



Message from Interim CEO, Amanda Bresnan



Welcome PCA Families members to this Winter edition of Thrive.

Firstly I want to say what a privilege it is to have the opportunity work for – even if it might be a short time - such a committed and passionate membership that I have found with PCA Families. I had the opportunity to join Journal Club on 3 June and got to meet a number of members. I hope over the next few months to meet

more of you, even at least virtually.

Special thanks to the hard working, committed and patient staff at PCA Families in particular Deb and Liz who have put up with my many silly questions over the past couple of months. The membership is very lucky to have such a wonderful team. I know there is already a tribute to Vicki Coverdale in this newsletter, but I also wanted to thank Vicki for her many years of working at PCA Families and as much as I tried to convince her not to retire, I wish her all the very best.

I also want to thank the PCA Families Board in particular Kris Peach who has been acting as CEO the past few months and who has put in place a number of new processes which will set the organisation up well for the future.

We were very pleased to receive ongoing funding for Helpline in the 2021-22 Victorian State Budget and credit must go to Lisa Milani and the Board for their work in securing this funding, along with the extension of Home Stretch to permanent care. As members hopefully have seen, we are working closely with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing on the processes for Home Stretch and Better Futures and will make information available as soon as we are able.

A key part of my focus during my time at PCA Families will be to explore sources of funding for the organisation. I have been on Boards of not-for-profits for a number of years and I well understand that it is a difficult time for organisations now to attract new sources of funding, further impacted by COVID-19. Having a sustainable organisation is vital to retain staff, run activities and programs and engage with members. I hope to be able to diversify the sources of funding for PCA Families so the organisation can carry out the activities that members have told me they find valuable.

**QUIT
PAPER.**



Paper newsletters to stop due to large costs associated with mailing as well as the environment this will be the last newsletter to be mailed. If you have an email address, please contact info@pcfamilies.org.au or call 03 9020 1833 so we can keep you up to date with what is happening in the permanent care and adoption space.

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Message from Chair, Meredith Carter



In our last newsletter I wrote about the proposed changes to update the PCA Families' Constitution. We were delighted by the strong support demonstrated by members voting for both the board's recommendations in this regard and for the Board itself which was overwhelmingly returned.

Since then we've also been very pleased by the State Budget which as our Interim CEO has noted we believe will deliver some great outcomes for our community.

They include continued funding of the Helpline, extension of support for children under permanent care (PC) orders to age 21 through the Home Stretch program, and greater access for PC and adoptive parents to Carer KaFE for example. We have also been talking to Minister Luke Donnellan, Minister for Child Protection and Minister for Disability, Ageing and Carers about the need for ongoing consideration of the needs of our community including those of adoptive families.

Models of adoption

It was fabulous to be able to spend some time with some of our adoptive parents at the retreat we held over the weekend. They do not often have the opportunity for such a treat or to network with each other in such a large group. The PCA Families' Board has been looking at trends in adoption and permanent care and thinking about where to next. We would love to hear your views.

One proposal gaining ground in some countries has been noted in Adoptions Australia 2019-20, a report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). It centres on the potential of 'simple adoption'.

Simple adoption is described as a progression from open adoption. Open adoption assumes ongoing open exchange of information between the parties. However, it still formally ends the legal relationship between the child and their birth parent(s).

Simple adoption is an 'adding' approach. The adoptive parents are granted ongoing parental responsibility and authority for a child, and the child becomes a full legal member of their family. This means there is an enduring legally recognised relationship after they turn 18. However, the birth parents also continue to be recognised as parents, with both sets of parents included on the birth certificate for example. Similarly, the extended birth family remains legally related to the child.

It may not be suitable for all children, noting the history of forced adoptions in Australia which means adoption remains contentious, particularly for Indigenous Australians.

PCA Families is investigating further implications of the simple adoption model and of ideas such as integrated birth certificates, and how government might facilitate adult adoption for children exiting permanent care orders. We would love your thoughts. Email your thoughts to me at chair@pcfamilies.org.au

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Meredith Carter".

