

Welcome from CEO, Lisa

Welcome PCA Families members to the Summer edition of Thrive, including new and existing permanent care, kinship care, local and intercountry adoptive families, and those in waiting!

What a year 2020 has been... a year like many of us have never experienced before and probably hope to never experience again! Like most challenging times, the sun eventually comes out again, and while the impacts will be felt for a long time, it's fabulous to see people getting back to 'normal' as much as possible. Permanent care, kinship care and adoptive families have shown incredible resilience this year and it certainly doesn't go unnoticed. I hope for many of you, you can breathe a sigh of relief as the year draws to a close and that you have an opportunity to 'reset' in preparation for (hopefully!) a better year ahead.



Our client services remain open to families in need of support but will be closed for the days between Christmas and New Year to allow our staff to have a well-earned break.

You may have read about some of our advocacy work in the last edition of Thrive. A key area of advocacy is improving access to post-order support to improve the lived experience of children and families. The majority of the funding distributed to families via our flexible funding program has been what is called 'lapsing funding', which means that there is no certainty each year that families will have this funding available to meet children's needs in the future. However, I'm pleased to say that the recent state budget resulted in ongoing flexible funding doubling, which is fabulous as it means that there is greater assurance that children's needs, such as therapeutic needs, can be met each year. While there is unfortunately still progress to be made, this is a really positive development. We were also advised last week that an extra \$785,000 flexible funding has been allocated by the Victorian Government to support permanent care families impacted by COVID-19. The funding is inclusive of local adoptive families and families with parenting orders, if you are in receipt of the DHHS care allowance.

We have had contact from several members who have raised concerns about the exclusion of permanent care young people from the expansion of the Better Futures and Home Stretch Programs. I am aware there are different views about this, but I have raised these matters with the Minister's office and DHHS, and will continue to advocate for permanent care young people to be included in these and related initiatives, as many of the same challenges facing young people leaving out of home care, are also experienced by permanent care young people transitioning into adulthood. Thank you to members who have shared case studies both verbally and in writing to support this work.

On a personal note, I wanted to let members know that I am going to be having a baby in April 2021 so I am going to be taking a break from my role to settle in as a family of four, but we will keep you up to date with interim CEO plans.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and for those that don't celebrate I hope you and your families have a restful break over the holiday season. Stay well, stay safe and please enjoy this Edition of Thrive.



Message from Meredith Carter, President, PCA Families



Hi everyone

I hope you are looking forward to the festive season and will get a chance to relax and recharge. I'm keen to see family members I haven't seen since last Christmas. We spent it under the red sun and clouds of bushfire smog in Sydney. It seems such a long time ago now.

I'm also reflecting on the positives that this strange year has brought for our community. That includes the great things our small PCA Families team has been achieving - working from home! We're really proud of the team. Journal Club is perhaps more active than ever – and on-line. New services like Click and Connect have been developed. And our CEO has been engaging in important advocacy. We want to make sure Government and others are well aware of the needs of children and young people in both PC and adoption. It also helps them keep front of mind the needs of the increasing number of families offering children stable ongoing homes as permanent members of their family.

Some of you would have made it to our fabulous member celebration in November online. It was great to highlight so many member stories and I hope you enjoy more of them in this Newsletter.

AGM coming up on Wednesday February 24, 2021

The Board explored having our AGM proper online too. Legal advice we received was that under our current constitution or Rules it would be better to hold a physical AGM when possible. Discussions with the regulators suggest we are not alone in this. Both Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Australian Charities and Not for Profits Commission (ACNC) agreed to extend the timeframes. This means the AGM will now be held on 24 February at 6.00pm with registration details to follow in the new year. The bonus is that it will be great to see people in the flesh after so many zoom meetings.

Updating our Constitution

Meanwhile the Board has been working hard with pro bono assistance from solicitors Herbert Smith Freehills to update our Rules. We want to remove inconsistencies and at the same time streamline the PCA Families' constitution. We also want it to be consistent with the online environment, contemporary language and practice, and reflecting developments such as the introduction of the ACNC.

Other activities that have kept the board and its committees busy this year have included a new strategic plan, revised risk register, redeveloping the website, CEO recruitment and appointment, new staff, further assurances of secured funding and more.

On behalf of all the board best wishes for the season.

