Centre for Excellence
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100 Years 1912–2012

Foster Care Status Report

September 2013

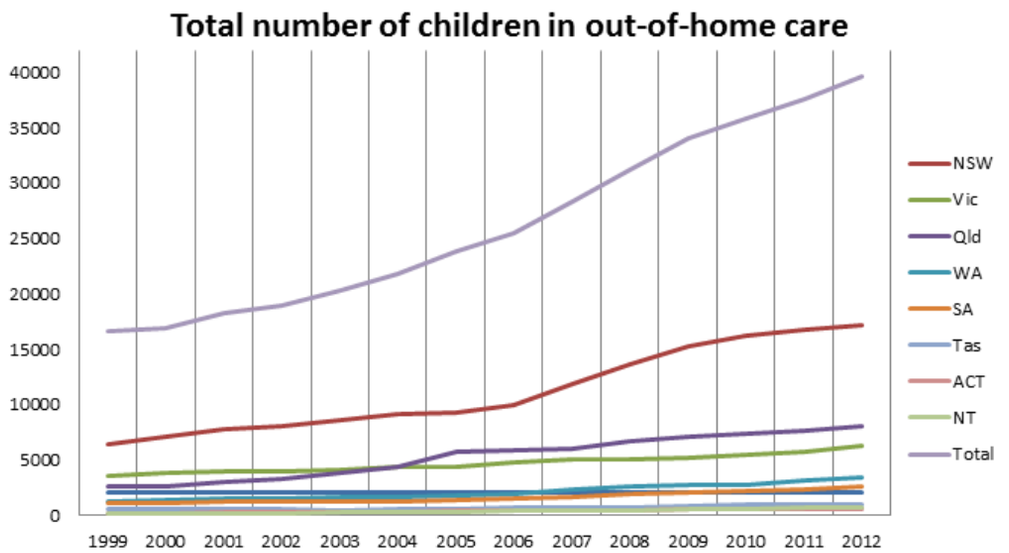
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Home-based Care

In Australia, children who cannot live at home for reasons of family crisis or safety are placed in out-of-home care. Depending on the circumstances of the child, this could be foster care, kinship care, residential care or another arrangement. In most cases, children in out-of-home are also on a care or protection order.

Numbers of children in out-of-home care are growing. This is also occurring in Victoria but at a slower rate. In the decade between 2001 and 2011, Victoria experienced a 46% increase in the number of children and young people living in out-of-home care placements, with numbers rising from 3,883 to 5,678[1]. As of 30 June 2012, 5.1 children and young people per 1,000 between 0-17 were residing in out-of-home-care placements, which compares to 7.7 per 1,000 children and young people in Australia[2].



Government responsibility for out-of-home care

Providing out-of-home care is the responsibility of State and Territory Governments, although the Commonwealth Government provides a number of supports to foster carers and is responsible for national standards through the National Child Protection Framework. In Victoria in 2011-12, the Government spent $352 million on out-of-home care with a per capita expenditure of $56,652. This compares with NSW at $43,393, and is larger than all states and territories except Western Australia ($60,493) and Northern Territory ($80,256)[3].

Total real recurrent expenditure on out-of-home care services($'000)[4]

