



10 September 2018

### **MEDIA RELEASE: LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS CALLS FOR MORE FOSTER CARERS**

As Life Without Barriers (LWB) gears up to celebrate its many wonderful foster and kinship carers during Foster and Kinship Care Week 2018 (9-15 September), the organisation is calling for more people to help care for the increasing numbers of children who need safe, supportive and nurturing homes.

According to recent studies from the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, over the last five years there has been an 18 per cent increase in the number of children in out of home care, from 40,549 in 2012-13 to 47,915 in 2016-17.<sup>1</sup>

LWB Chief Executive Claire Robbs said, "Life Without Barriers has over 2,660 foster carers across Australia, and we thank and celebrate them this week for their invaluable contribution to the lives of children and young people in their care. However, there are many more children and young people who deserve the same level of safety, care and stability that most of us take for granted," she said.

"We believe ensuring the welfare of children in our communities is everybody's business," Ms Robbs said, "and I urge anyone who truly wants to help a child succeed in life, who has the time and energy to support a child or young person to contact us to find out if fostering is right for you."

Life Without Barriers is looking for carers for children of all age groups and abilities – from babies and toddlers to children and young people, some of them with complex needs or disabilities.

Ms Robbs said, "Children in care have often been through difficult life circumstances and may have experienced trauma, so we need empathetic people who are understanding of behavioural issues that could arise from these experiences.

"We especially want people who are willing to partner with the birth family and our team of care professionals to help preserve family ties and ensure the best outcomes for children in foster care," she said.

"Life Without Barriers is looking for full-time, short-term and respite carers, so whether you can spare one weekend a month or more, please don't hesitate to contact us. You can make a real difference to the lives of children in your community if you are able to get involved.

"We welcome individuals and families from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds or marital status – single parents, same sex couples, de facto or married couples, with or without children – who are willing to open their hearts and homes to vulnerable children and young people in our communities," she said. "We're less concerned about your age, income or relationship. We need carers with attributes and beliefs that we know are good for children."

Potential carers will need to undergo background checks prior to being authorised. They will need to have a spare bedroom in their residence so that children can feel secure in their own space. Life Without Barriers will provide full carer training and on-call support 24 hours a day.

**If you are interested in becoming a foster carer, please contact [carers@lwb.org.au](mailto:carers@lwb.org.au) or 1300 592 227 or find out more at [beafostercarer.com.au](http://beafostercarer.com.au)**

#### **In New South Wales:**

**Meet Chloe, previously in foster care, and her carer, Steve**

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Child protection Australia 2016-17*, Child welfare series no. 68. Cat. No. CWS 63. Canberra: AIHW

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Chloie is an inspiring young woman who is studying primary school teaching. For five years until she started uni and moved on campus, she lived with her foster carer Steve and his wife Vickie, along with her three younger siblings.

Chloie had been in care from the age of 10, but when she moved in with Steve and Vickie, she knew she had found her home. "It was scary but I knew that I would be going into a loving home. When I met them [Vickie and Steve], they were lovely," Chloie said. "They actually gave me a little welcome package and a little card that I still have today."

Steve feels becoming a carer is the best thing he has ever done. "I remember reading a motivational book years and years ago," he said. "The happiest people in life are those that have purpose. I've come to realise that over the last several years that this is the purpose that my wife and I were meant for."

[Download high res photo of Chloie and Steve](#)

## Meet Stacey, previously in foster care

Stacey is a young woman with an exciting future. She is 18 and studying at Newcastle University, with plans to complete a social work degree and work with other young people, either in foster care or in a health setting. She's just moved out on her own and bought a new car, and also holds down two casual jobs.

Stacey, along with her brother and sister, had to be removed from her parents when Stacey was four years old. Stacey and her siblings went through two other placements before they were placed with her long term carer, who Stacey lived with for 11 years until she moved out on her own a few months ago.

Stacey's face lights up when she talks about her carer and her family. "My carer's family took me in because they were a loving family and it was important to me because I needed that love and support to help me grow as a person. Without that, I wouldn't have a sense of identity of who I am as a person today," she said.

[Download high res photo of Stacey](#)

## Meet Kieren, previously in foster care

Kieren is a young man who works full time with plans to buy a house in the future, marry his girlfriend of two years and loves to spend time with his dog Benji! He entered foster care at the age of 12 and says that his foster carer has played a big part in who he is today.

Kieren's carer provided him with outdoorsy opportunities likes riding motorbikes, building go karts, having bonfires and BBQs. As well as the fun times, his carer also guided him through the challenges of his teenage years. "I can deal with people better because whenever I had a struggle or disagreement with other kids, he'd let us deal with it ourselves - but if it was going the wrong way, he'd come in and show us how we could better deal with the situation and next time when it happened we'd do it better."

Kieren still is in touch with his carer and values the care he gave for Kieren even after the age of 18, when he needed time to get back on his feet.

[Download high res photo of Kieren](#)

## Meet Ruth, long term carer for 8 and 10 year old sisters

Ruth is a genuine, warm person who cares for 8 and 10 year old sisters, who clearly mean everything to her. Their house is decked out with family photos, as well as dolls houses, dress ups, three little dogs and one cat.

