

# MEDIA RELEASE



4 September 2019

## OzChild Congratulates Foster Carers after well-deserved recognition at the Victorian Protecting Children Awards overnight

The 2019 Victorian Protecting Children Award winners were announced last night, recognising dedicated teams and individuals working within government and community services who make protecting children their business every day.

OzChild foster carers, Nicole and Ross Mackay were recognised for their tireless dedication to providing care for more than 27 children since 2009. In addition, Emma Stirling and Anthony Denahy were awarded the Minister's Award for Innovation for the CaringLife platform they developed which provides a platform for children in foster care to keep memories like photos, videos, school reports, artwork and much more, ensuring special moments are captured when more often than not these things are lost when a young person moves through different placements.

"I was delighted to see Nicole and Ross awarded the carer award, their dedication and commitment to the children in their care is second to none. Not only have they cared for 27 children since becoming foster carers in 2009, Nicole and Ross are passionate about ensuring the children in their care remain connected to their culture, community and extended family," says OzChild Chief Executive Officer, Dr Lisa J. Griffiths.

Nicole and Ross are also passionate about maintaining strong relationships with local elders to ensure the siblings in their care have a strong sense of belonging and connection and have been asked to contribute to the planning of carer forums to help strengthen the foster care sector.

"Last night was a double celebration, not only were we proud to see Nicole and Ross receive the carer award - Emma and Anthony winning the Minister's Award for Innovation was the icing on the cake," adds Dr Griffiths.

"Emma and Anthony realised, while caring for their two foster children, that children in out-of-home care often don't carry with them photos, or mementos from their lives. Sadly, the keepsakes we all take for granted from our childhood are lost when children are placed in care. The CaringLife online platform is a creative, fun and easy way for children and carers to ensure these moments are captured. I applaud Emma and Anthony for their forward thinking, this will absolutely have a positive impact on children in care."

**-ENDS-**

- Dr Lisa J. Griffiths is available for interview please contact Rebecca Swinton 0439 472 281 to arrange

## **ABOUT OZCHILD**

For nearly 170 years OzChild has been committed to delivering quality services which make a real and lasting difference to Australian families to ensure all children and young people are safe, respected and nurtured to reach their full potential.

OzChild is committed to improving the lives of at-risk children, young people and families in our community, through foster and kinship care support and the delivery of evidence-based programs to achieve better outcomes, strengthen and repair relationships to build a brighter future for young Australians.

## **ABOUT CARINGLIFE**

The platform, CaringLife, is the brain-child of OzChild foster parents, Anthony Denahy and Emma Stirling, who realised that children in out-of-home care need a way to keep all their photos, videos and other important mementos from their time in care, safe and secure.

Until now, children have been given their photos in a photo album or on a USB stick, which can be lost or damaged. Other important documents like artwork, sporting certificates and school reports can also easily be lost.

With support from the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, Anthony and Emma developed the software, which has also been enthusiastically supported by their foster agency, OzChild, and the Foster Care Association of Victoria.

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### **Who can become a foster carer?**

- Anyone over the age of 21.
- Anyone with secure accommodation and appropriate space in the home.
- Race, gender, marital status, employment, sexuality and religion do not affect a person's eligibility to become a foster carer.

### **OzChild provides full training and on-going support to all carers.**

- 24/7 Case Manager and after hours support.
- Respite Support.
- Ongoing training opportunities.
- Community building events and access to other social events

**For further information please contact:**

**Rebecca Swinton**

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