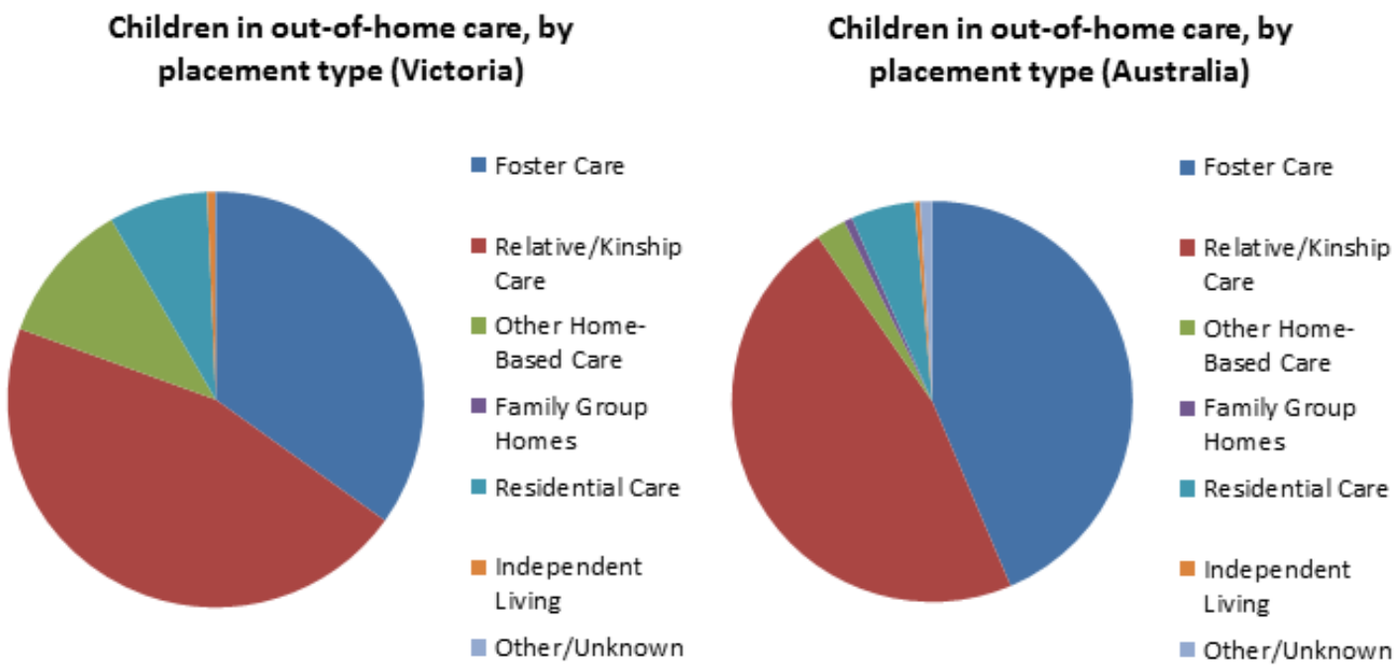
	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
NSW	309,693	363,859	367,643	371,315	436,230	530,160	601,141	691,292	711,952	746,007
Vic	182,744	188,426	227,943	231,572	238,842	253,218	286,808	314,902	335,495	351,641
Qld	121,008	141,777	211,357	259,619	314,871	332,594	336,213	359,611	375,464	396,070
WA	81,225	95,246	92,480	95,030	106,439	139,304	168,533	186,728	208,733	194,425
SA	30,673	31,475	45,080	50,814	87,438	97,643	108,781	124,875	134,908	141,591
Tas	17,568	20,336	23,712	30,087	34,493	29,639	28,029	35,322	39,775	39,687
ACT	13,516	17,966	26,561	23,336	22,359	22,105	22,011	22,619	28,336	26,850
NT	8,404	13,254	14,853	21,309	22,949	30,931	37,881	43,330	48,578	56,179
AUS	**764,832**	**872,339**	**1,009,629**	**1,083,081**	**1,263,620**	**1,435,595**	**1,589,399**	**1,778,678**	**1,883,242**	**1,952,450**

1 Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry (2011) Meeting the needs of Children and Young people in out-of-home-care, Victorian Government, Part 4, Ch. 10 p. 233, accessed 10 September 2013.
2 Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2011-2012. Child Welfare series no. 55.Cat.no. CWS43, AIHW, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, p.45.
3 Productivity Commission: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Report on Government Services 2013, Volume 2: Health; Community Services; Housing and Homelessness, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 2013, accessed 9 September 2013, Table 15A.3
4 Ibid, Table 15A.1

Foster Care

Foster care refers to the temporary care of children and young people aged 0-17 by trained, assessed and accredited foster carers. These children and young people come from various backgrounds and enter the foster care system for a range of reasons, with care arrangements made via court order, or voluntary agreement between the child's parent and a foster care agency.

In Victoria, foster care is an important option for children and young people in care, although relative/kinship care is the most common form of care for children and young people who cannot continue to live in their family home.