She is an early childhood teacher with a love for children, but it was her own adoptive mother's care for her that inspired her to become a foster carer. "She always made me feel like I was part of the family, so she's inspired me to think that if she can love someone else's child then I could too," Ruth said.

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Ruth said that she and the girls have shared so many special memories together. “The best thing would be all the first times. All the things that I’ve been able to share with them that they hadn’t done before that I was able to make happen for them.”

“We’ve shared learning to ride a bike...the girls had never been to the beach before when they came to me, so going to a beach and chasing a wave, that was a really good experience, sharing that with them. So many things,” she smiled.

[Download high res photo of Ruth](#)

## **In Victoria:**

### **Meet Fiona and Michael, long term carers for one year old boy**

Melbourne couple Fiona and Michael are full of energy. They have been foster carers for children of all ages for many years and currently care for a one-year-old boy who completes their household with their own six year old son.

“We both grew up in very fortunate families. When you come from such a good home, it’s nice to think you can provide that experience for someone who may not get it otherwise,” Fiona said.

In their 12 years as carers, they have seen it all. “You have to prepare for the bad times, as well as the good. There have been moments where kids have reacted violently...have punched holes in wall. People ask, ‘what do you do?’ [when that happens]” Fiona continued. “I say – ‘there’s a tin of paint in the garage!’ The reality is the wall can be fixed. If you remember you’re not responsible for their behaviour and it’s not directed at you, it’s much easier to support them.”

Fiona and Michael are often asked how their six year old son feels about being part of a carer household. “It’s taught him understanding and compassion and made him a very caring soul. For him, being our only biological child – the long term kids have given him a bigger family,” Fiona said.

[Download high res photo of Fiona and Michael](#)

## **In Tasmania:**

### **Meet Julie, Long term carer for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children**

“I just can’t express how important it is for Aboriginal children to maintain their culture and their community bond,” Julie said.

Julie and her husband Trevor took the plunge to become emergency and respite carers for Aboriginal children in their own community, which they did for three years, before recently becoming full time carers for a primary school aged child.

Julie urges other Aboriginal people to consider becoming a foster carer and has even inspired some of her co-workers to become foster carers. “Let’s look after our Aboriginal babies ourselves and not send them off to strangers elsewhere. Get the training so we can do this!” she said.

[Download high res photo of Julie](#)

## **In South Australia:**

### **Meet Colleen and Steve, Long term carers for 17 and 3 year old girls**

Colleen and Steve are a gentle couple who were inspired by Colleen’s brother, a foster carer of many years, to become carers themselves.

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“I wasn’t able to have children,” Colleen explained. “I’ve always had love and care for children – friends, family – but never considered fostering. The more that we would visit my brother – their house is filled with foster children... I’d think there is probably something missing.” Now, three years later, Colleen and Steve have their hands full and are enjoying the challenges of caring for two girls with a big age gap.

Of the 17 year old girl in their care, Colleen said, “She wants to take the right road and she just needs somebody to guide her. She gets all As and Bs and is an A class student in Italian, and was even able to go on a school excursion to Italy last year!” Colleen proudly boasted.

And with a three year old, they are also going through the trials and tribulations of having a toddler in the house. Steve explained how he loves “just being around and teaching her different things. And we’re learning from her too – how she picks up things. She’s pretty independent, so she likes to do it her own way!”

[Download high res photo of Colleen and Steve](#)

## Meet Travis and Chris, Kinship carers for Travis’ niece

Family is very important to Travis and Chris. A few years ago they got to a point where they wanted children in their life, and were exploring options for how to do it – legislation at the time did not allow same sex couples to adopt, so that wasn’t an option. While they were going through the training process to become foster carers with Life Without Barriers, Travis’ mum approached them and told them that Travis’ then 11 year old niece needed a home and would they consider caring for her – and they haven’t looked back.

Their niece has now been in their care for three years and Chris and Travis have seen her flourish. “Seeing her change and mature has been one of the biggest highlights,” Travis said.

“When she first came to live with us, she would hide behind us and would not talk to anyone. Now she introduces herself to everyone she meets,” Travis said. “When she was in year 7, she had to do a speech in front of the whole school assembly and she did that without a problem. Just little things like that are actually quite big for us.”

[Download high res photo of Travis and Chris](#)

## Thinking about becoming a foster carer? Here are some considerations:

### About you

- Must be over 18, with relevant life experience (In some States and Territories you may need to be over 25 years of age)
- Well and healthy
- Have a regular source of income
- Any cultural background
- Single or in a relationship
- Willing to undergo background checks

### About your home and family

- With or without children
- Rent or own
- Have a spare room
- Everyone active and willing
- Willing to undergo background checks

**About Life Without Barriers:** Life Without Barriers (LWB) is one of Australia’s largest not-for-profit social purpose organisations, delivering innovative, community-based programs to more than 18,000 people from diverse community groups across the country. LWB works in more than 440 communities delivering services in family support, disability, out-of-home care, aged care, mental health, youth justice, homelessness, substance abuse, and provides support for refugees and asylum seekers.