



Words from the CEO, Paul McDonald

Being a foster carer can be challenging, but it's enormously rewarding.

In Victoria alone, more than 13,000 kids need a safe and loving foster care home. After a couple of tough years during the pandemic, a number of our current carers have decided to take a break from fostering. If we can't recruit enough new carers, existing carers are asked to take on new placements. Or kids have to move out of their local area to carers elsewhere – away from their schools, away from their friends and community.

This Foster Care Week, we need more people to play a part and foster a child. In the September edition of Imagine, we're sharing a handful of stories about our inspirational foster carers. You'll read about care leavers Jarline and Frazer, and the incredible impact their foster carers had when they were growing up. Both of these young adults have gone on to become successful business owners – how inspiring!

The Special Report this quarter focuses on a Victorian-first way of foster caring AV has rolled out in Bendigo. The Mockingbird Family model provides our carers with additional support, and gives kids in care a community of trusted people they can rely on. It's a win for carers, a win for the kids and a win for AV.

I am grateful, each and every month, for the generosity of our loyal donors and supporters. Without you, AV wouldn't be able to provide the same level of support to our foster carers and the children they have welcomed into their homes. This includes additional training and support for

carers, and special birthday celebrations for kids in care who may have never had a gift on their birthday before.

Your donation to our annual Spring appeal will go a long way to supporting our incredible foster carers and the children they care for.

Paul McDonald.



SPECIAL REPORT: Victoria's first foster care support 'constellation' in Bendigo "a real game changer"

Foster carers in central Victoria will be the first in the state to benefit from a ready-made social support system that creates a 'care community' around the children who have been placed in their care.

MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ is an evidence-informed model, which has had great success in New South Wales, South Australia and internationally. It creates a 'constellation' of six to ten local foster carer households that work together and support one another like a traditional extended family would. Research from existing constellations has shown that this approach increases placement stability and foster carer retention.

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Welcome
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Welcome to this edition of Imagine, our quarterly publication designed for donors and supporters. Your interest and support of the work we do is valued, and we hope you enjoy reading this publication. It is also available in email format for those who'd like a digital version. Just let us know your preference via email at giving@anglicarevic.org.au



Merryn Wilson, a newly accredited foster carer at Anglicare Victoria, said that when MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ was offered to her and partner Jade she “got goose bumps”, as this level of additional support would make a big difference to carers and foster children alike.

“We’re going to be welcoming a foster care child into our home very soon – It’s fantastic to have access to other local carers who we can rely on during the transition. We’ve just recently done a weekend respite placement with another foster child in our constellation, which went really well,” Merryn said.

“My mind has exploded with the possibilities that MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ could bring to kids and families if it becomes available in more regions across Victoria, it is a real game changer.”

Evaluations of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ in the United Kingdom found that:

- More than 90 per cent of foster carers felt well supported
- Eighty-nine per cent of young people felt they had a safe adult they could go to for help
- Without MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™, one in five placements may have broken down
- Carer satisfaction increased: non-judgemental peer support was highly valued by carer families involved
- Constellation families increased the use of respite care between carer households.

There is an urgent need for foster carers in Central Victoria. If you are interested in becoming a foster carer, or joining the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ model in Bendigo please contact **03 5440 1100** or anglicarevic.org.au/fostering

Anglicare Victoria, in partnership with Life Without Barriers, is trialling the innovative approach to caring in Bendigo, where there is already a strong sense of community among existing foster carers.

Michael Oerlemans, Regional Director of Anglicare Victoria North Central, said he hopes the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ model will see an increase in the stability and longevity of foster care placements, as carers have a network they can rely on to help share the load.

“Although Anglicare Victoria has only recently implemented MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ in Bendigo, we’re already hearing positive responses to the model. Our new carer households feel relieved that they have access to seasoned carers who they can reach out to throughout their journeys as carers,” Michael said.

“High numbers of children have entered care over the past two years, but worryingly, the number of foster carers we have available to take on these kids is declining. As an organisation, we need to shake up the way we’re looking after both the children and carers, and we’re excited to see the impact MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ will have in our region.”

Pat shares the joys of foster care to a national TV audience

Bendigo resident Pat has been an AV foster carer for 24 years. The mother-of-six has fostered more than 100 babies under a year old.

Pat was recently interviewed by British-Australian actress Miriam Margolyes, for her new three-part series Miriam Margolyes Australia Unmasked.

Miriam’s documentary explores the unique Australian ethos of ‘a fair go’. Over three episodes, she takes a deep dive into the diverse and extraordinary lives of her fellow citizens. She speaks to Pat about how foster caring can give less fortunate children a better chance at life.



Photo courtesy of ABC Central Victoria

“Your heart expands. You can love your own children, and you can love your foster children,” Pat tells Miriam about how she has enough love for all the children in her life.

Miriam Margolyes Australia Unmasked is currently available to stream on ABC iView.

Reflecting on my time in foster care | Q&A with Frazer

Frazer spent time in foster care during his teenage years, he is now the proud owner of Harrow & Harvest cafe in Lilydale. He provides us an insight into his time in care.

How old were you when you first entered foster care and how long did you spend in care over the years?

When I first entered care, I was 14 years old. I was in foster care for a total of one-and-a-half years.

How many different foster homes do you think you lived in? Where you placed with your siblings? Or if not, did you still get to see them?

I was placed in two different foster homes. I was not with my siblings but I did get to see them on occasion.

Is there any one particular foster carer or even Case Manager who stands out to you during your time in care? And why? What was it in particular that helped you?

