

GOOD NEWS STORY

We have heard the concept of care team now for over five years in the Child Protection System, we have attempted to navigate the meaning of this from all perspectives – what is a care team, who is in the care team, how does the care team evolve and change. The concept of a care team essentially represents the team that wraps themselves around a child or young person to care for them.

Care teams are everywhere in society, they just might not be referred to that in other areas. When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness, their care team changes and expands, no longer just their parents and family, but now a mixture of different health professionals who are tasked with healing the child. When care teams work together, a child feels cared for.

What is the best way to determine who is in a child's care team? I say ask the child, for it is the child who will be able to tell you simply and purely those people around them who they feel cared about and for this reason we simply cannot underestimate the role that every single care team member plays in the life of a child.

This brings me to our good news story for this edition of the newsletter. Recently I received a call from a carer who I have worked with over many years during my time at FCQ. Like many carers she has had her ups and downs, she has experienced some really good working relationships and some not so good ones. The story she had to tell me on this day bought a smile to my face and literally warmed my heart.

Karen and her husband Ian have been carers for 17 years and have provided care to many children during this time. They have opened up their home to children for long term placements, short term and respite placements and emergency care. Caring is Karen's passion and one look in her home and you soon come to realise that everything in this household revolves around children.

One of the children that Karen and Ian have opened their heart and home to has now been placed with them for 11½ years, he was placed with them at just 10 days old. He is very much part of their family and will continue to be forever. Over the years this child has had more CSOs than Karen can remember who have come and gone from his world, some of whom he met, others he never did, and some of whom he developed a relationship with, others he didn't. From this child's perspective though, CSOs were someone from outside of his 'family' who were from the 'department'.

Around a year ago, Karen's family had a new CSO come into their world and it is this CSO that has made such an impact on this foster family and of course the child, that it needs to be shared because it is truly beautiful.

To sum it up take a look at this photo



This picture represents for this child who is in his family and what is so special about it, is that he has included his CSO and his agency worker in his family. This is the first time in his 11 ½ years, this child has viewed anyone from the department or a fostering agency as part of his family.

When you ask Karen why he may feel this way, she is quick to respond. The CSO comes to the home and enjoys spending time with him, she bakes with him and has taught him recipes, she paints with him and she absolutely acknowledges his achievements through sending him certificates and awards. He looks forward to her visits and will greet her with the biggest hugs and smiles. As a child that is diagnosed with autism and ADHD, life is not always easy for him and during some of his meltdowns when he just doesn't want to listen to Karen, he will call his CSO and she is the person that is able to calm him down – just like an extended family member. When you ask the child how he views his relationship with his CSO, he says 'I have two Nana's and she is like another one'.

The child also put his agency worker in this picture, who has unfortunately since left. This agency worker would often complete co-visits with the CSO and would also engage in activities with the child. The child viewed both the CSO and agency worker as a team who would help his carers make decisions about things such as high school options, school activities and other things that were happening in his life. But if you were to ask this child why these people came into his home to see him and the family, his response would be that he doesn't actually know why they come, but he loves that they do, he is now able to read the calendar and gets excited when he reads 'home visit'!

Bronfenbrenner speaks about every child needing someone that is 'irrationally crazy about them', this is usually a role taken on by a birth parent, it is the saying that represents the lengths you will go to, to keep your child safe, to provide for them, to nurture them and love them unconditionally. Unfortunately for our children and young people coming into care, they don't always have that person and the 'State' becomes their parent. Family based placements in Australia allow children to have that person come into their life that is 'irrationally crazy about them' and this child certainly has carers in his life where this has been achieved. However, the system is a hard place in which to parent at times and this is where a care team that works effectively together is essential to the ongoing wellbeing of children and young people in care.

A picture tells a thousand words and what this picture tells me is that this child has a care team wrapped around him that is effective. If you are a worker in the field reading this article, never underestimate the effect you can have on a foster family and a child – your words and actions can make the world of difference in the lives of our families who have to navigate a pretty complex system day in and day out in a world where parenting is already complex enough. This CSO will probably not be around for this child's 7 remaining years in care, however already she has made such a difference in the way he views Child Safety. This will stick with him forever and have a profound impact on how he views himself and those around him.

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