As at 30 June 2012[5]

Therapeutic Foster Care[6]

Therapeutic foster care provides for specialist therapeutic services to the child or young person, their families and foster carers to address impacts of trauma and abuse. The Circle Program as therapeutic foster care is known in Victoria as an alternative, child-centred approach to an existing model of care to better meet the needs of children and young person requiring out-of-home care

Number of children per foster care household

	1	2	3-4	5
Victoria	555 (59.5%)	258 (27.7%)	104 (11.2%)	15 (1.6%)
Australia	4,335 (49.1%)	2,468 (28.0%)	1,631 (18.5%)	388 (4.4%)

Note: As at 30 June 2012. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding[7]

5 Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2011-2012. Child Welfare series no. 55.Cat.no. CWS43, AIHW, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, p.78.
6 Department of Human Services Victoria (2009) The Circle Program- a therapeutic approach to foster care program guidelines, accessed on 30 August 2013.
7 Ibid, p.82.

Outcomes for children and young people

Concern is often expressed about outcomes for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Education[8] [9]

- Children and young people in out-of-home care commonly experience poor educational outcomes compared to those in the wider community. These poor outcomes include low academic performance and low levels of engagement with the school (18% not attending school at all, 14.7% have been suspended in the past 12 months).
- Children and young people may struggle academically due to learning and behavioural problems resulting from past traumas and lack of continuity in placements and schools (60% of children and young people have experienced a change of school).
- Poor outcomes may also be related to educational institutions' lack of knowledge and resources to address the associated impacts of residing in out-of-home-care, or poor coordination and communication between all stakeholders and the care team. Low expectations, inadequate encouragement from teachers and carers, and a lack of alternative forms of education and therapeutic placement options presents a further barrier for educational achievement.

Employment[10]

- Many young people leaving out-of-home care are often living in acute poverty, lacking adequate financial and housing security, which may make it difficult to concentrate on career pathways or employer expectations.
- Young people in out-of-home care often experience a lack of community connectedness, which may cause difficulties in obtaining employment or work experience.
- Young people may become heavily reliant on income security payments.

Health[11]

- Along with poorer physical health, children and young people in out-of-home care also have higher rates of mental health issues regarding attachment and psychosocial development and lower self-esteem, compared to those residing at home.
- Children and young people in out-of-home care are more likely to engage in a range of risky behaviours including smoking, unhealthy eating, substance abuse and unprotected sexual activity, which may impose health risks that could continue into adulthood.
- They typically present with a multiplicity of problems, rather than a single illness or disorder. Mental and physical health needs are also more likely to be unmet and their disabilities to go unrecognised.[12]
- The prospect of moving placements is a major source of stress to most children and young people in out-of-home care, further impacting their health and wellbeing.

Children Leaving Foster Care:

Leaving care is a major life event, and foster carers ensure that the young person in their care is adequately prepared for the transition from dependence into independent living, particularly for those who have had instability in placements throughout their time in care, and where returning to family is not in the young person's best interests.[13]

- Young people leaving care are assisted in developing key everyday skills for independent living, such as budgeting, cooking meals, personal hygiene, use of public transport etc.
- A Leaving Care Plan, identifying personal and community support networks for housing, education, employment, health and wellbeing, is developed collaboratively with the young person prior to leaving care.[14]

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8 Wise, S. et al. (2010), Care-System Impacts on Academic Outcomes: Research Report June 2010, Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria 2010

9 Mendes, P. (2009), Young people transitioning from state out-of-home-care- jumping hoops to access employment, Family matters, No. 83, Australian Institute of Family Studies, p. 32

10 Ibid, p .34

11 Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian(2013), Views of Children and Young People in Foster Care Survey: Health and Wellbeing, Accessed 30 August 2013

12 Lightfoot, E., Hill, K. & LaLiberte, T. (2011). Prevalence of children with disabilities in the child welfare system and out of home placement: An examination of administrative records. Children and Youth Services Review, 33, pp. 2069-75, accessed 28 August 2012

13 Mendes, P. (2009), Young people transitioning from state out-of-home-care- jumping hoops to access employment, Family matters, No. 83, Australian Institute of Family Studies, p. 32.

