change and to not just say we are stakeholders but to stand and be significant partners in the Care Team of the young people and children we care for on a daily basis 24/7, 365 days a year.

Also to note we are very keen to hear from Indigenous carers and Relative, Kinship carers for our board membership, so if any carers in these areas would like to volunteer and have an active involvement as part of our team of carers on the board, we would be very happy to hear from you.

It is with this in mind that the following article is positioned, it's a great read and very real, so take the time to read on, you'll find it extremely interesting, and till next time have a great day.

Stephen Hodges
Board Member

*We know we can not change the whole world,
but we can change the whole world of a
person...Join us!*

INSIDE

Slovenian Syndicate
Internet is a Tool
Face to Face
General News
An Option for Carers
A Tribute to
Foster Parents

A Tribute to Foster Parents

© 2004 Lawrence P. Adams

I have written a number of articles where I have been extremely critical of the foster care system. I feel it is badly broken and in need of drastic reform. There is one area; however, that I have not been critical of...the foster parents.

It seems, from my point of view, that the only time the general public thinks of foster parents/children is when a horrendous story reaches the headlines. Even then we may only talk about the story for a few days, when it leaves the headlines...they leave our thoughts.

Yes, there are a few bad apples in foster parenting, just as there are biological or adoptive parents. This however, does not portray the vast majority of foster parents. As one who lived within the foster care system for eighteen years, I believe I can speak with a degree of authority on the subject.

Maybe it is time for the media to tell the story of those who dedicate their lives to make a child's life better rather than the few who destroy them! Foster parents, to me, are very special people in our society. They provide a temporary refuge for those of us considered society's "throw away kids."

I do know that being a foster parent takes a very special type of individual. It takes someone who knows both sides of life. One who knows what it is like to be loved and also knows what it is like to be abused. I am not talking about "guessing" what abuse is like. You have to know the feelings of deep, dark despair that a child feels when he, or she, has been abused and has never been loved.

You see, foster parents in many situations do not receive the perfect little boy, or the perfect little girl, when they take in a child. There is no perfect little child by the time they reach foster care. The damage has already been done and it can be very severe. Children have already been physically or sexually abused, neglected, moved numerous times on the foster care system merry-go-round or just plain abandoned. Yet, foster parents take us kids into their homes for short or extended periods of time. They attempt to provide the nurturing, care and love that has been deprived us.

Many times they do this at great emotional and financial expense to themselves. Most are not fostering for the money, but for the love of the child. They often feel as abandoned by the system as do many of the kids. They should not also go bankrupt in the process. Often, though the system says they are part of a team, foster parents are left swinging in the wind...left to the whim of the current social worker assigned to the child. Their opinions about the child, their progress or problems are left unheard. The "so called" experts feel they know best! However, who knows better what is going on in a child's life than those caring for him/her twenty-four hours a day. Rather than be considered a "servant" of the system...they should be considered their most valuable resource and the "true" experts.

I receive e-mails daily or read posts from groups on the Internet from across the country. In one day recently I received notices from MO, CT, IL, OH, PA, CA, NE, FL and WI. The children have ranged being in the system from one-half year to nine years. Some have had several moves in this time period. The biological parents have been given several stays before TPR proceedings were begun or have yet to begin. All are in foster homes that wish to adopt them into their families if given the opportunity. If a foster parent appears to be advocating "too hard" for a child in their care they are threatened with simply having the child removed from their home. It is things such as this that foster parents must deal with, and they do. Why?...for the love of children!

I for one believe foster parents are the spine and backbone of the foster care system. It is time they are not only heard but also actually listened to by those in charge. Many counties and states are pleading for people to become or stay foster parents, maybe if they were allowed to really be a part of the team, listened to and cared about...more would.

To foster parents everywhere I say a very humble yet sincere THANK YOU for all that you do! You may not know the impact you have on a child's life while they are with you, but you will have one! I for one do not know where I would be today if it were not for people such as you willing to open your home to me as a child. I will be forever grateful. Please continue to be a great strength and courage for children. Sometimes the fruits of your labor may take years to harvest. You must always keep in mind, when taking in a foster child, that you are working toward, not just saving a child, but saving an adult later on down the road.

