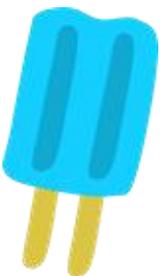


## Eastern Foster Care Program Update



Dear Carers,

Welcome to our Jungle Drums end of year newsletter and the Summer holiday season. December makes everyone stop and reflect on the year that's been and look forward in anticipation of what the new year may bring. And like everyone else, I too thought it would be good to summarise the events of 2015 and have a go at predicting what the future may hold for our program.

At the end of this year we will have lost the TEACHaR program, although some parts of the program may continue in some shape or form, a final decision is still outstanding. Trust funded for three years, the TEACHaR program is currently in the process of winding down. We have all come to value and appreciate the support the staff have given our children over the years. TEACHaR successfully worked with schools, workers and foster families and, as many examples have shown, succeeded in improving our children's educational achievements. Jo Myers developed and ran the 'Drum Beat' program in which many of our children participated. The group was a star performer at our Gala Dinner this year. TEACHaR won the Robin Clark Award for the best innovative educational initiative. Most of all we will miss the staff, Hayley Pethica, Natasha Chidgey, Alicia Sefton, Greg Rollings and Jo Myers, who have worked closely with us, our carers and our children. We wish them all well for the future and hope that one day they can join us again and continue their good work.

Move, Groove and Grow, the music, dance and fun program aiming at helping children to overcome their trauma, once again delighted Anglicare's guests at this year's fundraising event 'Gastronomique'.

We hope to increase participation in this fantastic program which provides excellent opportunities for children to gain confidence and learn to appropriately interact with others. Jessica Slinger, who worked in foster care for a number of years, has again agreed to manage the program next year. The group is facilitated by experienced staff from the Australian School of Performing Arts who have started similar programs in other regions.

As foreshadowed, we had our funding cut this year, not only once but three times. Our total losses amount to over \$200,000 and there is no certainty that there will be no more losses in the future. The reason for our funding loss is due to what is considered an underperformance against agreed targets. One target represents one client being placed for 365 days in a year and, although we have placed a higher than ever number of children this year and remain very responsive to after hours and emergency referrals, very few children remain nowadays in care long enough to make up one target, or 365 days of care in the year. Generally, the majority of children referred to the program remain in care between three days and three weeks only making it very hard to achieve full performance against targets. The trend for short term emergency placements is expected to continue and with this the risk of more funding cuts is an ongoing possibility.

The significant reduction in funding forced us to re-structure the program and to cut staffing positions. We decided to cut two case management positions and one half time position from the Recruitment team. All three incumbents had reached the end of their contracts by mid June this year and were not replaced. We lost Jen



Van Ewyk from the Recruitment team, and Melanie Cresci and Cassandra Wright from the Box Hill Case Management team. We also had to reduce our team leaders from four to three and sadly, Maya Serelis left the program in April choosing not to reapply after the positions were spilled. Jenny Conboy and April Harvey, the two remaining case managers from Box Hill moved to Lilydale. Michelle Mealor is now supervising a bigger Case Management team with the help of Kate Hansen and Louise Condell. Dean Parker remains responsible for the therapeutic programs, TrACK and Circle both of which are delivered in conjunction with the Australian Childhood Foundation, a partnership which continues to grow in strength every year. These were difficult times for staff and most likely also very confusing for carers who saw people come and go. Our Recruitment, Training and Retention team, the Intake team and the Accreditation and On-Call team (After Hours and Carers Support) remain at Box Hill, managed and supported by Tarni Haywood and Gina Housakos. I myself moved my office to Lilydale in the hope that I can be of support to Michelle and Dean who deal daily with challenging client situations. I can only express my gratitude to everyone, staff and carers, for their positive engagement in this challenging restructuring process and the good will and support everyone gave us.

## Eastern Foster Care Program Update Cont.



The threat of funding loss made us evaluate our respite program. We found that over 50 families had been using respite for a number of years which made it a very busy part of our program but gave us very little benefits towards achieving our targets as most children are in respite once a month for two to three days only. Earlier in the year, we were forced to 'close the books' on new respite referrals to free up worker time for other placements. Anglicare has now provided us with additional funds and we hope to soon employ a new worker part time and to continue with this important service to families. All new respite placements however, will now be negotiated for 6 months only to avoid ending up with another bottle neck into our respite service.

Earlier this year we responded to the Department's new initiative 'Targeted Care Packages'. The aim of the Targeted Care Packages is to find alternative placement options for children and young people who have been residing in residential care for a long time and who have not been able to exit to other placement options due to program constraints. Clients receive individualised funding according to their needs. Tori Smith, who is an experienced worker from our TrACK and Circle programs, accepted the position of a Targeted Care Project Worker and she has been busy exploring placement options and developing funding proposals for a number of clients. Tori scans our foster care list daily and is involved in recruitment campaigns and information sessions to attract interest for these packages. Clients successfully placed with a Targeted Care Package will be supervised and supported by a Key Worker who we are hopeful to have employed early next year. The Key Worker

will be co-located with the case managers at Lilydale and will be supervised by Dean Parker.

We are still fortunate to attract a good number of people interested in foster care. Our Information Sessions tend to be well attended and our Training Sessions are generally fully booked. But we struggle to find sufficient families for long term foster care with the majority of people being available for respite/emergency only and with no option of expanding their availability in the future. We are desperately trying to find long term family placements for a number of our children who now require long term care options after initially being placed in short term placements. Another challenge remains placements of pre-schoolers and children older than 13 years of age.

But in saying this thanks to your receptive and positive responses to our calls for placements we have been able to place close to 90% of children referred to the program. We have been particular successful in placing children after hours through our Retainer program. Our Retainers receive a weekly payment and in return agree to take a client after hours until the next working day. The program proved to be so successful that increasingly other regions started to refer to our Retainer program. DHHS have now agreed to provide increased funds, although for a time limited period only, to help us with the additional costs of this after-hours service to other regions. New foster families have joined us but a number of families have also exited the program. For some families foster care did no longer suit their life style, they moved out of the region and I am aware that some families were tired and frustrated with the system and at times also with us. We thank all of these families for the care they have provided and for their openness and co-operation with the agency.

Working with us can be very intrusive. We continue to encourage everyone to give us feedback as to how we can improve our relationships with you and what support you require. The more we hear from you the better we can respond to your needs.

Please, never hesitate to let us know what you think and where we can do better. We welcome our new families and hope that foster care will be a rewarding experience, one that will enrich your lives and will let you give to children what you do best, care, love, acceptance and the experience of good parenting. We invite you to become part of our foster care community and join us at our special activities for children and foster carers and continue to seek further support and training by attending our training sessions which we offer throughout the year.



For 2016 I am hopeful that we can continue to strengthen our program against further funding losses, that we remain responsive and flexible to the needs of children and foster families. I thank you for all your support and good will you have given us throughout the year and above all I thank you for the care and love you give and continue to give to children who, of no fault of their own cannot live with their own family.

I am joined by all our staff in wishing you a Merry Christmas and safe and peaceful holiday season. Our best wishes to you and all members of your family for the year 2016.

**Brigitte Boulet**  
Program Manager Home Based Care