14 Hall, A. (2012), It's Not a Transition Plan if the Young Person Wasn't Involved, Developing Practice Issue 33, Spring 2012

- Challenges of leaving formal care include coping with separation from family, and associated feelings of anger, loss and grief in addition to all the challenges experienced when young people leave home.

Becoming a foster parent

In Victoria, anyone who is over 20 years of age and can offer a child or young person in need a secure, caring environment can apply to become a foster carer, including:

- Single people
- Heterosexual and same-sex couples
- Older and retired people
- Young people
- Home owners or renters
- Students, unemployed people or those in full-time, part-time or unpaid work

Motivations for becoming a foster carer include:

- A capacity and desire to provide a positive family environment for a child or young person
- Ongoing history of foster caring or being cared for by the foster care system
- Desire to continue parenting role
- Childlessness and accepted infertility
- An existing personal relationship with a child or young person[15]

Training of foster carers

- All prospective carers must be willing to complete the Shared Stories, Shared Lives Victoria training program.
- Agencies in Victoria are responsible for screening (including a Police Check and Working with Children Check), assessment, approval and training of all prospective carers.
- CFECFW received 1696 direct enquiries into becoming a foster carer for the period 1 July 2012-30 June 2013, however, this does not take into consideration the number of direct enquiries through individual agencies.

Key Issues for foster care in the future

It is vital that we can ensure there are enough foster care families available for children who cannot continue living at home.

- The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 outlines that supporting children and YP within their family is the preferred option to out-of-home care.
- There has recently been a decline in traditional foster care placements, and an increase in relative/kinship care placements, possibly due to the limited availability of foster carers[16].
- In Victoria, there has consistently been more households exiting foster care (2011-12: 453 households) than those commencing foster care (2011-12: 434 households). Refer to table below.
- Some potential motivations for exiting foster care include[17]:
  - » Inadequate financial reimbursement for care and training.
  - » Change in personal circumstances (employment, housing, finances).
  - » Lack of information and support from agencies and government.
  - » Negative experiences in foster care, including impact of fostering on carer's own family.
  - » Unreasonable demands by the out-of-home care system, and frustrations in dealing with government.
  - » Placement breakdown.

15 Randle, M., Miller, L., Dolnicar, S. & Ciarrochi, J. (2012), Heterogeneity Among Potential Foster Carers: An Investigation of Reasons for Not Foster Caring, Australian Social Work, Vol. 65 (3), pp. 382-397, September 2012
16 Council of Australian Governments (2009), Protecting children is everyone's business: National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020, accessed 4 September 2013
17 Richardson, N., Bromfield, L. & Higgins, D. (2005), The Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers: A Literature Review, Australian Institute of Family Services, accessed 4 September

	2009-10			2010-11			2011-12		
	Households with Foster Care Placements*	Households Commencing Foster Care	Households Exiting Foster Care	Households with Foster Care Placements*	Households Commencing Foster Care	Households Exiting Foster Care	Households with Foster Care Placements*	Households Commencing Foster Care	Households Exiting Foster Care
NSW	n.a.	541	n.a.	4,579	585	n.a.	4,797	572	n.a.
VIC	1,612	354	495	1,574	226	291	1,615	434	453
Qld	2,520	n.a.	n.a.	2,583	338	439	2,697	539	442
WA	736	182	92	1,006	251	195	1,024	166	236
SA	766	90	393	752	86	53	786	131	108
Tas	275	64	40	283	53	33	291	88	59
ACT	164	58	19	170	24	53	249	37	19
NT	212	138	112	216	113	128	205	150	99
TOTAL	**n.a.**	**1427**	**1,151**	**11,163**	**1,676**	**1,192**	**11,664**	**2,117**	**1,416**

* As at 30 June 2012[18]

Supporting Foster Carers in their role

Financial Support

- Research suggests that the cost of caring for children in foster care is, on average, 52% higher than the costs of caring for other children not in care.[19]
- Carers receive a tax-free reimbursement per fortnight from the Department of Human Services.
- Reimbursement payments are divided into 4 categories for foster carers in Victoria, with rates dependent on the age of the child and the assessed level of complexity of the child's needs and associated costs.
  - » General (60% children in foster care)
  - » Intensive (30% children in foster care)
  - » Complex (10% children in foster care)
  - » Therapeutic (Circle Program)
- These assessments are conducted by DHS Child Protection, DHS Placement and Coordination Unit and the Community Service Organisation.

