

# Thriving Families

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## *Change Lives*



## **Strength in Partnership**

2020-2023 Carer Strategy

# Our Purpose

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Everyone *thrives* in our care

Providing  
**exceptional**  
home-based  
care for children  
and young  
people to thrive  
by **empowering**  
and **supporting**  
our carers.



# Making a Difference



Dr Lisa J. Griffiths  
Chief Executive Officer

OzChild has a rich history of providing care for children and young people which dates back to 1851.

Whilst our programs and services have evolved, we have never lost sight of our vision that all children and young people are safe, respected, nurtured and reach their full potential.

This is only achieved with the support of a tight-knit community, a village of carers.

For positive outcomes to be achieved for children and young people we know we must improve the carer experience. We must ensure the long-term wellbeing, happiness and stability of foster and kinship carers and their family members.

We acknowledge the critical role carers play and recognise something needs to change. The number of foster carers exiting the system is greater than those entering. So how do we flip things around to ensure there are enough foster homes to meet the demands of an ever increasing child protection system?

At OzChild we believe it starts with us, working in partnership with carers to give children and young people the greatest chance at a brighter future.



Helen Maxwell-Wright  
President

I am incredibly proud to see OzChild committing to the ongoing support of carers. There is no doubt, when carers are well supported the children and young people in their care thrive.

Carers contribute significantly to the long-term stability for the children they care for whilst playing a supportive part in maintaining their connection to family, community and culture.

Cultural connection is at the centre of a child or young person's wellbeing and identity.

We are committed to supporting self-determination of Aboriginal children and young people and continue to ensure cultural plans are in place to maintain their connections.

We are proud of the outcomes we achieve through our work and would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to each and every one of our carers who have taken a vulnerable child or young person into their homes and together with their family have shown them love and kindness.

To make a difference in the life of a child is one of the greatest joys in life.



# We are OzChild

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- *Committed* to improving the lives of at-risk children, young people and families for nearly 170 years
- *Believe* all children and young people deserve to be safe, respected and nurtured, to reach their full potential
- *Deliver* around 23 programs and services across VIC, NSW, QLD and the ACT
- *Engage* over 700 staff, carers and volunteers
- *Support* over 10,000 children, young people and their family members each year
- *Largest* provider of evidence-based programs in Australia

# Currently

Foster and kinship care provides a safe and loving environment for more than 45,000 of our country's most vulnerable children and young people. Whether short or long term, care can be a life changing experience for a child who cannot return home due to family violence, neglect, mental health and other social challenges.

We recognise it is the extraordinary commitment of the carers in our community who provide stability, hope and love that truly makes a difference in their lives.

It is our belief that a thriving family enables everyone in the house to flourish.

Despite its profound rewards, being a carer is challenging and carers report their role is often undervalued.

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**“The recruitment of foster carers is one of the greatest challenges to the future of the out-of-home care system.”**

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Placements have broken down and ultimately foster carers have exited the system due to carers feeling undervalued, leaving many children and young people bouncing around from home to home, with no stability, nurture or long-term family – often leading them to a life growing up in a residential care environment.

We know, actions speak louder than words, that's why our commitment to creating positive long term effects for all involved in the care system must be actioned by our organisation as a whole. Behaviour change throughout the whole of OzChild will ensure the success for everyone involved in the care system.

Approx. every  
**45 minutes**  
a child enters the care  
system in Australia

Source: AIHW Child Protection Collection 2018



Our Thriving Families, Change Lives strategy will **honour** and **value** all carers by leading significant change across the out-of-home care sector.

# Volunteering Carer Army

1.5 million

voluntary carer hours  
contributed to the  
community per year by  
OzChild carers

System  
in crisis

in 2018 nationally 1,400  
households commenced  
foster care whilst  
1,500 exited

0.04%  
of population

volunteer to be foster  
carers across Australia

Foster carers are ordinary people doing extraordinary things for children and families in crisis, providing safe and loving homes for children to begin healing from trauma, with the goal of eventually returning home to their families or kin.

