



## Introducing our new CEO

### **Lisa Milani**

Firstly I would like to extend a warm welcome to PCA Families' members, including our newest members. This year has brought many ups and downs for families due to the bushfires and now COVID-19. From getting back to basics, more time to connect as a family, to adjusting to working from home and remote learning, to job loss or reduced hours, financial stress, safety concerns, social isolation and mental health challenges. It has been an incredibly challenging time for many families who have been doing their absolute best in the circumstances.

As this is my first edition as CEO at PCA Families, I'd like to share a little bit about myself. I'm a social worker with an MBA and I have worked in the children and families sector for the past 15 years. This includes direct service roles in Child Protection and an adoption and permanent care team. I have also undertaken senior leadership roles overseeing community services across the family services to out of home care continuum, including adoption and permanent care services. I served as Principal Officer and Deputy Principal Officer of adoption (a guardianship role) for four years. Additionally, I have headed up the advocacy arm of a large not-for-profit. I am passionate about innovation and have led the development of a number of programs such as Concurrent Care (dual foster care and permanent care accreditation) and a therapeutic contact service.

So why do I care about permanent care and adoptive families?

In my experience, permanent care and adoptive families are often a forgotten carer group who care for some of the most vulnerable children in our community. This has fuelled my passion for improving the lived experience of permanent care and adoptive families.

Particular areas of advocacy have included:

- Better availability of therapeutically grounded support to families to enable placement preservation and timely reunification of children to their parents.
- Timely permanency planning to reduce systemic harm to children.
- Modernisation of the Adoption Act due to a number of factors including discrimination against same sex couples and single people, and lack of provisions to adequately consider the best interests of children in decision-making.
- Broadening the use of the Concurrent Care program across the state for a very select group of children where there are strong, early indicators a long-term out of home care placement may be needed to prevent unnecessary placement changes.
- Greater availability of therapeutically grounded family contact services to support the development of relationships between children, birth families and carers (amongst other things).
- For a standardised permanent care and adoption carer accreditation assessment framework across the state grounded in an evidence-based approach.

There's lots to read in this issue so please enjoy. I'd like to acknowledge the members who have contacted us for support during this time and encourage those of you in need of support to please reach out. Finally if you have a moment to complete our ['advocacy priorities survey'](#) it will help us shape where we focus our attention in future.

Thank you for your continued support of PCA Families.



# Journal Club



COVID-19 has seen many rapid changes across our communities; including transitioning Journal Club from Collingwood library to zoom. It's been acknowledged that many participants have missed the face to face connection that is fostered during Journal Club sessions, while regional carers have reported the benefits of bringing Journal Club into their homes as well as those who just cannot leave their families at night.

April focused on a Q & A with Mick Naughton, Director of Children and Families Reform at DHHS discussing the '[Strong carers, stronger children](#)' strategy along with Board President, Meredith Carter of PCA Families. We had around 40 carers participate with some interesting discussion around the specific needs for the permanent care community and highlighting the need for permanent carers to have access to a variety of resources to secure children's and carers needs in order to sustain placements.

May featured Australian Childhood Trauma Group ([ACT](#)) with Yaso Samaranayake, Clinical Lead Melbourne, Mental Health Social Worker talking about ways families can support children, young people and each other when sitting with uncertainty and additional stress. It was fantastic to see 65 carers attend, with the conversation continuing with a peer lived experience discussion at June's Journal Club. It was incredibly warming to hear stories of resilience and shared wisdom from families on what has been helpful during some of the challenges navigating new social, educational and economical domains. Please visit <https://theactgroup.com.au/resources/>

Despite recent changes with Journal Club moving to zoom, the heart and richness of Journal Club continues to be the unwavering dedication of it's permanent care and adoptive families shared collective experiences in a safe and secure space. We thank our volunteer facilitators Mary, Chris, and Cas and if you have any suggested topics you would like discussed, please email [info@pcfamilies.org.au](mailto:info@pcfamilies.org.au)

We look forward to seeing many of you on July 2 for another zoom Journal Club session with Rachel from 'Create Vitality' on '3 keys to connection when emotions are high'.



## Journal Club Thursday July 2 at 8.00—9.30pm, via zoom With Rachel — Director of Create Vitality

Rachel is a registered Occupational Therapist with clinical expertise in psychosocial recovery in the mental health field. She also has training in Creative Arts Therapy and Qigong.