Meredith Carter

Adoption and permanent care trends

We thought you may be interested in some up to date data on adoption, permanent care and children in care. The latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) report Adoptions Australia 2019-20 tells us that in 2019–20, there were 334 adoption orders in Australia.

Most of these adoptions were by foster carers of children in their care—there were 171 of these adoptions last year, 51% of all adoptions finalised in Australia, overwhelmingly in NSW. There were only 48 local adoptions where there was no pre-existing relationship, usually involving a baby under 12 months of age. Interestingly, while the majority of birth mothers involved in local adoptions were not married nor were they the stereotype teen mum. Most were between 20 and 40 years of age.

There were also 37 children adopted from overseas, most from Taiwan and South Korea. While no babies were adopted through intercountry adoption most were under age 5. In contrast almost 80% of children adopted from care last year were over 5 years of age. Interestingly almost half were adopted as part of a sibling group.

Reflecting that adoption of Indigenous Australian children is particularly contentious, in 2019–20 only 9 adoption orders were for Indigenous Australian children. Seven (7) of these were by carers or foster parents, 2 who also identified as Indigenous Australians and 5 who did not.

The increase in carer adoptions is overwhelmingly driven by NSW at this stage. However, the trend reflects a new framework agreed nationally for children in care. The framework emphasises the importance of stability through permanent placements to improved life outcomes for children who cannot live with their birth parents.

Victoria's approach

Victoria has signed up to the same national framework as NSW but interprets it differently. For example, the Permanency amendments to the Children Youth and Families Act which came into effect in 2016 included adoption from care. However, in practice this has generally not occurred. It appears that applications must be made under the Adoption Act 1984 and meet its requirements.

Further, even though in Victoria permanent care appears to be preferred by the State over adoption from care, the data shows there are still impediments which do not appear to relate to the best interests of the children concerned. Only 376 permanent care orders were issued by the Children's Court of Victoria in 2019-20 according to its Annual Report. These orders transfer what are called third party parental responsibilities to the kinship or foster carer, usually until the child is 18.

There has also been an increase in long term care orders. These are made where permanent care is not recommended, usually because a high level of department support is considered appropriate. Overall however permanent care and long term care orders make up less than 10% of all orders in respect of children in care at a time when family reunification orders for these children are falling.

At the same time Victoria has seen a very significant increase in orders granting care to the Secretary. This means no carer is specified at all. It is not often a stable arrangement and affects a disproportionate number of Indigenous Australian children.

My take home message from all this—Victoria's permanency arrangement rates are higher than many other states or territories. However overall, more needs to be done to support safe reunification of children with birth parents and where this cannot be achieved to ensure children are not left in limbo.

Inaugural Adoption retreat

PCA Families held its first Adoption retreat over the weekend which was well received and most enjoyable.

It gave those who attended a chance to learn, reflect and socialise. The power of being together over one weekend with parents who share a similar parenting journey was paramount. It provided the opportunity to share knowledge and ideas in a non judgmental and supportive environment which was incredibly valuable.

We had two guest speakers on Saturday, Danielle who delivered a presentation on Why do they do that? 9- 18 years and Joanie who spoke passionately about parenting with emotional intelligence. Joel de Carteret an adult adoptee joined us on Sunday to share his experience and wisdom growing up in Australia as a Filipino adoptee.

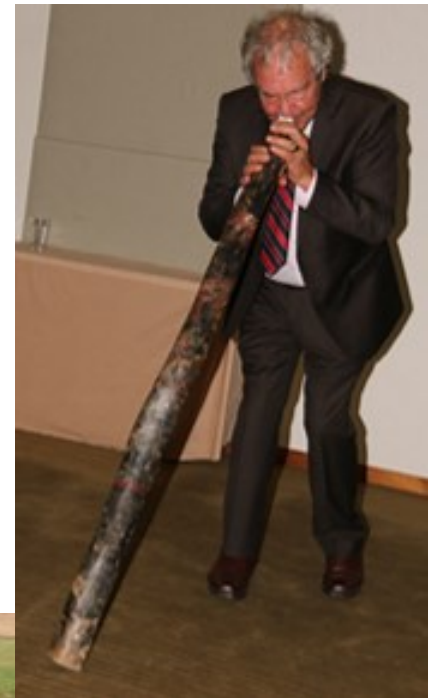
Many thanks to you and all of the team that organized our very restorative and illuminating weekend at the beautiful Healesville RACV club.