I have made something of my life, not because of the system and what it put me through as a child, but in spite of it. I wish I could take full credit. But the credit is not mine to take. The credit belongs to those who took, however briefly, the time to make a difference in my life. YOU are my heroes. You may never get a medal or an award. You, however, will be able to know that many of your kids of today or us kids of yesteryear became something...just because of YOU!

I was fortunate to be able to maintain a close relationship with one of my foster families for years after I was removed from their home for the third and final time. I loved them deeply and they will always remain Mom and Dad to me. They knew what they meant to me and the impact they had on my life. They are now long passed on but their impact will continue throughout my life.

You may never know the true impact you have had on a child who has been in your home, however, rest assured there are thousands across the country who say a quiet thank you and a prayer for you each and every night. ■

In 2004, Lawrence P. Adams wrote the poignant book of life through the eyes of a throw away child entitled: *Lost Son? A Bastard Child's Journey of Hope, Search, Discovery and Healing*. A new book, *A Voice from the Voiceless and Forgotten*, will be released summer 2005. Mr Adams serves as an Advocacy Ambassador for International Advocates for Children.

Members in The Spotlight Slovenian Syndicate for foster care families

Betka Skerlak, Secretary Syndicate for foster care families

At the Conference in Prague, one of the new organizational members of IFCO presented a workshop about the status of Foster Carers. An important debate focuses on the payment of foster carers, and about their voice be heard. This is in line with a discussion taking place in many countries, developmental or developed, where foster carers plead for greater recognition, and demand that their rights, and position, be rewarded. We open this debate with the contribution of Slovenia's Syndicate for foster care families, and we invite you to react to it.

Foster Care around the World – Slovenia is part of it Slovenia, a new member of the European Union (since May 2004), is a small, developing country, with a strong concern for Human Rights, particularly regarding children. Yet, the situation of children in the country can only be qualified as "not so bad": you would never find in Slovenia abandoned children on the streets, the state taking care of children separated from their family. But should we be satisfied with the way it does it?

One way to take care is Foster Care, and with the help of IFCO we are advocating and working to develop this alternative, the one that provides children with love, protection and a home of their own. We found a great help, through IFCO and its network, in exchanging experiences and learning from other countries. We came to the conclusion that in Slovenia the foster parents are not considered the way they deserve, and this is the reason why we initiated the Syndicate. In Slovenia, Foster Care is legally defined as an institutionalised form of public service that provides children with substitute family environment and is therefore financed by the state budget. As such, the status is similar to other forms of care, like institutions for children, and the state considers the foster carers as "employees" that should comply with the employer's requisite... but not granting them with the corresponding salary.

Foster carers therefore undergo the inconvenience of both a governmental top-down decision-making process and a lack of recognition of their skills and knowledge. We, as a Syndicate of Foster Care families, claim that :

- The government should acknowledge us with a status equivalent of the one that other social workers have in Slovenia The budget for Foster Care, including a financial benefit for the foster carers, should be in proportion with its weight in the field of childcare, and acknowledge the superior quality of care, and the fact that it is the most appropriate form of upbringing and education for these children.

- The government should acknowledge us with a status equivalent of the one that other social workers have in Slovenia The budget for Foster Care, including a financial benefit for the foster carers, should be in proportion with its weight in the field of childcare, and acknowledge the superior quality of care, and the fact that it is the most appropriate form of upbringing and education for these children. In consequence, we regret that an Act and a new set of regulations on foster care are now being implemented in Slovenia, without any form of cooperation or consultation of foster carers. It created a tense situation, foster carers being put in a position to accept this new regulations on foster care, that we think are inappropriate and unfair, or give up fostering!

