

WE LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS VE

MEDIA RELEASE

8 September 2017

LIFE WITHOUT BARRIERS CELEBRATES & CALLS FOR MORE FOSTER CARERS

Foster and Kinship Care Week is not just about celebrating and recognising our amazing carers, it is about reaching out and finding as many compassionate individuals, couples and families to become Foster Carers by providing long and short-term care or weekend respite foster care for children and young people who are unable to live with their families. When you become a Foster Carer, the children who come into your home will present both challenges and wonderful opportunities. The challenge is caring for children who may have experienced difficult circumstances in their life and may be insecure, frightened and sometimes angry. The opportunity is the love, understanding and patience they receive from you and the huge difference this can make in their life, as well as yours. If you can provide a safe, stable and nurturing home the foster and kinship care state teams at Life Without Barriers would love to hear from you.

“Our children come from a range of circumstances and reflect the diversity of our communities. We need carers who reflect that diversity to support children to remain connected to culture and community. This is especially important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who may need support to return home or be cared for by members of their own community,” says Life Without Barriers Manager of Carer Recruitment Deanne Carroll.

“Some children will go home and we need supportive restoration carers to help make this happen. Other children will need carers, guardians or adoptive parents for life. Whether you provide short term care or commit for life, all carers make a significant difference in the lives of children,” reinforces Life Without Barriers Chief Executive Claire Robbs. Life Without Barriers has over 2600 foster carers across Australia and this week we thank and celebrate them.

In New South Wales:

Meet Jacintha and Eddie and their respite carer Raechel

“Being a foster carer is the hardest and the most rewarding job you will ever have and it comes with huge responsibilities,” shares Jacintha.

Having started as foster carers in 2009 with the support of Life Without Barriers, Jacintha and Eddie love the idea of having a large family around them. Now with a sibling group of four foster children in their home, they say the experience has been thoroughly rewarding for them on many levels.

While living in the UK as a younger person, Eddie’s parents were foster carers and so it was always a part of his life. They are supported by their respite carer Raechel who is more like another member of the family.

“The activities I do are driven by the children. I am keen to stay consistent with how they are raised with their foster family; which is with measured and thoughtful choices; to give them the right blend of guidance and empowerment. Their weekend with me is time to have fun and relax,” says Raechel.

- [Download high res photo of Jacintha, Eddie & Raechel](#)
- [Download high res photo of Jacintha & Eddie](#)
- [Download high res photo of Raechel](#)

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In the spirit of Reconciliation, Life Without Barriers acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of this country, and their connection to land, water and community. We pay our respect to them, their cultures and customs, and to Elders both past and present.

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Meet Kaz and Jo

Kaz and Jo are both short and long term foster carers with Life Without Barriers and they currently care for a little baby boy who is an absolute joy. Kaz is also the biological mother of a wonderful 18 year old son Jackson and Jo the biological mother of a sensitive and nurturing 21 year old daughter Brittany – who also works in child care. They are a supportive and loving family unit and being foster carers has brought an already close family, even closer.

“We wanted to give back to the community in some way. Having two grown up children of our own, we felt we had a home we could open to others. We came across Life Without Barriers at Mardi Gras Fair Day and we haven’t looked back,” says Jo.

Jo and Kaz are a same sex couple and when asked if they have encountered any prejudices Kaz said, “Not any prejudice from agencies, but certainly plenty from members of the public. For some it’s difficult to get past the short hair, tattoos and being a female couple, to see that we are just the same as them and our motive is to care for the kids. Kids never care though. As long as we could kick the ball around or build sandcastles at the beach, that child was happy.” Jo adds, “If you have love in your heart, a safe warm environment and can stand above the noise of the naysayers, just have a go. It’s about opening your heart and being the constant for a child in their journey while they grow into wonderful members of society.”

- [Download high res photo of Kaz & Jo](#)

In Tasmania:

Meet Shell and Gary

When you walk into the magnificent, tranquil and picturesque home of Shell and Gary you are immediately greeted by Heather Trott (the family pig), six horses, five dogs, the sound of singing birds and the smell of an apple pie baking in the oven. This is truly a home bathed in warmth and love.

Currently in their care they have four foster children in long-term placement and one in respite care - who range in age from 3-years-old to 12-years-old. They also have three grown-up boys of their own.

It is clear that as a family unit they value honesty, authentic love and the approach of both an open heart and mind above all else. Gary says that as a foster carer you should, “Never say anything you are not going to do! Even little things will make the difference.”

“If you have ever thought about fostering, and have the time and patience, it will be the best thing you ever do for yourself and the lives of these little ones,” adds Shell.

- [Download high res photo of Shell & Gary](#)

Meet Georgie and Mitch

Georgie and Mitch are the dynamic duo from Launceston. They are about to get married, but decided they wanted to foster as well! They are the awesome foster carers of a teenager who is a big part of their world.

When asked about the foundation of their relationship with their foster child they both agree that it is lot of respect and good humour, “We try to laugh through the good and hard times. But behind those jokes and light hearted approach, there is a lot of care. For us it was also helpful to establish some family routines - heading to the dog park together with Luna and Walter (our dogs), trips away, helping with homework, going out to dinner, watching him play football, going bowling or to laser tag or simply watching our favourite TV shows together. If we make connections and show interest, we form a bond.”