It was so very nice to catch up with familiar faces and build new friendships, especially given we Victorians' shared the COVID journey - Robyn

Thank you for organizing a great weekend—it was outstanding! So lovely to reconnect with this community—Allison



A waking meditation through the surrounds of Healesville



Welcome to Country with Uncle Ian Hunter (Warrend-Badj) Wurundjeri Elder



← The group of adoptive parents and staff



Journal Club



This survey is an important opportunity to capture the value of the long running PCA Families Journal Club model of peer support, as well as participants' preferences if and when COVID restrictions lift.

We are particularly wishing to capture feedback about possible topics, guest speakers, other formats, locations and suitable times for future Journal Club sessions, as well as anyone who might be interested to help co-facilitate future sessions if we are able to expand our peer support across Victoria..

Feel free to also include suggestions regarding other forms of peer support that you would like PCA Families to consider offering.

All this information will help inform us of future planning, and will especially assist in our funding applications.

We are most grateful to you for taking the time to complete the survey. We are offering two \$50 Coles Myer vouchers which will be drawn once the survey closes on Monday 26 July. You could be one of two lucky winners which will be drawn randomly.



We really value your input on what is important and how best we can support you and your family.

Click on the link to complete this two minute survey <https://survey.alchemer.com/s3/6336111/New-Survey>



TOPIC: Strictness and Freedom!

DATE: Thursday July 1

TIME: 8.00—9.30pm

Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEkc-CrjwrE9ylzg7xSa76pxlyHD2Om5bX>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Do you ever wonder if your rules are too strict—or too lenient? When is it time to reel your child back in, and how will you know when it's safe to loosen the reins a bit? Most importantly, is your child ready for more freedom and independence? Or are they showing clear signs that they're not?

As your child grows, you need to offer them the opportunity for age-appropriate independence.

After all, how will your child learn to be independent on their own if they're never given a chance to try new things?

It's not easy, but we need to make those leaps sometimes as parents so our kids can learn to fly.

To read more please visit this [link](#).

Dates for remainder of the year:

- ✓ 5 August
- ✓ 2 September
- ✓ 7 October
- ✓ 4 November
- ✓ 2 December

Topics being planned are:

- Effects of Fetal alcohol syndrome and
- Relationships Australia—support for adoptive families



Click n' Connect

Click and Connect Social Group – Wednesday Fortnightly – 12.00-1.00PM

Every second Wednesday a group of parents/carers meet in a social space online, to discuss topics of interests to them and their families.

Parents/carers are honoured as experts of their families/lives and natural conversations are allowed to flow as a consequence.

Liz and Sonia host these meetings, starting off with a brief presentation on a topic – the latest research or thinking – then opening up to real life discussions.

Upcoming dates for your calendar for those who like to be super organised are below.

Please register by clicking on the attached Zoom links. Once you have registered to the session, you will receive a link to join the session.

DATE	TOPIC	ZOOM LINK FOR REGISTRATION
Wed 14 July	Sensory challenges and how to assist in embracing the senses!	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUoduqgrjssH9fPaAWWLB7HH5jWb8XsptZO
Wed 28 July	NDIS – tips and ideas and shared experiences.	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZ0sfuugqz8iH9x1PuUPOgmErofPJWbUy8bC
Wed 11 Aug	My life story – how much do you share with parents or teachers? How do you help your children share their story and how do you get them ready?	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAucu6vqTIsGdZQByq91xQt1sHO5h5Bqwt0
Wed 25 Aug	Therapists – who should you engage with and how often?	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEvfuivrDkrHNGhJH9hLn9W2wIjhuNS3UiQ
Wed 8 Sep	Mental health – anxiety, irritability, depression and sleep disturbance arising from pandemic disruption	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZEpduyprD8uGtbS-gHtQELoHg3w0ZzuwGFN
Wed 6 Oct	Respite care – what it could look like and where to get support	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMsc-6trz4gGtRayZN7SXXCciiQUUWR5Nas
Wed 20 Oct	School readiness – how to support your child to start kinder or school or get ready for the year ahead	https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMvce2rqz0rGdWZGwytwD2sq75TOFpd9cRJ