Meredith Carter
President, PCA Families Board

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AGM

Save the date

24 Feb 2021

6.00 - 7.30pm

One year old boy with special needs seeking family



Search for a VERY special, loving family

Anup is a beautiful one year old boy who is looking for a permanent home and a family with a big heart! Anup has a rare genetic condition called pelizaeus-merzbacher syndrome (PMD), which limits mobility and development and creates uncertainty in his life expectancy.

But for now, Anup is in a stable condition and is in the care of a foster family. The perfect family for Anup will be able to keep up with regular specialist appointments and ongoing medical care, and provide all the love, care and cuddles in the world! Anup's new family will also receive support and training regarding his care needs.

If you think you can provide a loving, caring home for Anup, please contact CatholicCare on 9689 3888. All enquiries are treated confidentially.

**Name changed to protect privacy.*

Journal Club

Journal Club will continue in 2021 facilitated by our wonderful volunteers, Mary, Cas and Chris.

We are optimistic that we will meet face to face at the Collingwood Library some months and other months virtually via zoom so that families from across regional Victoria and Australia can participate.

If you have any topics or guest speakers you would like to suggest, please email Deborah@pcfamilies.org.au

This year Journal Club reached hundreds of parents and carers. We look forward to our members continuing to enjoy the benefits of our peer support services.

Journal Club occurs on the first Thursday of every month (except January) at 8.00pm

Save
the
dates

Please pencil these dates in
your diary for 2021

Time: 8.00pm—9.30pm

Thursday February 4

Thursday March 4

Thursday April 1



Q&A with our Program Lead, Ann



Ann started with PCA Families in October and is responsible for overseeing our client services.

Tell us about your family?

My family is pretty small. There is myself and my husband Dan, our one-year son Charlie and our dog Fjord.

Most enjoyed family activity during COVID-19?

During the lockdown our local golf course was opened to the public as parkland. I really enjoyed going on walks there with the whole family and having picnics!

What have you enjoyed the since lockdown was eased?

Being able to see my friends and family again, especially those who live down near the beach.

What's your favourite travel destination and why?

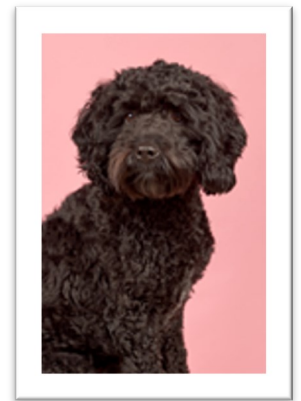
Indonesia. I lived there for a while and I really love the culture, people, food and the diving!

What's your favourite food?

Laksa.

What is your guilty pleasure?

Eurovision.



What do you enjoy most about working with PCA Families?

Enabling families to share their experiences with others through groups like Click and Connect and Journal Club.

Carer census - please participate in survey



PCA Families invite you to participate in an important survey designed to understand more about your experiences as a permanent care parent/carer or adoptive parent. The survey is also designed to better understand the experience of other care cohorts including kinship carers (non-permanent care) and foster carers. By sharing your thoughts, you will be helping to improve the experiences of families in the future.

The survey is part of the Victorian Government's Home-based Carer Strategy: Strong Carers, Stronger Children and will provide information for improving future policy, programs and services.

Your responses will be completely confidential and anonymous and will take about 10-15 minutes to complete depending on your answers.

To access the survey, please click on the [link](#). Thanks in advance for your assistance

Insights from a Permanent Care Parent

"If Hindsight Was Real"

Congratulations!

After spending what feels like years with strange people delving into the darkest depths of your personal life, you've finally had "the call" you've been linked to a child!!!!

This is where it's so important to be prepared with the right questions - so apart from the obvious, I highly recommend adding these to your list:

1. Do the birth parents currently have a positive/strong bond with the child, including regular family contact? What are their expectations moving forward as part of the Permanent Care Order (PCO)?
2. Apart from the birth parents, who else in the birth family (or other) are wanting continued court ordered family contact and how often?
3. Does the child currently have continuity of support from either the Foster Care agency or Permanent Care Agency? What will happen if any of these Case Workers leave? What happens once the PCO is granted?
4. What is the likely timeframe from the child transitioning to our family and the PCO being finalised in the courts?

Like most excited prospective parents, we assumed so much, including the validity of the reports we were given from our permanent care agency and the foster agency, but they are typically based on whatever information they can gather from the birth parents. So please be mindful that these link reports can paint a very inaccurate picture of the truth. My best piece of advice is to ask LOTS of questions at the link meeting and it's ok to say "no" to a child if it doesn't feel right for you and your family. My husband and I did exactly that with our first linked child and we were filled with a sense of guilt, but ultimately we made the right decision.