The word **voluntary** is incredibly important to remember when discussing foster carers. It's often overlooked, forgotten or even unknown that carers are volunteers, receiving a contribution to cover the basic costs of food and clothing for the child in their care.

Kinship carers are often "morally volunteered" and go to extraordinary lengths to keep family together, in circumstances that are complex and challenging in the immediate family. Keeping children with family is the preferred choice for those who cannot live safely with their birth parents, as it maintains their connection with family, culture or kin.

It's no secret how hard all carers work, the dedication to their role as a 24/7 carer is truly inspirational.

It is critical to break the cycle that fuels a negative perception of being a carer to help stem the dire shortage of foster families. At OzChild, we passionately believe supporting our carers is everyone's responsibility. Together we will walk alongside our "army" of carers to ensure we deliver a flexible, personal and positive partnership experience.

  
**Carers are the**  
*game changers*  
**in the lives of children**

**We will innovate the care experience in partnership  
with our carers to support their long-term  
wellbeing and caring role**



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## Together we will

- *Modernise* the carer experience
- *Engage* carers skills and wisdom
- *Acknowledge* all roles are equal in a care team

# Our Promises

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**Our carer promise is to work together in genuine partnership**

# Thriving Families Change Lives

**Respect, support, communication**, and above all, **relationship** are the foundations of our Thriving Families carer strategy. Through our three year strategy roll out, we will demonstrate and lead real change in how the community and sector view the role of carers.

Our teams will build authentic relationships with the whole carer family and recognise all families are unique in what is important to them, we want to walk alongside carers to celebrate life's joys and support them during times of stress and hardship.

Family wellbeing is our first priority and we work with commitment and compassion for every caring household. We will play a key role in helping to navigate system challenges and requirements throughout the caring journey and make this simple promise to our carers - *we are partners in care*.

**We will improve the day-to-day carer experience by embedding carers into our**

*three key pillars;*

- Organisational Culture
- Program Development
- Community Building



We will **educate** and **influence** the way we partner with carers and truly make a difference to a child's experience in care.

**Now is the time to support our carers to thrive and ensure we provide placement stability within nurturing families**



# Taking Action

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## *Organisational Culture*

### **We will lead sector change by activating our partnership culture**

- Lead an organisational culture that not only values working in partnership with our carers but measures this as an outcome annually.
- Ensure all staff live and breathe our carer strategy through recruitment and induction processes
- Prioritise carers as respected partners and champion their role in the community
- Measure staff performance to ensure their behaviour demonstrates partnership values

## *Program Focus*

### **We will set carers and staff up for success**

- Establish governance groups
- Collaborate in program planning
- Ensure carer participation in stakeholder meetings and staff recruitment panels
- Enhance induction journey to set carers and staff up for success

## *Community and Support*

### **We will build and support a community of thriving carer households**

- Encourage stronger social and community participation
- Offer social opportunities for the whole household
- Deliver a robust training and development program
- Continually improve communication through technology

# Final Outcomes



**Influence**  
**behaviour change**  
**sector and community wide**

Over the next three years we will be deliberate in modelling professional behaviours that shape a more prosperous and robust care system, one that honours carers.

- We will value carers and the critical role they play.
- We will be strong advocates to ensure carers are treated as equals in the care team and have a voice.
- We will ensure carers are appropriately supported so they can focus on their caring role.

**Our evidence-based framework will measure our strategy to ensure we have delivered these final outcomes:**

*Increased*

carer recruitment  
and retention

*Stabilised*

placements whilst  
preparing children  
for reunification or  
permanent care

*Improved*

morale and wellbeing  
of carers and staff

**OzChild is proud to be leading a movement that transforms caring partnerships, to ensure better outcomes for children, young people and families.**



“ Coming together is the **beginning**.  
Keeping together is **progress**.  
Working together is *success* ”

- Henry Ford