State foster care subsidy levels by age of child (March 2013) ($ week)[20]

	1	3	6	10	14
NSW	218	218	245	245	329
VIC	159	159	159	171	252
Qld	224	224	241	241	262
WA	172	172	225	225	277
SA	145	145	169	169	241
Tas	190	190	217	217	251
ACT	231	231	259	259	348
NT	211	211	226	266	329
Foster Care Estimate	218	218	234	274	245/337*

*First amount applies to a boy aged 14, second applies to a girl aged 14

18 Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2011-2012. Child Welfare series no. 55.Cat.no. CWS43, AIHW, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, pp. 48-49

19 McHugh, M. (2002). The costs of caring: A study of appropriate foster care payments for stable and adequate out-of-home care in Australia. Sydney: NSW Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies.

20 McHugh, M. (2013) National Foster Care Payments for Selected Age Categories, Presented at the Foster Care Futures Forum, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia, 11 September 2013.

- All foster carers in Victoria are entitled to obtain a Carer Card that offers a range of discounts and benefits.[21]
- In addition to the base allowance, supplementary funds may be available. These include[22]:
  - » The New Placement Loading Payment, to assist carers in paying for the start-up costs of caring. This payment is offered to carers receiving general reimbursements and is added to the fortnightly payment.
  - » Education Assistance Initiative is paid quarterly by DHS and can be used to purchase educational related items or enrolment fees based on the number of days the child or young person has been in the placement.
  - » Education and Medical Allowance is paid quarterly by DHS and can be used for medical and dental examinations, school enrolment and extracurricular school activities.
- The Foster Child Health Care Card, entitling carers to concession rates and medicines at a lower cost, is available to families. It is not assessed by income or asset test however, carers must satisfy residency requirements to be eligible for the Card.[23]
- Foster Carers in Victoria are currently not entitled to superannuation as their caregiver allowance is not classified as taxable income. There has been discussion about the need for carers role to be recognised professionally, therefore entitling the care giver to superannuation and better long term financial security.
- Foster carers may be entitled to payments via the Family Tax Benefit A or B, which is dependent upon the assessed total earnings in a sole-income household.

Support from the case-worker at the foster care agency

In Victoria there are a number of community service organisations recruiting foster carers. These organisations provide:

- A case worker and 24 hour assistance from supportive professionals.
- The provision of ongoing training and referrals to support programs that may assist the carer.
- Respite care for one weekend per month and possibly more often during the school holidays.
- The opportunity to participate in the planning of the child's care and needs.

Support from the therapeutic worker in therapeutic foster care[24]

- The therapeutic worker has specific roles and responsibilities that are enshrined in the Registration Standards for Community Organisations. These responsibilities include:
  - » Providing planned, regular face-to-face contact with the carer and child and to ensure another worker is available in their absence.
  - » Organisation and management of the care team meetings. These are essential to pass over relevant pieces of information between all members and to ensure the requirements of the Looking After Children (LAC) framework are being met.
  - » Taking note of the carer's biweekly report, and address the issues and needs of the child and carer appropriately.

Respite care for foster carers

- Respite Care is an essential component of carer support, allowing full-time foster carers and the child or young person a short term break, often over a weekend or during the school holidays.
- There are many special considerations which need to be taken into account in establishing respite support for carers, including arrangements for procuring respite support, transport to and from the respite location, and allowing adequate time for a handover to the respite worker regarding the child or young person's needs.[25]
- Respite care can be provided by people who are unknown to the child or may be relatives or friends of the foster carer. This population of respite carers can also provide other means of support such as cleaning, gardening and in-home babysitting.[26]