I'm a mum to Permanent Care siblings and live on the Mornington Peninsula. It's been 6 1/2 years of roller coaster rides, but the love and genuine family bond you develop outweighs everything.

If you live around the Peninsula and would like to connect for a coffee, please feel free to contact info@pcafamilies.org.au and we will forward your details on to Kirsty to connect.

Regards, Kirsty



Physically distanced, socially connected virtual group!

Online social group, hosted by PCA Families Advisor, Liz

The group will be a supportive social space that allows natural conversations to flow to ensure you are honoured as experts on your families and lives.

Who: Anyone who identifies as a Permanent Care & Adoptive Family!

When: **Wednesdays at 12.00pm**

Where: Please register in advance via Zoom link (link provided each week)

Pre-registration is required. Keep a look out on Facebook and emails for topics and dates.

Click and Connect will resume mid January 2021 (to be advised) after a short break!

Flexible funding applications - school resources

If you require financial assistance with books, uniforms and any other educational information for the 2021 school year (**above what is covered by the DHHS Care Allowance and other funding sources**) for children on Permanent Care Orders, Adoption Orders (with DHHS care allowance) or Family Law Court Orders (with DHHS care allowance) and wish to submit a Flexible Funding application, you can do so once we reopen on the 4th of January 2021. Please note any applications made before this date will not be allocated or processed due to the Christmas break unless deemed urgent; ie. concerns about family breakdown.

The flexible funding program is now able to process pre-approved applications for booklists and school uniform costs. Please call 03 9020 1833 or email flexifunding@pcfamilies.org.au with costings to discuss pre-approval for school related purchases. All **receipts must be kept** for carer reimbursement.

We would also like to thank those families that have actively followed up with their schools to access State School Relief for additional school uniforms and for applying to the Camps, Schools & Excursion Fund (CSEF). For information on your eligibility, please check the links below or speak with your school's Student Welfare Co-ordinator, Assistant Principal or the administration staff to see who manages these within your school.

CSEF: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/csef.aspx>

State School Relief: <https://stateschoolsrelief.org.au/>

Note: CSEF—Families who do not meet the general CSEF eligibility criteria can discuss with their school a Special Consideration application for “*Students in out of home care*”. You may require a letter from PCA Families so please call our Helpline to discuss further.

Private School Fees:

In exceptional circumstances only, flexible funding may contribute towards private school fees. However, we are unable to provide guarantees of ongoing payments and ask families to consider their capacity to independently sustain a private school placement. We also encourage families to discuss with your school's Welfare or Pastoral teams, as well as the school's Business Manager, special consideration discounts or payment options prior to submitting an application.

Our Adoptive Families may also be eligible for CSEF and State School Relief if you meet their general eligibility criteria.

For additional assistance, check out the **Ardoch School Costs Guide**, which is a great resource:

<https://www.ardoch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Ardoch-2020-School-Costs-guide-Booklet-VIC.pdf>



Introducing three PCA Families' Board members



Introducing one of our newest board members, **Judy Gouldbourn**. Judy works as an Executive Officer supporting a Not For Profit allied health association and has spent most of her working life in the field of human resources, mostly with volunteer organisations. Judy is an adult adoptee. She has put together a video to help our members get to know her a little better.

To hear Judy's personal story, click on this [link](#)



Introducing **Sarah Witty** who joined the Board in 2019.

Sarah has had a corporate career working her way up through the insurance, property and finance sectors. Sarah is a dynamic individual with an extensively transferable skill set, passion for business and a proven leader. Sarah's passion has seen her exceed all expectations in delivering workplace performance outcomes, on time and according to budget. She has a strong understanding of financials and has spent many years picking them apart as she assesses a company's viability through her work in both trade credit insurance and banking. She has also owned and operated several small businesses.

Giving back to the community is important to Sarah. Currently, she works for a social enterprise, Homes for Homes as National Partnerships Manager, raising money for social and affordable housing. In her role, she has so far raised over \$15million.