With over 20 years experience, she has worked with hundreds of families navigating the health care and education systems in support of a child. She can see how hard parents work and the sacrifices they make to support their children. To learn more about Rachel and Create Vitality, please visit <https://createvitality.com.au/>

Please join our discussion with Rachel on

**Date:** Thursday Jul 2, 2020

**Time:** 08:00 PM

Please [register in advance](#) for this discussion: <https://us02web.zoom.us/join/register/tZwtcu-srDkuH9cvo-lloabHjhAjLVxnuC8b>

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# COVID-19 Helpline and Flexible Funding

We have a number of services available; our helpline offers short-term information, support and referral services covering anything from COVID-19 related emotional support, to assistance with parenting strategies and behaviour management, to information about contact visits, passports and support to access other referral pathways.

Flexi funding packages also continue to be available, including dedicated funding for both Aboriginal families and for families requiring support due to COVID-19.

The best contact details for PCA Families are:

- Phone: 9020 1833 during business hours
- Helpline email: [info@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:info@pcafamilies.org.au) to request information or a call back
- Flexi Funds email: [flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au) to forward an application or to request a call back

If you are unable to use email, you can post your application, **but please take a copy prior to posting and DO NOT send any original documents.** Our postal details are:

Permanent Care & Adoptive Families  
PO Box 201  
Fitzroy VIC 3065

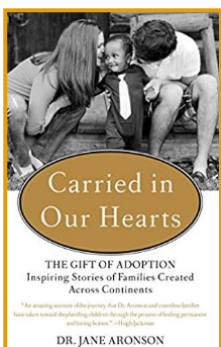
To read more about flexible funding and the services we offer, please view our website <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/flexible-funding>

## Book review

by Danielle Lucas, PCA Families

### *Carried in Our Hearts: The Gift of Adoption: Inspiring Stories of Families Created Across Continents*

**Author: Jane Aronson**



“Carried in Our Hearts” is a touching, sweet, informative and at times tear provoking book. The title refers to a saying that is familiar to many adoptive and non-biological parents and often repeated to their children ‘you did not grow in my tummy you grew in my heart’.

Dr Jane Aronson who is a paediatrician specialising in adoption medicine and founder of the World-wide Orphans Foundation prefaces the thematic sections of the book. She’s collected some of the most memorable adoption stories she’s heard and lived through in *Carried in Our Hearts*. All of them, including her own story of finding her calling and adopting her two children, speak to the transformative power of adoption and love.

Among many there is a beautiful story of a teenage boy adopted from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. To him happiness was such a foreign concept that the sound of his new sister laughing disturbed him greatly. His adoptive mother encouraged her son to do research on the topic of happiness for a school project, and it so impacted him that he decided to become a counsellor and psychologist.

I thought I already knew a lot about the adoption process, but this book and the testimonies of the broad range of contributors is a wonderful presentation of people bound by their moving and transformative experience as adoptive parents. I recommend the book to families made up through adoption, permanent care, foster care and blended. It is a good read about families dynamics.

If you have a book you can recommend or can even provide a review, we’d love to hear from you. Great reads and resources are always welcome and a great way to share knowledge. Please contact [Deborah@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:Deborah@pcafamilies.org.au)



# Funding for Indigenous families

## 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](mailto:flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au)  
Web: <http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/>

Reminding all our indigenous families, that funding is available to families with child under 18 years on a Victorian Permanent Care Order. The amount that can be funded is tailored to the needs of the family, within the guidelines provided by our funding body.

If you or any families you are in contact with may benefit from this, please contact us or pass on the information. We have funds available to families so please contact us as soon as possible by calling 03 9020 1833 or emailing [flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:flexifunding@pcafamilies.org.au)

# Website upgrade

As you may be aware, we are upgrading our website which was created back in 2011. The Fundraising, Advocacy and Member Engagement Committee (FAME) are managing the project which is due to be relaunched by the end of November 2020; in the meantime, our website is up and running and still current.