All Ways Playgroup - for Permanent Care, Local and Intercountry Adoptive Families

Has relocated to:

Living and learning @ Ajani, 2/284 Thompsons Rd, Lower Templestowe

First Thursday of each month from 10.00am—12.00pm

Please contact Shae on E: shae.e.baxter@gmail.com or T: [0430 085 455](tel:0430085455) for more details.



Pod casts, YouTube and communications

We have a number of podcasts on our website with a YouTube channel. Below are what we have created to date:

[How Maggie, an African refugee, navigates the system of out of home care and comes out shining!](#)

[How does baking help parents to parent therapeutically with safety, structure and nurture?](#)

[What do kangaroos have to do with developmental trauma and control, shame, hoarding and overeating?](#)

[For school leavers and those in care, you can get to TAFE or Uni by accessing supports \(without VCE\).](#)

[Blow ups and how to avoid & move on from them](#)

[Safeguarding financial interests and estate planning](#)

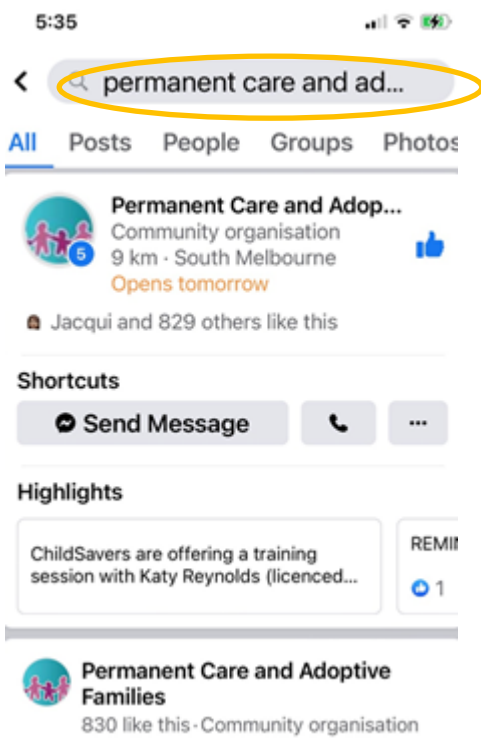
[How a rescue cat and sensory play help with trauma & development](#)

To subscribe to our YouTube channel, here are some instructions on how to!

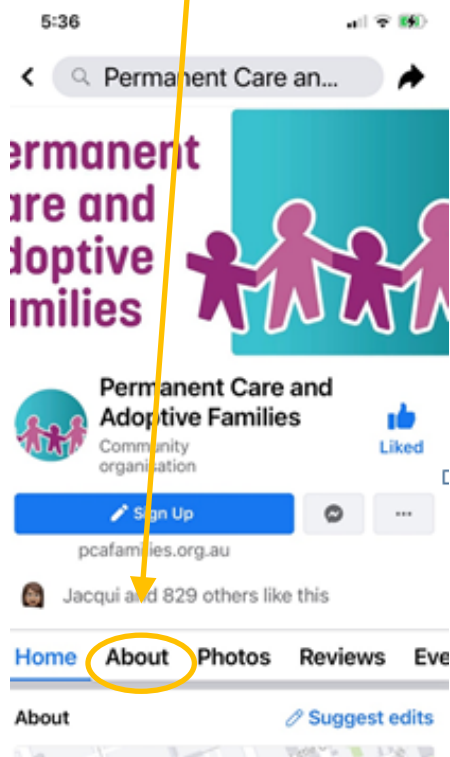
Copy this address into your internet browser (Google, Safari or Otherwise) <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaGikaQ1JHVz-RdrZKPUG1g>