Sarah was engaged to her husband Paul after only two weeks of meeting, although they waited five years before they married, they have now been happily married for 11 years. Sarah was unable to have her own children and experienced numerous miscarriages before turning to IVF. After many years and many failed IVF cycles, she decided to turn a negative into a positive and became a foster parent. Together with Paul, Sarah has proudly provided a temporary safe haven for six children who have been welcomed into their home. The children in her care attend local schools and childcare, and Sarah enjoys being part of these supportive communities. Sarah has Permanent Care approval should any of the children in her care require her to continue to look after them and transition from foster care to permanent care. Sarah joined the Board of Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (Vic) in 2019 and is chair of the Fundraising and Memberships Committee.



Introducing **Chris Lockwood** who is Secretary on the Board of Directors.

Chris and his wife Jillian have two adopted children, their eldest from China and their youngest from South Korea.

To listen to Chris' story, click on the [link](#)



Helpline and Flexible Funding

We have a number of services available to support families.

Our helpline offers short-term information, support and referral services covering anything from COVID-19 related emotional support, to assistance with trauma informed parenting strategies and behaviour management, to information about contact visits, passports and support to access other referral pathways.

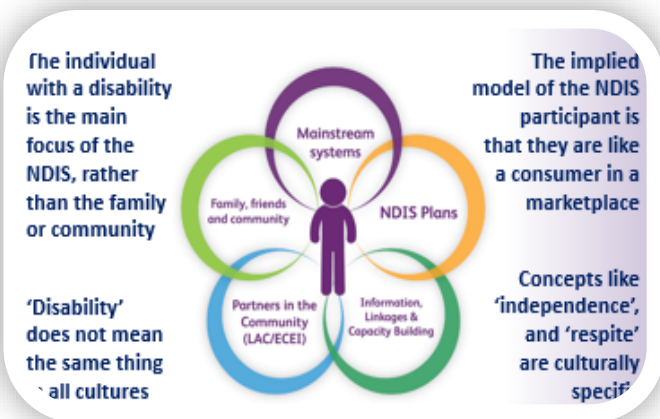
Flexible funding is available to support Permanent carers including dedicated funding for Aboriginal families.

The best contact details for PCA Families are:

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

To read more about flexible funding and the eligibility criteria, please view our website <http://www.pcfamilies.org.au/flexible-funding>

NDIS Workshops—reflections by member, Alison Verghese



Many thanks to PCA Families for organising a terrific two-part session on NDIS run by the very knowledgeable Mark Ryan from the Centre of Excellence in Child and Family Welfare. How to access and to plan (if successful with access) around the complexities of NDIS was the focus of the two very engaging zoom sessions.

The first session covered how to apply for NDIS – specifically how to increase your chances of success by understanding the language to use that makes sure your young person meets the criteria. The information was practical and helpful with lots of great links, examples, hints and hacks. It was especially helpful in explaining how developmental trauma could potentially fall within the ‘psychosocial’ pathway to NDIS which many of those from PCA Families could identify with.

The second session was how to get the most of a plan after successfully navigating the access requirements. There was a lot of great sharing and discussion on how to make the plan requests meet the necessary requirements to get the funding - It's all in the language!

It was really pragmatic, practical and easy to understand and made NDIS less daunting for those of us able to attend. Mark Ryan was a fantastic presenter with so much knowledge generously shared.

If you would like to attend a session in 2021 on “How to apply for NDIS funding”, please contact Deborah@pcfamilies.org.au and you will be placed on the register.

Raising Expectations—for school leavers

RAISING EXPECTATIONS



Thinking about studying in 2021?
Raising Expectations: Everyone's path to TAFE or Uni is different. Let's find yours.

Raising Expectations connects care experienced young people to aspire to, access and succeed in vocational and higher education.

For lots of information and resources, go to www.raisingexpectations.com.au and look up 'getting more care leavers to TAFE and uni'.

Have a look at supports and services at our partner universities (TAFE and university courses) [University Feature — Raising Expectations: getting more care leavers to TAFE and uni.](#)

A great way to get into university via a TAFE pathway or to complete as a stand-alone qualification is through the Skills First Youth Access Initiative. Care experienced young people have access to 800+ no-fee TAFE courses from Certificate through to Advanced Diploma level.

To be eligible, you need to:

- be an Australian or New Zealand citizen and aged 24 or under; and
- have been or are currently on a Child Protection Order or a Youth Justice Order (but not currently in custody); or
- be a resident of an Education Youth Foyer

For more information, guide and referral form go to [Skills First Youth Access Initiative \(education.vic.gov.au\)](#).