- We, as a syndicate, are now fighting to protect foster carers rights and to seek justice for them. We believe that higher standards should be promoted, as well as a greater recognition for the carers, that their voice should be heard, and their talent rewarded – and paid for. We think we have to speak up and no longer be ashamed or embarrassed to demand money for the job done and the energy devoted to children: we perform our job well and fair, we should be clear and courageous when asking for a Salary.

- We advocate that a foster care salary would represent a form of recognition of the work, and of its quality, that it would mean that the state, as "employer" and "monitor" does value it. Slovenia's Constitution, after all, declares that as a legal and social state, Slovenia has to take care of children – What about their Carers?

- We, as a Syndicate of foster care families, are therefore demanding that the state provides us with a pay, and a refund of the expenses related to the care of foster children. This is nothing to be ashamed of: we are no "money grabber", it is only fair that we get paid for the work we perform. We have never considered the payment to be in relation with our foster children as persons, but as a reward from the state to the foster parents for the very special and caring form of social work they perform Everyday.

- We wish that in Slovenia we could give children more than just survival, and we hope that with the help of IFCO we will make a better world for the children... ■

Fact Sheet

CYFS Complaint Handling Process

The following steps will be taken to try to resolve your complaint.

- The Staff member investigating your complaint will talk to you to ensure they clearly understand your concerns and to find out what you want CYFS to do to resolve your complaint.
- The Staff member will talk to staff who have been involved in your case and look at your file to ensure they have all the information relevant to your complaint.
- If further information is required the Staff member will contact you.
- The Staff member will contact you during the investigation to let you know how the investigation is progressing or if they have drawn any conclusions from their investigation. The Staff member may also try to work with you at this time to resolve your concerns.
- A decision on the resolution of the complaint or action to resolve your issues will be made by the date noted in your letter of acknowledgment. If this is not possible, the Staff member will contact you, explain why there will be a delay and set a new resolution date. You will also be advised of the changes and reasons for the delay by letter.

The complaint is resolved when you are satisfied that the issues you have raised have been dealt with effectively or you are prepared to accept that even though you have not been able to achieve the result you wanted, everything possible has been done to resolve the issue.

Options for Carers

If the matter cannot be resolved by the Staff member, you can ring or write to the District Centre Supervisor at the address listed on the attached letter.

If you are still not happy you can ring or write to the District Centre Manager. If your complaint is not resolved at the District Centre you can contact the Customer Service Officer on 82266930 or Free Call 1800 003 305. The Customer Service Officer cannot investigate complaints but will provide information on your rights and other options for a review of your complaint. Options include requesting a review of your complaint that is independent of the District Centre.

If you are still not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation of your complaint you can contact the State Ombudsman. The State Ombudsman's Office is an external, independent agency that can investigate complaints about CYFS and other government organisations.

CYFS is always striving to improve their services to Consumers. If you have used the CYFS complaint resolution process and would like to "Tell Us", your views on how your complaint was handled, please contact Staff in your District Centre, ring the Customer Service Officer in the CitiCentre or write to your local CYFS office. Your comments will help us to identify what is working well and what areas of our complaint resolution process need improvement. ■

The Internet is a Tool

Kreigh Tomaszewski

The Internet is a great resource with a vast collection of the world's knowledge available. Not all knowledge is appropriate for children. And as with any other forum of human activity, there are bad places and people around. Appropriate caution and safety procedures should always be used with power tools, and the Internet certainly is one.

Filtering is one option for protecting yourself online. Some filters are better than others, but no filter can be 100% reliable. Filters can also inappropriately block access to legitimate information, but this issue is getting better over time. Filtering may be part of the answer to appropriate Internet use, but it is not the solution.

When you want to find something online you visit a search engine, type in your query, and get pages of possible results back. If your query was appropriate and reasonably specific, the list of possible websites returned will generally have only appropriate sites included. Teaching proper use of the tool avoids most problems.

Children need to be trained about what to do in a dangerous situation. There will be times they are outside of your protection and control. And they do grow up. You also need to teach them appropriate responses to inappropriate website content. Alt-F4 on Windows, and Command-W on Macintosh will quickly close the current window. When children grow up, the only Internet filters they will have are those you instilled into them during their formative years.