Mitch also said that as foster carers it is important to remain agile and responsive, “There are good days and hard days, and being flexible is a huge part of that. Teenagers can be very spontaneous and not always the best communicators or organisers so sometimes we have to take a breath, support each other and try not to sweat the small stuff. Adapting and

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thinking of the bigger picture always helps progress if we ever take a step back. It's also important that the carers are a team."

- [Download high res photo of Georgie & Mitch](#)

In South Australia:

Meet Paul and Chris

"Look at your life. Think what it would be like with children. Assess your capabilities? Learn about trauma. Read, read, read!! Do whatever courses you can. Meet some other foster parents, attend morning teas," says Paul.

Paul and Chris have been foster carers for Life Without Barriers since 2009 and currently have two beautiful sisters in their care aged 12 and 10. It's fair to say that Paul & Chris are 'family oriented' with 4 of their own and current custody of their two grandchildren aged 8 and 10. For them the drive to become foster carers was about a sense of social responsibility. Both being teachers, they were aware of the issues facing disadvantaged children and the idea of fostering captured their imagination. They felt particularly drawn to be trained as therapeutic foster carers, giving a home to children requiring additional support with behaviour management or who may have a disability.

"We believe in living a good life and modelling positive relationships. We foster with love, acceptance and taking the lead from the child, learning what their needs are. We are here to help them understand themselves as well as others," says Chris.

It is clear why Paul and Chris are such magnificent and special foster carers. The power of their own words when talking about it moves and amazes you, "The children are the highlight. They are at the cutting edge of life, the up and coming future of the world. They challenge you, keep you up to date with the world, and keep you active," says Chris.

- [Download high res photo of Paul & Chris](#)

Meet Gwen

Gwen is the biological mother of five grown-up children and a grandmother to seven children. She has a big and growing family with two teenage foster children who are siblings. They have called Gwen's house a home for the last 6 years. Gwen decided to become a full time foster carer after providing respite care for good friends who were existing foster carers. "I love children and it just went from there," she said.

When asked about how to form a relationship with a new foster child coming into your home Gwen says, "Love and communication is the key with an abundance of patience, commitment, respect and honesty thrown in."

"I'm the lucky one to have these amazing young people in my life. If you love children and have room in your heart and your home, then do it. Your life will be changed forever for the better. Never a dull moment, I do love it and highly recommend it. It helps you grow as a person. Just helping them to be the best they can be and hopefully being a positive influence on a day to day basis is what drives me. Being a foster carer delivers a busy life full of love, pride and laughter."

- [Download high res photo of Gwen](#)

In Victoria:

Meet Aaron and Jacqui

Melbourne couple, Aaron and Jacqui are relatively new foster carers with Life Without Barriers. Since September 2016 they have been the carer of a 16-year-old boy.

Aaron says, "It has brought a new element to our small and young family. Our 5-year-old has enjoyed having an older child in the house and it has been a new experience having a teenager around. Our foster child loves music, is full of life and is always singing. We love hearing the joy coming from him, as this hasn't always been the case in his life."

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“The traumas and hurts of the past can cause some foster children to have various ups and downs. Just like the rest of us though, all it takes is a little extra love and care to get through,” says Jacqui.

When asked what advice they would give to others interested in becoming foster carers, Jacqui suggests, “Don’t take this step lightly but don’t be scared either! Your whole life will change, but it will be for the better. We need more people willing to open their homes, lives, families and hearts to kids who need a fresh start.”

- [Download high res photo option 1 of Aaron & Jacqui](#)
- [Download high res photo 2 of Aaron & Jacqui](#)

If you are interested in becoming a foster carer you should be familiar with the selection criteria.

- You can be from any cultural background;
- You can be single; defacto, married or same sex couples; with or without children;
- You have a spare room in your home or apartment – you can be renters or owners;
- You are healthy and have the emotional capacity to deal with the challenges of foster caring; and
- You are over 18, with relevant life experience (some States require foster carers to be over 25 years). Upper age limits may apply for some types of care.
- Everyone in the household needs to be an active and willing participant in fostering vulnerable children.
- Mandatory checks are also completed as part of the assessment process, these include: Working with Children, Criminal Record, Reference, Health and Medical, and Home and Safety checks. All potential carers also undergo training prior to commencing as carers.

“It is also vital that you have the right motivation to become a foster carer, where the child is at the centre rather than fostering because you might be lonely or for your own benefit. We are also looking for carers to take on children of all ages. From babies to primary school and teenage children all looking for a secure and safe environment to call home. You will also have plenty of training and support from your local Life Without Barriers foster care team,” concludes Life Without Barriers Manager of Carer Recruitment Deanne Carroll.

If you are interested in becoming a foster or respite carer with Life Without Barriers please contact:

T. 1300 592 227

E. carers@lwb.org.au

www.fostercare.lwb.org.au

END

Available for Interview

- All foster carers listed above.
- Life Without Barriers Manager of Carer Recruitment - Deanne Carroll.

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About Life Without Barriers: Life Without Barriers (LWB) is one of Australia’s largest leading social purpose, not-for-profit organisations, working in more than 300 communities across all states and territories. Its main areas of operation includes support to people with disability, children, young people and families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, refugees and asylum seekers, older people, and people who are vulnerable to social exclusion.