Need more information, contact us through the chat page [Chat With Us — Raising Expectations: getting more care leavers to TAFE and uni.](#)

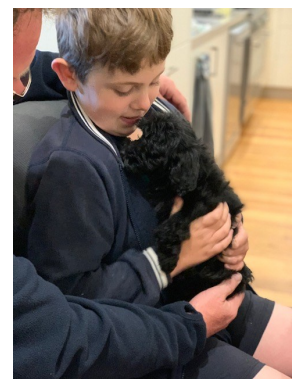
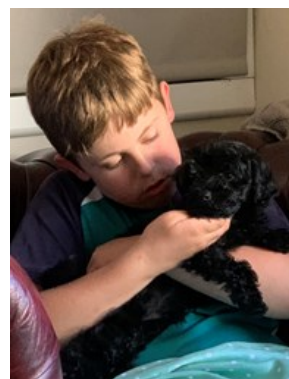


To sign up for a Raising Expectations newsletter, contact Laura at reprojectsupport@cfecfw.asn.au and to keep in touch and stay up to date, follow along on [Facebook](#).

When Sylvester meets his therapy dog for the first time



The smile says it all "It is astounding the difference a therapy dog can make to a child's life!"



Closure of PCA Families office over Christmas

PCA Families' office will be closed during the holiday period from 25 December to 3 January 2021, with limited staff rostered on 23 and 24 December.

If your email relates to a flexible funding application submitted over the holiday period, your application will be received on 4 January 2021. We are working hard to ensure timely processing of all applications'. Can this be remove and updated to say: 'If your contact relates to a flexible funding application submitted over the holiday period, your application will be received on 4 January 2021.

Thank you for your patience during this time. If you are contacting us for support and require immediate help, please contact the below organisations:

Organisation	Number	Details
Emergency Services	000	24 hours
Parent line	13 22 89	8am – Midnight, 7 days per week
Nurse on call	1300 606 024	24hours, 7 days per week
Kids helpline	1800 551 800	24hours
Lifeline	13 11 14	24hours
Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre	1800 015 188	24hours, 7 days per week
Grief line	1300 845 745	Midday—12.00am
Doctors on call	13 74 25	Monday to Friday 6.00pm – 8.00am Saturday 12.00pm – 12.00am Sunday open 24 hours
Eheadspace mental health phone & digital support 12-25 years old	1800 650 890	https://headspace.org.au/eheadspace/
Beyond blue	1300 224 636	24hours

CREATE Foundation and Carer KaFE events

To see what's happening at the CREATE Foundation, please visit their website at www.create.org.au.

12/12/2020 - CREATE Christmas Party – online
Register to victoria@create.org.au

15/12/2020 - End of school year celebration – online
Register to deborah.watson@create.org.au

January date TBC. Connection Event – location TBC
Register to victoria@create.org.au



Carer KaFE have set dates for 2021 if you are interested in viewing their schedule, please visit <https://www.carerkafe.org.au/>

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/>

Support PCA Families

PCA Families exists to support strong, stable families who have the support they need to provide nurturing and permanent homes for the children and young people who come into their care through permanent care, kinship care or adoption. We know first-hand that the journey for families is rewarding but not always easy.

How we help the permanent care, kinship care and adoption community

Supporting PCA Families will enable us to continue to develop and roll out programs that enable strong and stable families through parenting and peer support services that directly benefit children, young people and their families. It will also support us to continue our advocacy work to improve the lived experience of permanent care and adoptive families.

How you can get involved

There are many ways you can play an important part in helping us to support families formed through permanent care, adoption and kinship care.

You can make a difference through:

- **Single or monthly gift**
- **Leaving a gift in your will**
- **A gift in memory or celebration of loved one**
- **Regular giving (including workplace giving.**

You can **donate** online at <https://www.givenow.com.au/pcafamilies> Donations over \$2.00 are tax-deductible.

We also welcome applications to join us as a **volunteer** and would particularly like to hear from you if are interested in the following volunteer opportunities:

- **Communications Officer**
- **Events/Fundraising Assistant**
- **Peer Support Mentors/Facilitators**
- **General Administration Support.**

For a volunteer application form, please contact Deborah@pcafamilies.org.au or call 9020 1833.

Thank you for your continued support of PCA Families.



Spread Gheer!

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

Thrive is a quarterly newsletter produced by Permanent Care and Adoptive Families
© 2020 Permanent Care and Adoptive Families (VIC) Inc.
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**Permanent
Care and
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Families**