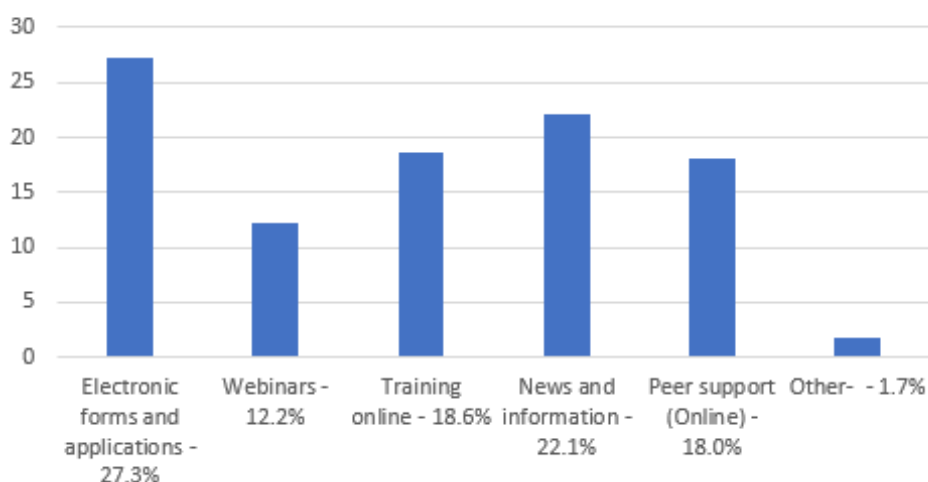
With over 120 members completing the website survey, we have a greater understanding of what your needs are and how we can improve the way we communicate electronically. We really appreciate your input as it will shape the website and deliver a user friendly, communicative and interactive platform.

The aim of the project is to provide PCA Families with an upgraded website that better meets the needs of its members and the community by:

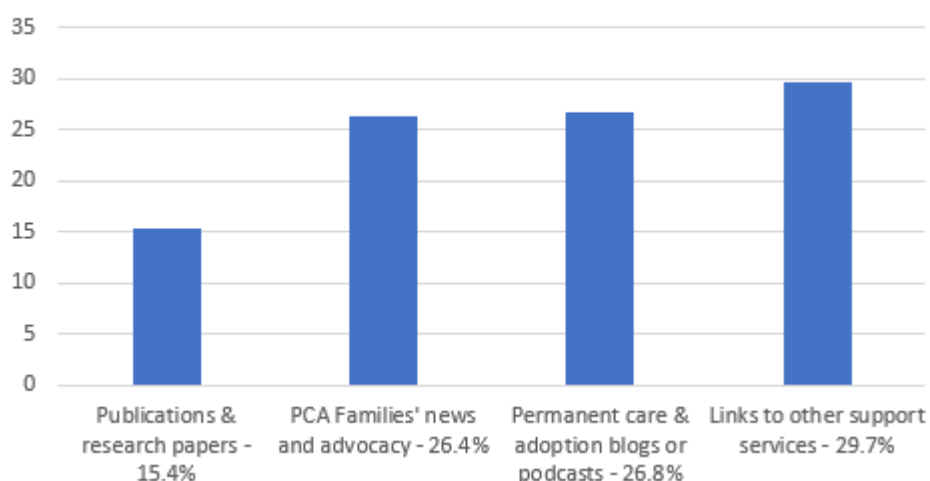
- refreshing the site design
- refreshing site navigation, content and functionality
- making the site responsive to perform on all types of devices
- introducing additional features for usability on all devices
- integrating social media where appropriate
- optimising site and content for search engines
- introducing improved content management system for ease of use by PCA Families.

Below are two of the graphs which explain the features and content you would like from our website.

## Which features would you like to see added?



## What new content would you like to see?





# Sylbar an assistance dog

We are grandparent carers of our two little granddaughters, aged 8 and 7. Permanent care was granted nearly seven years ago when they were just babies. It's been a long struggle both financially and emotionally to raise these two beautiful girls. We are blessed to have them in our lives, but as many other carers understand it's certainly challenging. Both girls were born addicted and have serious psychological issues. Our youngest also has autism and FASD. Without the help, care and support of PCA families our journey would have been even more difficult.

