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MEDIA RELEASE: Major child protection service calls for better family inclusion in foster care

This Child Protection Week, major provider of child, youth and family services, Life Without Barriers, is calling for a greater focus on the role of birth families in the lives of children in foster care.

There are around 50,000 children in kinship, foster or residential care in Australia who are unable to live with their parents. Many of these children will return home, but when that's not possible, it's vital for a child's sense of identity and belonging to have a meaningful relationship with parents and extended family.

"I think we appreciate the best possible outcome for a child is to be safely reunified with their parents and to maintain their connection to family, culture and community," Life Without Barriers Chief Executive Claire Robbs said.

"However, for many children in care, we need to be thinking about how we provide support for children in loving secure homes that recognise and foster relationships and contact with family. Family inclusive practices are vital for the long term wellbeing of children and I believe it is the role of all us in the sector to work together to achieve this for children."

Life Without Barriers is focussed on recruiting foster carers and are eager to work with generous people from the community who understand the importance of maintaining a good relationship with the family members of children in care.

"Foster carers play a really important part in a child's life, by providing loving care during the time they can't be with their parents," Ms Robbs said.

"Whenever possible we ask our foster carers to help encourage connection with birth parents. It's important for them to work together so that children can be reunified with their families, and where that's not possible, support constructive and meaningful relationships between children and their families. We are lucky that we work with some wonderful foster carers who are birth parents' biggest champions."

She said that both the community and social services sector needed to work together to do more to support families in a greater effort to prevent child removal.

"Being removed from family is in itself a traumatic and distressing experience for children. It's far better for parents to be supported before it gets to the point where children have to be removed.

"Many parents who have children in care may have intergenerational trauma and experiences of poverty, homelessness and violence. As a community we need to work harder to address the underlying factors that increase the likelihood of child removal so that all Australian parents are supported to be the best they can be."

In addition to preventative family support, Ms Robbs said more support was needed for parents whose children had been removed. "Many jurisdictions around the world have parent advocates, who are parents who have experience of their own children being removed, and who understand the parent's situation and can support and advocate for them."

Ms Robbs and Life Without Barriers will continue to work with government, the sector, foster carers and parents to champion best practice in child safety and protection.

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About Life Without Barriers: Life Without Barriers is one of Australia's largest not-for-profit social purpose organisations, delivering innovative, community-based programs to more than 22,000 people across the country. We work in more than 440 communities delivering services in family support, disability, out-of-home care, aged care, and more