At the start children's use of the internet should be closely supervised so that appropriate use can be taught. To provide supervision when you can't be there I suggest you consider electronic monitoring. There are a variety of inexpensive or free personal firewall and activity monitoring packages available that can do hidden monitoring of websites visited. Inappropriate use can be detected and appropriate consequences provided. A personal firewall is a good idea in general.

And remember, you always have the option of password protecting the computer (or the internet access), and not sharing the password. Personal Filtering software is available from: ■

www.cybersitter.com
www.netnanny.com
www.surfcontrol.com

Carer Information and Support Service

Carer Information and Support Service works to support and empower foster carers

What CISS Does

CISS provides information, support and advice about any issues that arise from being a carer.

CISS will support you by:

- *Providing* answers to your questions
- *Supplying* you with information about your rights and responsibilities as carers
- *Connecting* and referring you to resources that you may need to access as a carer

CISS provides a confidential advisory service through:

- *Listening* to your issues and concerns
- *Assisting* you with problem solving
- *Helping* you to make choices from options that are available

CISS can support you by:

- *Informing* you about procedures used in Special Investigation Unit investigations
- *Promoting* your interests, rights and issues to government departments and agencies that impact upon you as foster carers
- *Advising* you on procedures to make complaints and getting heard, ensuring that you are treated fairly in all dealings with agencies and government departments involved in alternative care and child protection
- *Advising* you about carer rights and standards that are expected in the alternative care sector

CISS is an independent service that is:

- Not a part of CYFS - Children Youth and Family Services
- Not a part of agencies that are responsible for supporting foster carers
- Not a part of any representative carer group

CISS is a service of **Lutheran Community Care**

**Carer Information and Support Service
PO Box 2137, Magill North SA 5072**

08 8331 3111 or ciss@lccsa.org.au ■



LUTHERAN COMMUNITY CARE

Options for Carers

If a carer feels that they have been treated very badly by a social worker, it is possible that the social worker has breached professional standards of ethical conduct. The following information is provided by the Ethics Committee of the S. A. Branch of the Australian Association Of Social Workers (AASW). It explains some facts about that association and where to find out about the ethical code that social workers are expected to abide by. The ethics committee is responsible to handle any complaints about social workers who are members of the AASW.

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is an incorporated peak body for social workers which is managed nationally by a board of directors, comprised of a director from each of the 10 branches, with a President and three Vice Presidents. The executive, directors and national and branch committee members undertake tasks for the AASW in a voluntary (unpaid) capacity. There are currently approximately 6,000 members of the AASW in Australia.

One of the functions of the Association is to provide a process to deal with ethical complaints against social workers from clients, the public, other professionals and other social work colleagues. An Ethics Committee comprising very experienced social workers in each Branch receives complaints made against social workers who are alleged to have violated the AASW Code of Ethics. The committee follows the procedures contained in the AASW Ethics Bylaws to seek a resolution to any complaints.

The AASW website contains a copy of the Code of Ethics and the Ethics Bylaws.

www.aasw.asn.au

As the title Social Worker is not a registered title it is important to understand that there are workers who have no professional social work qualifications, who call themselves a social worker and are not bound by the profession's Code of Ethics. There are also qualified social workers who are not members of the AASW and therefore are also not bound by the ASSW Code of ethics. These two categories of workers can only have allegations of ethical violations against them dealt with by the AASW if they agree to cooperate with the AASW ethic's process. If they refuse to cooperate then any complaint against them will be filed at the National Office and they become ineligible for membership of the AASW until such time as that complaint has been resolved.

Social Workers who are members of the Association agree to abide by the Ethics Code and are answerable to the Association for any breaches of the Code.

To find out if a social worker is a member of the AASW or to enquire about how to deal with allegations of unethical behaviour of a social worker, carers may either call the AASW National Office in Canberra on a toll free number 1800 630 124 or the SA Branch office on a Tuesday or Thursday 9am - 4pm - Ph. 8231 9977.