Click on the subscribe button in YouTube to subscribe. If you haven't logged into YouTube before, you will need to setup your account after you select subscribe. If you are already watching this weeks video, below the video is a subscribe button you can click on. If you are a Facebook member, you can also access YouTube directly by searching for Permanent Care and Adoptive Families and selecting the About Page, World Symbol, Subscribe. See images below.

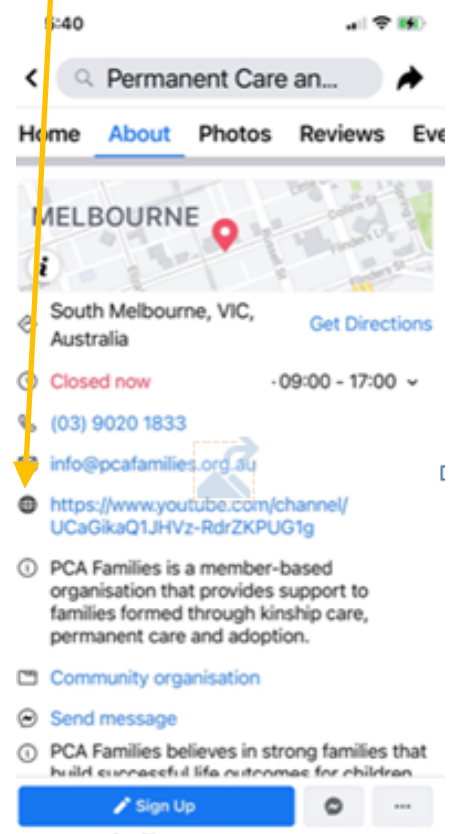
Search Facebook for PCA Families



Click on About



Click on World symbol which has you tube channel



Home Stretch and Better Futures Program

Home Stretch and Better Futures

The 2021-22 Victorian State Budget included investment of \$38.9 million over the next four years and \$13.8 million ongoing so that young people on permanent care orders can be supported via Better Futures from 15 years and 9 months and Home Stretch from 18 years up until their 21st birthday.

Better Futures aims to engage earlier with young people leaving care, providing individualised supports both in-care and post-care across a range of life areas including housing, health and wellbeing, education, employment, and community and cultural connections.

**18 to 21
YEARS
OLD**

Better Futures includes:

- Direct case work support
- Information and advice
- Access to flexible funding

Through Home Stretch, young people turning 18 years of age will be able to remain with their carer supported by an allowance, case work and flexible funding. Those who cannot remain with their carer will be supported to transition to other housing options (for example, private rental) supported by an allowance, case work and flexible funding.

Home Stretch is delivered via the Better Futures service delivery model and both programs are delivered by community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations across the state.

The expansion of these programs to include young people on permanent care orders will commence with Home Stretch support being available from 1 July 2021 for young people turning 18 years of age. Access to Better Futures for young people from 15 years and 9 months will follow later in 2021.

PCA Families are working closely with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) on the expansion, and further details will be provided in the coming weeks regarding access pathways, noting that it is likely that an interim process to connect young people and carers to their local Better Futures provider will be implemented whilst a longer term approach is developed.

The interim process will likely involve needing to prioritise information provision and access to support to young people based on when they are due to turn 18 years of age. Those turning 18 years of age between July to September 2021 will be the first group to be progressed.

A list of Frequently Asked Questions is being developed and will be made available as soon as possible via the PCA Families website.

At this stage we are asking people to wait for information to be made available before getting in touch with PCA Families, DFFH or Better Futures providers. Referrals to Home Stretch will be gradually progressed when we have the appropriate processes in place and



information available to do this. No eligible young people will miss out on support. We thank everyone for their patience.