When I was in care, I had a Case Manager named April. April was so full of joy and happiness. Every interaction, every phone call and at every home visit, I had a giant smile on my face. April had a way of always making me feel at ease, safe, listened to, and like someone cared about where I ended up. April's nurturing and caring spirit helped me a lot and I honestly don't think I would have been so content and relaxed in foster care if I didn't have her to always call if I needed someone to talk to.

What were the hardest parts of being in foster care? Conversely, what were some of the good parts? Are there any memories or stories that you remember fondly that you can share?

The best part of being in foster care was the sense of belonging and family I felt whilst being in care.

In my foster home I always had food, I was always warm and felt safe. Having access to those basic necessities every day, along with feeling loved and



welcomed in my foster home, were what made my journey in care so great.

A really incredible memory I have is how Hilary my carer taught me a lot about plants and gardening. She had an incredible garden that was like a forest. Daily I would help her in the garden and she would teach me about certain plants and growing vegetables. I often come back to these memories and think of them from time to time. As a grown adult now, gardening and plants are a huge part of my life and I always cherish and look back on the time I spent with Hilary in the garden as such a positive and life enabling part of my journey.

One of the hardest things about being in care was dealing with my feelings of abandonment, loneliness at times and often feeling like I was a failure. Even though I sometimes had hard days I had just as many good days, days where I didn't feel any of those emotions and I felt so cared for.

To find out more about Frazer, scan the QR code to view Frazer's video story, celebrating 25 years of Anglicare Victoria.



We need your opinion

Our bi-annual donor survey is coming soon and will be in your letter box or email in the next few weeks. AV's donor survey, in both hard copy or electronic, is an important tool to help us better understand how our donors and supporters like to engage with our agency. We also use the information provided to personalise our communications to you, ensuring that you will receive appropriate appeals and updates.

Please look out for our survey and complete at your earliest convenience. We look forward to receiving your feedback and helping form our communication strategy for the coming years.

If you have any questions about our survey and how we use your information provided, please get in touch with our team at giving@anglicarevic.org.au.



Life changed for Jarline when she moved in with foster carer Sandra Kay and her family at 13 years of age.

"I call my home with Sandra my 'Lucky 13'. She and her family gave me love, care and understanding. Even when times were tough I felt nurtured and safe, and knew I had a home with them regardless," she said.

"Sandra saw what I was interested in and nourished my artistic side – she gave me someone I wanted to be like when I was older.

"Children in foster care need real love and commitment, and people who believe in their future – this is what Sandra and her family were able to give me. It made an enormous impact on my approach to school and my outlook on life; I started to feel positive."

Jarline is now mum to five children, she and her partner gained an interim accommodation order for his one and three-year-old sons in October last year.

Becoming involved in the Child Protection system again brought up many difficult emotions for Jarline, but she is pleased she can be a strong and supportive mum to her boys, and someone who knows what they've been through.

Jarline is now encouraging others to find out more and consider becoming carers

"As foster parents you have the ability to give children an example of an adult they can choose to be. With your support, love and trust, you can help them change their future."

Anglicare Victoria is looking for new foster carers willing to open their homes to some of Victoria's most vulnerable children. To find out more, visit our website or call to book into our one of information sessions.

When you're a child in foster care, your foster carer can make all the difference.

33-year-old Jarline Mays from Wyndham Vale was a foster child from the age of seven. In the space of six years Jarline had lived with 13 different families and started at 11 different schools.



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Include a Gift in your Will to help vulnerable children, young people and families experience Better Tomorrows.

Introducing our free Will-writing service

Anglicare Victoria has partnered with Gathered Here, Australia's top-rated Will-writing platform.

Write your free Will in under 10 mins

Bonus: Scan the QR code or use this link to get free and unlimited lifetime updates to your Will: www.gatheredhere.com.au/c/anglicarevic-imagine.

Leaving a Gift to Anglicare Victoria

Large or small, when you include a gift to Anglicare Victoria you are helping alleviate immediate hardship among vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorians.





Foster carers play a vital role in our communities, opening their hearts and homes to vulnerable children and young people.

With every child they bring into their homes, every foster carer, every day, is helping to shape these children into emotionally supported young adults so they can enjoy a better future for them and eventually for the families they will be part of.

Foster carers like Amanda are providing invaluable care for children when they need it most – for as little as one night, or for as long as many years.

“My job is to love each child for as long as I’ve got them. As long as they’re in my care, they’ll get everything – all my love.” – Amanda, Anglicare Victoria Foster Carer since 2019.

Since 2020, Amanda has been the foster carer for two young boys. The brothers, who have complex care needs, are now four and six years old, and while Amanda is absolutely devoted to them, it’s not always smooth sailing. *“I’d be remiss if I didn’t admit that there are tough days,” she says. “I’ve had to grow as a carer to cater to my boys.”*

Amanda also ensures the boys remain connected to their family. She facilitates regular contact with the boys’ older sister and makes photobooks to share with the boys’ parents. *“We do it to let their family know that we’re loving this child, until they’re able to,” she says.* Extending her compassion even further, Amanda has recently taken on shared foster care of another young child, aged 16 months.

When asked Amanda what she’d say to someone considering becoming a foster carer with Anglicare Victoria we were overjoyed by her response.

“Do it. Just do it,” she says. “Anglicare Victoria has been amazing. I can’t fault the staff, their care and compassion.”

We’re deeply grateful to all of Anglicare Victoria’s dedicated foster carers, and to you for your generous support. Without your kind gifts we simply wouldn’t be able to provide the level of care and support with our foster carers, and the vulnerable children in their care. If you can, please show your generosity once again today – you can be assured your donation will make an immediate and important impact.



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PO Box 45 Abbotsford VIC 3067

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Phone 1800 809 722 to donate

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YOU**

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