CFC-SA WEBSITE

www.cfc-sa.org.au

Visit our website for updates and info



CREATE Foundation is a national not-for-profit organisation run by, with and for children and young people in foster and out-of-home care throughout Australia. CREATE aims to ensure all children and young people in care are afforded the same life opportunities as all young Australians. Established in 1993 (previously known as the Australian Association of Young People in Care) CREATE is the only organisation of its kind in Australia and one of only three internationally. CREATE aims to improve the life outcomes of this very vulnerable group through provision of a comprehensive range of products and services that are designed to connect, empower and change both children and young people and the system that plays a vital role in outcomes for this group of children and young people.

Most importantly, the direct participation and input by children and young people has provided governments and agencies with new solutions to address widespread and systemic problems in the care system of Australia.

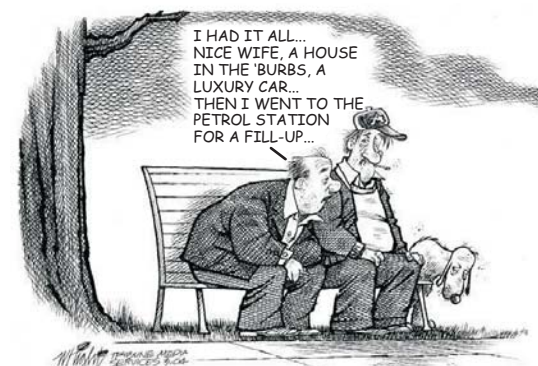
CREATE runs programs and services to:

- **Connect** children and young people to each other.
- **Empower** and resource children and young people in care, and
- **Change** the care system from the inside out through the participation of children and young people themselves.

Children and young people in care can join clubCREATE free and be included in competitions, receive newsletters, birthday cards and be invited to fun, free clubCREATE events.

Young People aged 15-24 yrs in care or who have been in care are invited to take part in Young Consultant's training a fantastic free 3-day training to learn how to be heard and help improve the care sector for other children and young people in care. Young Consultants training is happening 11th - 13th October (school holidays).

For more information call CREATE Foundation on 1800 655 105.



International Foster Care Organisation

Helping to make the right of every child to live in a family a reality

Connecting Foster Carers – SA would like to celebrate their membership to "IFCO" (the International Foster Care Organisation) with an article from their most recent newsletter and some general information. For more information you can contact IFCO directly, or don't hesitate to contact us.

IFCO has as its main aim, to promote and encourage the improvement of the quality of service given to children and young people in care and the development of standards for organisations and individual carers. It has maintained its prominent role in the exchange of research ideas, practices in foster care, world wide, at many conferences and publications. IFCO's role is becoming one of development and advocacy into parts of the world where foster care, as we know it, does not exist, or is very limited. IFCO "Spread the Wings of Foster Care" into South America in 2003, and has established a network working to improve foster care in that continent. We are currently working with several East European countries to establish foster care systems to replace mass orphanages.

JOIN: By being an IFCO member, you contribute to the work of IFCO worldwide, receive regular IFCO newsletters, are informed about upcoming conferences and receive a 10% discount on early conference registration. Membership enables IFCO to continue its role as an international charity and to promote, develop and strengthen family Foster Care worldwide. Membership runs from 1 July to 30 June. There are categories for organisations, individuals and youth. The Australian equivalent fee is only around \$A385 for organisations, \$A50 for individuals, and \$A20 for youth. Contact John Hulskamp for details of how to join. His contact details are:

John HULSKAMP, Treasurer, IFCO
E: treasurer@ifco.info | www.ifco.info
T: (03) 9596 2782

7-13 August 2005:
IFCO World Conference Madison, Wisconsin, USA

25-30 June 2006:
IFCO 2006 SEOUL-Training Seminar, Seoul, South Korea

11-16 February 2007:
IFCO World Conference, Hamilton, New Zealand