Lookout Centres

Aligning Career, Education and Leaving Care Planning

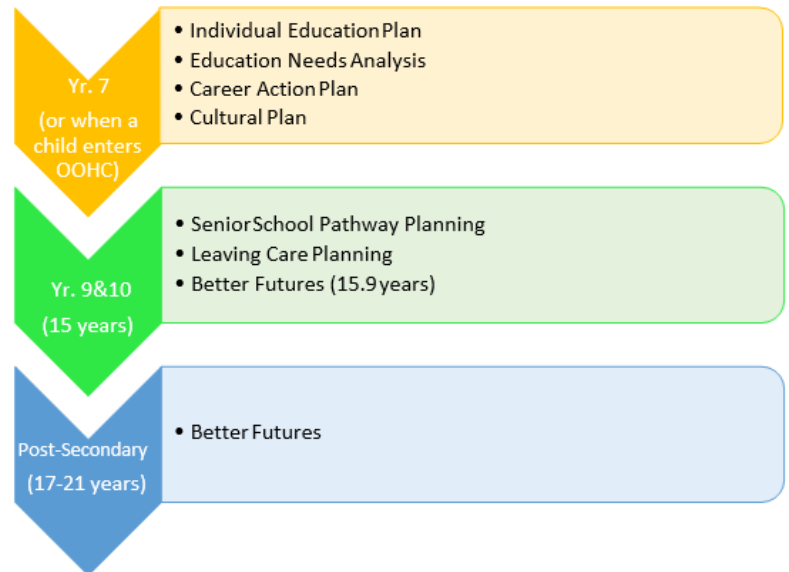
The Aligning Career, Education and Leaving Care Planning Practice Guide has been developed to assist Career Practitioners, Designated Teachers and Case managers to understand and align education and leaving care based planning for secondary students in Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) to support post school further education, training and employment.

The guide provides:

- an overview of the roles and responsibilities of professionals in the school, Child Protection and Better Futures sectors
- an overview of Career Education planning
- an overview of Leaving Care planning
- audit Checklist
- timeline of key actions
- additional Resources

To read the full guide, please visit <https://www.pcafamilies.org.au/support-services/better-futures-and-home-stretch>

Leaving School and Care Continuum



Q & A with Merle; Advocacy and Support Officer

Tell us about your family?

My husband and I migrated to Australia in 1990 from South Africa. We have 3 grown sons, and recently became grandparents for the first time!

What I enjoy doing.

Being in the garden and tending our veggie patch and fruit trees.
Taking our 2 dogs for walks on the beach.

Most enjoyed activity during COVID lockdown?

I made many loaves of sourdough bread with my own starter I named "Priscilla". Sadly, Priscilla is no more, but she was enjoyed by many!

My husband and I have a couple of beehives and during lockdown we managed to extract lots of honey and share it with family and friends.

What is your guilty pleasure

Binge watching series on Netflix with a large bowl of popcorn!

What do you enjoy most about working with PCA Families?

The difference we can make in providing financial relief to families that already are doing it tough. Being able to provide emotional and practical support when needed. Working as part of a great team that is committed and passionate about the cause.



Flexible Funding support

If you have a Victorian Permanent Care Order, Adoption Order or Parenting Order via the Family Law Court, receive the DFFH care allowance and are more than 12 months post the Order, please apply for the Flexible Funds we have available post lockdown.

Keep an eye on our website and social media, as we will be highlighting different types of eligible expenditure; however, if any of the following are applicable to you, please apply now:

- Catch up tutoring to compensate for lockdown schooling issues (see page 7)
- School related costs—educational resources, uniforms, holiday programs (see page 6)
- Catch up sporting and social activities
- Home infrastructure changes to address child’s physical or emotional needs etc.
- Cognitive assessments, specialist appointments & related therapies
- Costs associated with birth family contact, return to country
- Assistance animals
- Transportation issues
- Additional or catch up counselling/therapeutic treatments
- Health related costs
- Therapy (counselling, psychology, art play, equine etc.)
- **If your child is 17, think about applying for prepayment of TAFE or other educational fees, driving lessons etc, to help your family’s financial transition at age 18 .**



[Download an application form](#)

Complete the form and send it to flexifunding@pcfamilies.org.au or alternatively, contact our helpline on 03 9020 1833 Monday - Friday, 9am-5pm to find out more.

