



Minh's story

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As an emergency and respite foster carer (also a full-time working couple) for the last 6 years, I realise how broken the child safety system is and feel that, if we want to improve things like Youth Crime and have better outcomes for children, action needs to start much earlier than when they start offending.

I am sure that children in the system are so much more vulnerable and likely to commit crimes because they do not experience good examples set by parental figures, especially if they end up in residential care, they also bounce around between random carers if they are hard to look after and end up in staffed residential care.

Therefore, we need a much larger pool of foster carers who are invested in getting good stable outcomes for the children in their care. Currently we have a severe lack of foster carers in the system which means the ones we do have are overused and burning out.

However, new foster carers are not coming on board, I believe this is very much because they cannot afford to anymore with the cost-of-living crisis. The standard allowance amounts to just over \$60 per night – this is expected to contribute to the cost of having a child in your home (food, clothes, incidentals, essential items, transport and activities). For example, a youth worker, gets paid more for 1.5 hrs work than my husband and I get for 24 hours caring and providing all the necessities.

Foster carers are volunteers who are not expected to “do it for the money”, we foster because we care and want to offer our safe spaces to those who are not as fortunate as us. The idea being that foster carers are not “paid” because the wrong people would be attracted to become carers. However, the same could be said for teachers, child safety workers, youth workers, foster agency staff.... but they all get paid for their time.

It feels like foster carers are not valued by the Government and they should be, it feels like we are being taken for granted and our goodwill is being taken advantage of. We also give up our free time to meet with our Agency every month to make sure everything is going well, we spend many hours doing carer training, a combination of on-line

Child Safety Commission of Inquiry



training and external training. Not only that, we use our annual leave and personal carer's leave from our employers, and stretch our employer relationships, to provide care.

How many more Primary Foster Carers could we have if it was viable for them to make a partial income from caring for 3 or 4 children – and receive superannuation. To work less and spend more time with the children.

In short, if you want more people to become foster carers, you need to treat them properly and pay them for all the time they invest and the money they spend and stop taking their goodwill for granted. It's a whole lot cheaper than building and staffing more residential homes and gives much better quality of carer.

More carers would mean more choices for the placements to make sure they are a good fit, not just any carer that says 'yes' in a crisis situation. It would mean Primary Carers could get more respite. It would mean that Emergency and Respite carers would want and be able to say "yes" to placements more often.