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MEDIA RELEASE

100 Lives Changed and Counting: Professional Foster Care Model Proving to be a Critical Solution in Out-of-Home Care

As Australia faces increasing challenges in the out-of-home care sector, one professional foster care model is proving to be essential in providing better outcomes for vulnerable children and young people. OzChild's Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) program is marking a significant milestone this week, celebrating the 100th graduation from this evidence-based intervention.

TFCO is demonstrating the significant role that professional foster care can play in diverting children from residential care, improving their life trajectories, and addressing the sector's over-reliance on less effective care arrangements.

A Game-Changer for Children in Crisis

Driving a shift towards an evidence-based approach to reduce the number of children under 12 in residential care, OzChild first implemented the TFCO program in Victoria for children aged 7-11 in 2016. Today the program is changing the lives of children and young people in New South Wales and Queensland too.

This initiative is shaping an evidence-based service system for children and families while contributing to long-term cost savings for governments.

The TFCO program offers a therapeutic, home-based alternative for children aged 7 to 17 who exhibit complex emotional and behavioural challenges. These young people, often with significant trauma histories, are at high risk of entering or have already spent time in residential care, where they typically face poorer outcomes compared to those in family-based care environments.

OzChild's Chief Executive Officer, Dr Lisa J. Griffiths, highlights the unique value of professional foster care: "Many of these children are bouncing between multiple placements and are disconnected from school, community, and even hope for a better future. Professional foster care models like TFCO are not just about placement; they are about equipping carers and children with the skills needed to manage trauma, build resilience, and foster positive behaviours."

Professional Foster Care vs. Residential Care

Unlike traditional residential care, professional foster care provides a stable family environment with intensive support structures. TFCO carers are equipped with a dedicated team of therapists, skills coaches, and educators, enabling a tailored approach to each child's needs. The program focuses on teaching carers and biological families how to manage behaviours in a constructive way, turning around extreme and challenging behaviours that often lead children into a cycle of disadvantage.

Natalie Sykes, a TFCO carer in Toowoomba, has witnessed firsthand the impact of professional foster care. "These kids have been through so much trauma, and their behaviours reflect that."

Through the TFCO program, they learn to trust, heal, and build a future they couldn't imagine before. It's a chance to show them they matter," she said.

Significant Outcomes and Cost Benefits

TFCO is proving to be more than just a compassionate response; it is also cost-effective. Children in the program show reduced involvement in the youth justice system, improved academic engagement, and enhanced pro-social behaviours. Remarkably, 97% of OzChild's TFCO graduates transition to lower levels of care, such as returning to their birth families, moving to kinship care, or achieving semi-independent living.

In New South Wales alone, TFCO has prevented 33 children from entering alternative care arrangements since 2019, saving the government approximately \$17 million. This reduction in high-cost emergency accommodations and other residential care placements underscores the economic and social benefits of professional foster care as a sustainable solution within the sector.

The Future of Out-of-Home Care

As the demand for more effective care solutions grows, the need for professional foster carers becomes increasingly urgent. OzChild's TFCO program demonstrates how a professionalised approach to foster care, backed by evidence-based models and extensive support, can transform lives and provide a critical alternative to traditional residential care settings.

"Often, the problem is the system around the children, not the children themselves," Dr Griffiths stated. "Professional foster care equips both children and carers with the skills to change their stories. It's not just about providing a placement; it's about providing a pathway out of the system and back into family and community."

For more information on how to become a TFCO carer or to support OzChild's work, please visit www.ozchild.org.au

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