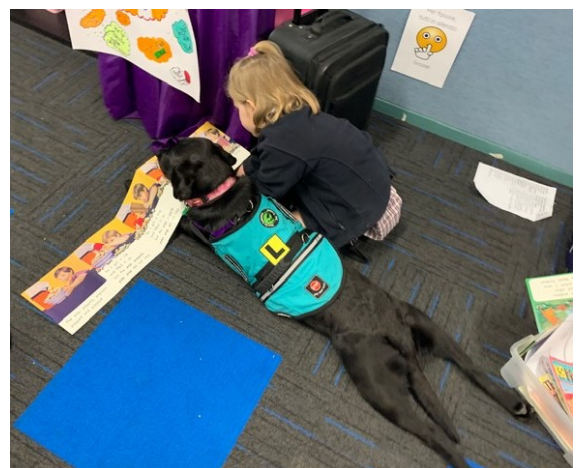
The support from PCA families has been both personal and financial to us, but as you would understand often these two dilemmas go hand in hand. As kinship carers you have enough to deal with, but with the added stress of lack of finances, sometimes it's just too much.

Our paediatrician suggested some time ago that we try and get an Assistance dog for our youngest, the benefits sounded wonderful, but once again, there was the problem of finances. However, the more we researched the more we knew we just had to somehow make this happen. Sylbar came into our little family about 6 months ago. We were fortunate to be accepted by the Victorian Guide Dogs to purchase a reclassified guide dog. Sylbar was not suitable for a blind person, however, for a child with autism she was perfect, as not every dog can become an Assistance Dog, they need to have the right personality and be a good mix for the child.

Reclassified guide dogs are amazing and have had a good deal of training, but the very important role of a fully fledged Assistance Dog requires further extensive training which was once again, far beyond our reach. This was not a normal request that we were asking of PCA families, so one can imagine how incredibly happy we were to be told that our flexi funding application had been granted.

Sylbar is such an important part of our family, she goes to school everyday, she was even at remote learning doing Zoom calls with the teacher. Our little girl is much calmer in her presence. Yes, there are still autism meltdowns, but these are few and far between now. Sylbar and our granddaughter are still in training (Sylbar would pass the test now) but a child with autism is another matter! We expect she will be off her learner's in a few months.

A big thank you to PCA Families.



If you and your family have a story you would like to share, please contact [Deborah@pcfamilies.org.au](mailto:Deborah@pcfamilies.org.au)  
**"Keep them coming!"**

# Q&A with Deb Hunt

In the spotlight with Deborah Hunt, Membership Engagement and Office Manager at PCA Families



## Tell us about your family?

*My name is Deb and I am mum to two adopted children from South Korea. My son is now 18 but we were fortunate to adopt him at the age of 5 months and my daughter is 15 and she came to us at 6 months. We are a relatively small family, I have one brother and my husband Joe has 1 brother. They both have 1 girl and 1 boy so we all have pigeon pairs.*

*My brother and I were raised by my grandparents as my parents were killed in a car accident when I was 6 years old and my brother 10, so I understand what it is like growing up with grandparents. We were extremely close to our Nan and Gramps who sacrificed so much to raise a second family. I grew up in Bentleigh and we had a place in Bermagui on the NSW coast so we spent most of our holidays there and it is where they eventually retired.*

## Most enjoyed family activity during COVID-19?

*The best part of being in "lockdown" was all our family meals. My children, like most, are busy with sports activities and a social life so COVID-19 meant we could enjoy being together with no outside pressures of having to be somewhere. We watched a lot of Netflix and movies without feeling guilty!*

## What's your favourite travel destination and why?

*I have always travelled a lot as I used to work for Ansett. With our children being Korean, we have travelled there six times so that is definitely one of our favourite places and Joe is from Fremantle in WA so we spend every Christmas by the beach. If I had to choose a destination, it would be Italy for the food, London for the arts and Greece for the life-style.*

## What's your favourite food?

*Pasta, nuts and chocolate.*

## What do you enjoy most about working with PCA Families?

*I have worked at PCA Families since it became a non-for-profit organisation back in 2011. It has changed a lot over this period but the staple role of assisting families and children has always been our priority. I particularly enjoy talking to members and being in a position to assist and support families. My role as Member Engagement Officer has also varied over the years but my main tasks have consisted of organising family days, training, peer support, and all forms of communication including newsletters, sending lots of emails, the website and much much more.*



*Bobby, my porter was my saviour. I wouldn't have made it, if not for him!*

*The local children loved playing with the older boys!*



*In 2019, my son and I walked the Kokoda track in Papua New Guinea with his school. It wasn't a favourite destination as it was challenging in every way but rewarding in equal measures.*



# What did you do during "lock down"

We asked some of our members' children what their thoughts were in ISO "lockdown". These are their responses.

