

A STATEMENT FROM KCV ABOUT THE VICTORIAN STATE BUDGET

A statement from Anne McLeish, Director Kinship Carers Victoria

It is no surprise to kinship carers that once again the acute needs and wounds they are afflicted with have been dressed with a few flimsy band aides. Not surprising because kinship carers are used to the neglect and abuse – but oh so distressing, and confirmation about the priorities of government and the near-contempt government demonstrates towards kinship carers.

It is not reasonable to expect kinship carers to be prepared to take their share of the pain attached to the dire financial circumstances they find themselves in. Kinship carers are amongst the poorest families in the state, so asking them to take their share of pain is out of all proportion and is inhumane.

Nearly 75% of children in out-of-home-care are being raised by kinship carers. If children must be removed from the care of their parents, placing them with other family members (kinship care) is the ideal solution for the extended family – and most definitely for the children concerned.

Kinship carers are performing miracles as they turn children away from a pathway leading to truncated life options to pathways leading to fulfilling lives where their aspirations can be met and they can become citizens of whom Victoria can be proud. Despite this level of productivity, which is far better than the outcomes of any government program we can think of, kinship carers are not compensated for the costs they incur, let alone being rewarded for achieving every performance measure that could be dreamt up and placed against them

There are a few strategies affecting kinship carers worth mentioning. Each of them conjures a picture, not of treasury officials worrying and searching for ways to support kinship carers, but of DFFH searching through every cupboard and draw to find every bit of loose change they can scrape together to give kinship carers some cursory emergency first aide. It's something at least, but not nearly enough!

So, what do kinship carers actually gain out of the budget?

- A one-off \$650 payment for statutory kinship carers (this money will put food on the table for a few weeks – no more than that).
- Some kinship carers will benefit from the ongoing implementation of the targeted care packages to help children and young people to live in suitable care arrangements rather than residential care.
- New kinship carers will benefit from a statewide program allowing young people to access health assessments as they enter statutory care within the child protection system.

These programs are welcome but do not enable kinship families in general to lift themselves out of poverty. If these programs were accompanied by an increase in their general entitlements, there would be some hope for them. Where is the increase to the basic financial support for kinship carers that has been requested year in and year out?

Given that the other political parties in Victoria have not demonstrated any deeper compassion for kinship carers, we are left to wonder where to from here? Beyond the daily torment of making ends meet, should kinship carers start to demonstrate to the world the ways in which Victoria breaches children's rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – of which Australia is a signatory?

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Director

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