21 State Government of Victoria, Carers FAQ, http://carercard.vic.gov.au/home, accessed 9 September 2013
22 Foster Care Association of Victoria, Caregiver Reimbursement Rates Kinship Care & Permanent Care Fact Sheet, accessed 9 September 2013
23 Department of Human Services Victoria, Foster Child Health Care Card, accessed 9 September 2013
24 Department of Human Services Victoria (2009) The Circle Program- a therapeutic approach to foster care program guidelines, accessed on 30 August 2013.
25 O'Neill, C. et al. (2010), The cost of support for stable foster care placements: A research project undertaken by the University of Melbourne and Monash University with Barnardos Australia, accessed 9 September 2013
26 Borenstein J, Minje A, Campion M & McNamara P (2012) Strengthening Kinship Families: The role of respite care, Respite Care Consortium,

Ensuring Aboriginal Foster Care for Aboriginal Children and Young People

- The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle recognises the cultural rights of the child or young person who has been removed from their birth family to promote safety and wellbeing.
- The principle is recognised in legislation and policy in all Australian states and territories, and outlines the preferred order of placement for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child or young person as follows:
  - » With the child's extended family (kin)
  - » With the child's indigenous family (kith)
  - » With other indigenous people[27]
- Where an appropriate indigenous placement is unable to be located, and consultations with the local indigenous community and agencies have occurred, the child may be placed with a non-indigenous carer.
- In 2011-12, 69% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placements in Australia were with relatives/kin, indigenous carers or indigenous residential care.[28]
- Emerging from the Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children's inquiry conducted in 2012, the Victorian Government has committed to developing a five year plan for Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care, which will acknowledge the importance of maintaining strong connections to family and community.[29]

Foster care service providers in Victoria

The provision of foster care services are governed in accordance with the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.

In Victoria, foster care services, including specialist adolescent and therapeutic programs, can only be provided by registered community service organisations as is outlined in Section 46 of the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005.[30]

Agencies are responsible for supporting foster carers, for meeting the protection and care needs of children in foster care and for working in collaboration with Child Protection and the child's family to ensure their best interests are met (a full list of Victorian agencies is available on www.cfecfw.asn.au).

Some recent research

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (2012), Foster Care in Context: An evaluation of the Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (2012), Pathways to caring: a strategic engagement of potential foster carers, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (2012), The Circle Program: an Evaluation of a therapeutic approach to Foster Care, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, Australia

Creed, P., Tilbury, C., Buys, N. & Crawford, M. (2011), The career aspirations and action behaviours of Australian adolescents in out-of-home-care, Children and Youth Services Review, Vol. 33(9), pp. 1720-1729

Mendes, P (2012), Examining the health and mental health care needs and experiences of a group of young people transitioning from out of home care in rural Victoria, Communities, Children and Families Australia, Vol. 6(1).

Octoman, O., McLean, S. & Sleep, J. (2013), Children in foster care: What behaviours do carers find challenging?, Australian Psychological Society, DOI: 10.1111/cp.12022 (forthcoming)

Randle, M., Miller, L., Dolnicar, S. & Ciarrochi, J. (2012), Heterogeneity Among Potential Foster Carers: An Investigation of Reasons for Not Foster Caring, Australian Social Work, Vol. 65 (3), pp. 382-397, September 2012

Randle, M., Miller, L., Dolnicar, S. & Ciarrochi, J. (2012), The science of attracting foster carers, Child and Family Social Work, DOI: 10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00881.x (fortcoming)

Wilks, S. & Wise, S. (2011), The Care Factor: Rewards and Challenges of Raising Foster Children, Anglicare Victoria.

Wise, S. et al. (2010), Care-System Impacts on Academic Outcomes: Research Report June 2010, Anglicare Victoria and Wesley Mission Victoria 2010.

No.3, p.30, accessed 10 September 2013

27 Australian Institute of Family Studies, Children in Care fact sheet, accessed 2 September 2013

28 Australian Institute for Health and Welfare, Child Protection Australia 2011-2012. Child Welfare series no. 55.Cat.no. CWS43, AIHW, Australian Government, Canberra, 2013, p.42.

29 Productivity Commission: Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Report on Government Services 2013, Volume 2: Health; Community Services; Housing and Homelessness, Productivity Commission, Canberra, 15.98, 2013, accessed 9 September 2013

30 Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Victoria) . No. 96/2005