Staff changes



We say farewell to our wonderful advisor Vicki Coverdale. Vicki has been with PCA Families for over five years when she took on a short term role of 6 months which became years.

She has been incredibly dedicated to the organisation by helping our members enormously. We will miss her dearly.

She is retiring so she can spend time enjoying her artistic interests along with spending more time with family.

We wish you a wonderful retirement!



To cope with the increase in flexi funds and the start up of the Home Stretch, we have the following staff to assist you. Please note the majority of our staff work part time.

- Liz Powell - Team Leader
- Merle Shap - Advisor
- Andrea Campbell - Advisor
- Ray Carroll - Advisor
- Zahra - Client Services Officer
- Sonalee - Client Services Officer
- Eden - Client Services Officer

Flexible Funding for school holiday programs



Are you considering accessing flexi-funding for school holidays programs?

School holidays are a great opportunity to build children's skills by engaging in activities that they enjoy with like-minded children.

Programs are wide ranging and flexi funds can be accessed to assist with skills development.

The opportunities are endless, but here are a few that you might consider:

Emotional and Social Intelligence – Shine Academy and Longford and Fraser Academy offer weekly (during term), small group weekend (4 classes) or school holiday intensive (3 days) programs to help build children's resilience, leadership, ethical decision making, self-confidence and assertiveness. With fun role plays, scenarios, competitions, games and more, it's a great way to learn and practice the tools that we rely on every day!

<https://shineacademy.com.au/>

<https://longfordandfraser.com.au/school-holiday-program-8-12-years/>

Coding – Code Camp offer children from 5-13 coding, filmmaking, music and animation classes, everything from DJ camp to You Tube Creators camp. Do you have an aspiring blogger or gamer in your life? It's a great feeling to create your own content, while learning a programming language. Why not put your child in the drivers seat and get them to create their own code where technology and creativity meet with your child's interests. [https://](https://www.codecamp.com.au/)

www.codecamp.com.au/



Lego Bricks – Bricks4Kidz offer specially designed models with Lego We Do Software to make the bricks come to life. Imaginative, multi sensory play in the world of engineering and architecture. From basic to challenging Lego building. <https://www.bricks4kidz.com.au/melbourne-nthcasey/>

Dance, Drama and Musical Theatre – Have fun, make friends and build confidence and public speaking skills through training in the performing arts. Creative play helps foster confidence, creative and social and personal development, so why not let them develop their skills with something they enjoy! https://stageschool.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SSA_Prospectus_2021.pdf



Acting – Acting Antics offer small scale production opportunities for the aspiring actors in your life. This 4 day holiday program offers real life training in theatre: costumes, auditions (a role for everyone) and a performance on the last day! A great way to develop presentation skills and confidence, while using language and social skills, working towards a shared goal through the medium of live theatre. <https://www.actingantics.com/>

Have you considered a holiday or after school program for your child?

Call us on 03 9020 1833 to see if we can help with funding and finding the right program for your child.

Are you caring for an Aboriginal child who is on a Permanent Care Order?



Flexible Funding is available to assist with some of the needs of the child and family.

This funding is designed to support Aboriginal children and young people under Permanent Care Orders in many ways including:

- Cultural Identity and Family Connections
- Family and Community gatherings
- Return to Country
- Graduation Costs
- Sporting Carnivals and Participation
- Attending NAIDOC, Survival Day, Dreamtime at the G
- Sorry Business
- Household Items – (not covered by DHHS carer payment)

For further information or support please call us for a yarn to see if we can help.

Please contact Permanent Care and Adoptive Families
Ph: 03 9020 1833
Email: flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au
Web: <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/>

PCA Families has zero tolerance of child abuse and we are committed to establishing and maintaining child safe environments.

