

It takes a village: More foster carers needed in Morwell

- **Victoria's state-wide foster care recruitment service Fostering Connections is calling on the Morwell community to open their hearts and homes to children and young people in need.**
- **Foster Care Week runs from 13-19 September and this year's theme is a celebration of the incredible work of carers.**
- **It takes a village to raise children, find out how you can become a foster carer and become may be part of the village.**
- **There are approximately 11,000 children and young people in Victoria's out-of-home-care system.**

Carers are the backbone of the Victorian out-of-home care system and Foster Care Week, commencing on Sunday 13 September, is an opportunity to recognise their immense contribution to the community.

Thousands of children and young people from all over Victoria need safe and nurturing homes every day and foster carers provide a space where they can grow and develop. Carers from all walks of life make up an important part of a child's village and join an incredible network of other people who help a child thrive.

Fostering Connections, a joint initiative between foster care agencies across Victoria and the Department of Health and Human Services, is seeking to raise the profile of foster carers in Morwell and invite them to join the village that cares for children and young people who can't live safely at home.

The CEO of the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre), the peak body for child and family services in Victoria which administers the Fostering Connections initiative, Deb Tsorbaris said foster carers provide stability and support in a child's life.

"Foster carers are incredible people who choose to become part of the village for children and young people who cannot live with their families for a period of time. Many different people make up these villages – parents, extended family, teachers, friends' parents, and in some cases, carers!

"Anyone over 21 can apply to be a foster carer. The most important thing is that you can offer a safe, caring home," Centre CEO Ms Tsorbaris said.

Quantum Support Services' Acting Practice Leader - Out-of-Home Care Katelyn Terranova, said the organisation will be celebrating Foster Care Week a little differently this year, delivering carefully crafted goodie baskets to its Morwell foster carers.

"We'll also be announcing our up-and-coming carer support groups for foster and kinship carers, which will provide an opportunity for our carers to regularly get together, get to know each other and share their challenges and triumphs.

"We are planning to have these groups up and running by the end of the year via Zoom, and will hopefully get to transition to in-person sessions when it is safe to do so again," Ms Terranova said.

Berry Street's Gippsland Director Faorligh Hunter, said: "Foster care week is a wonderful opportunity for us to thank all our foster carers.

"Our carers go above and beyond to provide safe homes for children and young people in need," Ms Hunter said.

Sophie, a 23-year-old foster carer from Warragul, was inspired to become a carer because of her parents.

"Mum and dad fostered many children over the years, even before I was born.

"Now is not the right time for me to have my own kids but I'm ready to look after children in need of a loving home," Sophie said.

Sophie encourages people thinking about foster care: "Give foster care a go – it's so important to support children who don't have the best start in life.

"The need for foster carers continues to increase in our community and we urge anyone that's thought about foster care to attend an information session and get started," Ms Hunter said.

Applicants take part in training and various checks before becoming an accredited foster carer and are provided with round-the-clock support, including financial assistance.

For more information about fostering a child or to get in touch with your local foster care agency, visit fosteringconnections.com.au or call 1800 013 088.

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Speakers available:

- Deb Tsorbaris, CEO Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Faorligh Hunter, Gippsland Director for Berry Street
- Katelyn Terranova, Acting Practice Leader – Out-of-Home Care at Quantum Support Services