



## Editorial

### Foster Care Week: September 13<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> 2020

#### A time for gratitude and hope

Each year in September, we celebrate our foster carers, people who've opened their hearts and homes to children and young people, who for various reasons, cannot live with their families, whether it be temporarily or long term.

Across Australia, over recent years, we've seen a steady increase in the number of children needing out of home care and this demand has been reflected in the Mallee. During the last twelve months Mallee Family Care has supported almost 100 children through its foster care program and as the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 reveal themselves, we are bracing for a further rise in demand. However, this upsurge is not being matched by an increase in people becoming foster carers. Indeed, more carers are retiring after years of service, than new carers are registering, leaving a small group of dedicated families caring for Mallee children in crisis. In one of our communities alone, there were 17 families caring for 42 children who required out of home care, over the last twelve months.

We have children across all age groups, from infancy through to eighteen years, needing care but there's particularly high demand for support for children aged between 10 and 16. Young people who need someone to support their education, to help prepare them for adulthood and to partner with them to achieve their goals. They need people who are looking to make a meaningful and lasting impact in the life of a child.

We have seen the profound difference that's made when children experiencing vulnerability are placed in a stable and caring home. We know their attendance at school improves, we know their academic outcomes improve, we know their health and wellbeing improves. We know that long term life outcomes are intrinsically linked to our childhood experiences – the support and encouragement we receive, the care and opportunities that are afforded to us, directly impact our sense of self-worth, our aspirations, our education and employment potential. Young people who don't have the support and opportunity to complete their education are more likely to face unemployment and to have lower future income earning capacity. The poverty trap starts in childhood.

Foster care is a haven of hope for children whose families are unable to provide the care they need to thrive and it's also a means of building capacity within our own community. This Foster Care Week, Mallee Family Care recognises and celebrates our team of wonderful carers and their contribution to the lives of children – the difference they are making will endure long after the children have left their homes. We are also calling on people to consider joining our team, there are children in our region, right now who need someone just like you.



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