## "Lockdown" with a 10 year old in year 4

**What has been the best thing about lockdown?**

I liked watching shows and YouTube in my pyjamas.

**What has been most challenging?**

Sometimes I got sick of staying home all the time.

**What did you miss most?**

I missed going to the beach and to kids in motion.

**What have you learnt?**

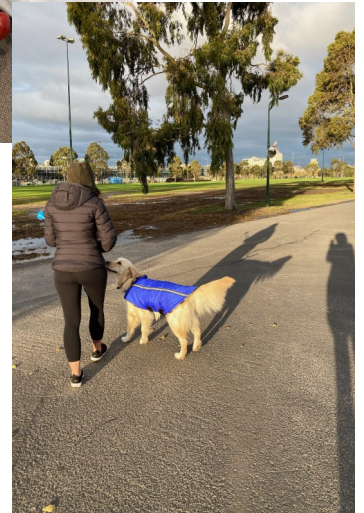
I learnt how to make cookies with my big sister, but she was very bad at it. Maybe I will make them with mum next and hopefully they will be better.

**How have you stayed connected with people?**

Zoom and google meet.

**What are some of the fun things you have done?**

I have had fun watching movies on Disney plus and eating popcorn.



Celebrating Inclusion at school via zoom



## "Lockdown" with a 15 year old girl in year 10

**What has been the best thing about lockdown?**

Sleeping in.

**What has been most challenging?**

I didn't find anything challenging, I quite enjoyed it.

**What did you miss most?**

My friends and working collaboratively at school.

**What have you learnt?**

I've learnt self control – stick to a schedule even when there isn't one. Stay focussed when it is easy to get distracted at home.

**How have you stayed connected with people?**

Texting and facetime.

**What are some of the fun things you have done?**

Learnt to Knit, on line shopping (but didn't buy anything), watching "The Office".



# What did you do during "lock down"

We asked some of our members' children what their thoughts were in ISO "lockdown". These are their responses.

## "Lockdown" with a 16 year old in year 11

**What has been the best thing about lockdown?**

Spending quality time with my family. I have also enjoyed discovering new and old activities that I love doing.

**What has been most challenging?**

Is probably staying inside. I am an outdoors kind of person and staying inside and doing nothing really stresses me out. It has also been slightly challenging being around the same people all the time.

**What did you miss most?**

Seeing my friends, going to athletics and dance. And generally going outside to the shops and going to eat in places that are not your house!!

**What have you learnt?**

I really do not always like to stay in my house, I have learnt resilience (when the WIFI does not work). I have also learnt that you have to stay self motivated (this is especially true while doing school work online). I have also learnt to have integrity and not cheat on my SACS for VCE.

**How have you stayed connected with people?**

At the start of lockdown I facetimed my friends everyday but then I got bored of them. I message them on various social media platforms like snapchat and Instagram. Towards the end of lockdown I would go walks with them!! (socially distanced of course). We also ZOOM called our relatives from overseas.

**What are some of the fun things you have done?**

Camping in my backyard, going on walks with my Mum as well as having a nice long and relaxing break. I have also enjoyed all the yummy food we have cooked over the isolation period.



## "Lockdown" by 14 year old girl in year 8

**What has been the best thing about lockdown?**

Being home and being lazy.

**What has been most challenging?**

Waiting for my computer to load to submit work.

**What did you miss most?**

My friends.

**What have you learnt?**

That I can concentrate ok at home and I am more positive than I thought – also that I am quite lazy.

**How have you stayed connected with people?**

Zoom, and phone.

**What are some of the fun things you have done?**

Painting, Art, Catching up with family and camp fires outside.



# Raising Expectations



Everyone's path to TAFE or uni is different. Now over 260 care leavers are studying at Federation University, La Trobe University and Swinburne University of Technology.

Raising Expectations supports young people in out-of-home care and care leavers to aspire to, access and succeed in vocational and higher education.

Raising Expectations has launched their new website [www.raisingexpectations.com.au](http://www.raisingexpectations.com.au) which will make it easier for young people with a care experience, care leavers and their supporters to find information, resources and services to support them to go to TAFE or uni.

There's even a chat function, allowing site visitors to connect directly with the Raising Expectations team with their questions. Please check it out.

## Youth Programs

The **Mindfulness in Motion Kids Program** is designed specifically to assist children and young peoples' personal growth. Classes blend skill development, personal observation and experiential learning in an environment that is fun, supportive and engaging.



Classes focus on acquiring:

- Resilience
- Focus
- Teamwork
- Assertiveness
- Emotional regulation
- Self-reflection
- Body awareness

The classes run **Tuesday** evenings from 5.20—6.15pm on the dates listed below.

**For ages** 5 - 12 years old

**Address:** Mindfulness in Motion, 6 Oakover Road, Preston

**Dates:** August 4, 11, 18, 25

**Time:** 5.20 – 6.15pm

September 1, 8

**Register:** <https://www.trybooking.com/BAYWC> or call Deborah on 03 9020 1839 or email [info@pcafamilies.org.au](mailto:info@pcafamilies.org.au)



## Young kinship carers parenting children



We thought you may find it of interest to read about a project which shone a light on young kinship carers (30 years or under) with a range of relationships to the children in their care.

A notable feature of the results was the significant improvement described by both the young carers and the young people's wellbeing and development over time. Consistent with these observations, the young people interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with their care, and appreciation of the challenges their carers faced.

The focus of kinship care policy and research has been mainly on grandparent care in the belief that grandparent and kinship care are virtually synonymous with less attention given to other relatives who step in at times of crisis. This research project explored the other end of the carer age spectrum: young kinship carers.

[http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/uploaded-files/Kinship-care-young-Research-Report\\_1591754010.pdf](http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/uploaded-files/Kinship-care-young-Research-Report_1591754010.pdf)

# Carer Kafe Learning and Training

## JUNE

### 7 June - Melton

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 9 June - Heywood

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 11 June - Mildura

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Young People who Self Harm

### 11 June - Bendigo

Berry Street  
Life After Loss: its effect on the developing child & you

### 12 June - Morwell

Australian Childhood Trauma Group  
Divided Loyalties: Kinship Care

### 15 June - Ringwood, Monash

Healthy Eating, Active Living Matters (HEALing Matters)

### 22 June - Reservoir

Australian Childhood Foundation  
After the Storm: supporting children after family violence

### 24 June - Wodonga

Lancaster Consulting Australia  
Why do they do that? - Understanding & responding to behaviour in young children 9 - 18 years of age (2 days)

### 25 June - Melton

VACCA  
Nikara's Journey (2 days)

### 30 June - Geelong

Manifest with Power  
Fostering Resilience - Youth Edition

## JULY

### 2 July - Frankston

Manifest with Power  
Fostering Resilience - Youth Edition

### 14 July - Sunshine

Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development  
TBRI Caregiver Training (2 days)

### 15 July - Echuca

Keystone Counselling & Consulting  
Therapeutic Caring: Yarning about children with challenging behaviours & how to help them heal

### 16 July - Mildura

Lancaster Consulting Australia  
Why do they do that? - Understanding & responding to behaviour in young children 0 - 8 years of age (2 days)

### 17 July - Ballarat

The Pyjama Foundation  
Love of Learning Program Part 2

### 27 July - Bendigo

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 29 July - Dandenong

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 30 July - Norlane

VACCA  
Nikara's Journey (2 days)

### 30 July - Sale

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 31 July - Morwell

AGENDA 2001  
Youth Suicide Prevention

## AUGUST

### 3 August - Wangaratta

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 5 August - Geelong

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 6 August - Eaglemont

AGENDA 2001  
Working with Teens - A Toolbox of Strategies

### 6 August - Horsham

VACCA  
Nikara's Journey (2 days)

### 11 August - Sunshine

Secure Start®  
Helping Children & Young People Achieve their Potential: An Introduction to Kinship CARE

### 13 August - Frankston

Secure Start®  
Helping Children & Young People Achieve their Potential: An Introduction to Kinship CARE

### 20 August - Geelong

Settlement Services International  
Supporting positive cultural identity for children & young people from multicultural b'grounds

### 21 August - Bendigo

Australian Childhood Trauma Group  
An Introduction to Mental Health

### 21 August - Heywood, Monash

Healthy Eating, Active Living Matters (HEALing Matters)

### 22 August - Shepparton

Lancaster Consulting Australia  
Understanding Disability

### 25 August - Dandenong

Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development  
TBRI Caregiver Training (2 days)

Carer Kafe training is for statutory kinship carers and accredited foster carers, however, if there is space available permanent carers can apply.

For more information, visit: <https://www.carerkafe.org.au/>

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

