

FOSTERING NSW RECRUITMENT PROGRAM

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

JUNE 2014 – DECEMBER 2017



Prepared by:

Dr Wendy Foote, Sharon Broady, Liz Potten, Savita Sanderson

With contributions by:

Ioana Ramia, Isabella Saunders and Fanny Salignac, Centre for Social Impact, UNSW, under the auspice of the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies Ltd.



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Publication Date:

14.02.2019

Foote, W.L., Broady, S., Potten, L, and Sanderson, S. (2019).

Fostering NSW Recruitment Program, Final Evaluation Report, June 2014- December 2017.

Evaluation Report, Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, Pty Ltd
NSW. Locked Bag 13, Haymarket. 1240.

EVALUATION OF FOSTERING NSW PROJECT JUNE 2014 – DECEMBER 2017

Table of Contents

FOREWORD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
Fostering NSW Recruitment of Foster Carers Project	6
Evaluation.....	7
Key Findings.....	7
1. INTRODUCTION	10
1.1 Project Context – Sector and Societal.....	10
1.2 The Need for a State-Wide Campaign	10
1.3 Impact of Transition, Contracting and Safe Home for Life /Permanency Support Program on Foster Care Recruitment	11
2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT, STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION	16
2.1 Project Approach	16
2.2 Target Audiences	16
2.3 Key Messages and Call to Action	18
2.4 Creative Material	19
2.5 Stakeholder Relationships	22
3. CAMPAIGN REACH	25
3.1 Advertising.....	25
3.2 Social Media.....	28
3.4 Local and Agency Promotion	34
3.5 Targeted Components	35
4. CAMPAIGN IMPACT.....	38
4.1 Enquiries – Online and via 1800 Enquiry Line.....	38
4.2 Website and Foster Forum	44
5. INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	48
5.1 Interaction with Political/Service Environment.....	48
5.2 Customer Feedback – Enquirer Survey Results and Analysis.....	50
5.3 Sector Engagement – Agency Survey Results and Analysis	56
5.4 Opportunities for Improvement	63
6. CONCLUSION	65
Appendix 1: List of Video Resources	66
Appendix 2: Agencies	67
Appendix 3: Google Analytics Data from Fostering NSW Website.....	68
Appendix 4: Interview Guide for CSI Stakeholder Interviews with Agencies	70

FOREWORD

During 2012 ACWA first undertook the project management of the Fostering NSW foster care recruitment campaign and 1800-enquiry phone line. The transfer of this project from FaCS to ACWA was part of a large-scale reform agenda, set in place as a result of the recommendations of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Child Protection in NSW (2007-2008). In addition to this transfer, the Connecting Carers, a training and support program for foster carers, was established at Karitane, Department of Health. In addition, the transfer of 2,000 carers and children from FaCS care to the care of accredited NGO agencies took place between 2012 and 2017, while the transfer process will continue for Aboriginal carers and their children until 2022.

The positioning of Fostering NSW within ACWA, the peak body for out-of-home care agencies in NSW, was, in retrospect, a strategic decision by FaCS that made use of the relationship between the peak body and its members.

Fostering NSW, while looking outward to engage with innovative marketing methods, particularly through the use of social media and public relations, maintained a close connection to service providers. The reference group that continued for the length of this time was the basis of the ongoing connections with the sector, and the contributions from service providers in developing local material for public relations events and stories was a key plank in the campaign strategy. As a result, Fostering NSW benefited from the willing participation of service providers to work with the campaign – ensuring that the campaign effort expended by Fostering NSW was magnified through agency involvement in campaign development using their own communication channels to share the stories that were generated. The program also hosted two secondments of senior recruitment specialists, from Life Without Barriers and Wesley, who provided expert practitioner knowledge to the program and extended aspects of the program, including the development of training programs that have been put into the CCWT calendar. Fostering NSW also provided support and training to service providers, especially new agencies setting up recruitment teams. The approach that ACWA's Fostering NSW developed was successful in generating media exposure of human relations stories valued at more than one million dollars' worth of free media each year (as evidenced through media monitoring analysis undertaken by isentia.insights).

In addition to working alongside service providers, ACWA also benefited from ongoing conversations with its fellow peak, AbSec and the funding body, FaCS. In a reform environment where there was an evolving system, and the need for foster carers was constant, collegiate support and feedback was important in tracking the specific needs of the changing sector. The foster care recruitment program was

continuously impacted by the external policy and, at times, political environment that was itself impacted by the media narrative around foster care and the broader child welfare system.

Values play a role in decisions about how a program is implemented, in the messages that are amplified, and the approach used. ACWA's values that are rooted in the need for reforming our service system and society to provide better life outcomes for vulnerable children informed the work undertaken by Fostering NSW. Seeding conversations in the public domain and shaping the public narrative about children's needs and rights, as well as celebrating the extraordinary care provided by dedicated and creative carers, and their agencies served the purpose of developing a higher level of public recognition of the value of foster care and of our collective responsibility for the children of NSW. As an auspicing body, ACWA sought channels of communication that targeted populations that may have not have been exposed to the message related to foster care through the Fostering NSW communications strategies. Involving corporate Australia in the conversations about the needs of children living in vulnerable circumstances was one of ACWA's aims that would also feed into the Fostering NSW campaign. We were delighted to gain the willing co-operation of PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to achieve this, and in 2017 PwC made a national announcement that foster care had been included in the company's human resources policies, as a specific leave provision. In the wake of this announcement, ACWA was contacted by other companies for information about developing their own foster care related leave provisions – thus providing evidence of involving a broader segment of our population in considerations about child welfare issues and foster care in particular.

This evaluation was undertaken on a small budget, and mostly conducted and written in house by program staff, using the data captured during service delivery. I would like to thank the team at Centre for Social Impact, UNSW, who were engaged to undertake interviews with service providers and carers to examine their experiences of working with the program. This independently collected and analysed data strengthens the validity of the report.

Lastly, I would like to thank those who worked tirelessly on the project, the staff of the program, who have shown great commitment and focus in ensuring the success of the program and a special mention to both the CEO of ACWA while the program was running, Andrew McCallum, and the Chair of the ACWA State-Wide Fostering NSW Reference Group, Nigel Lindsay from Wesley. Both provided steadfast support and an informed analysis when the program needed it.

Dr. Wendy Foote
Acting Chief Executive Officer
ACWA

21.01.19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fostering NSW Recruitment of Foster Carers Project

In 2012, the NSW Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) and the Peak Body for out-of-home care service providers, the Association of Children's Welfare Agencies (ACWA) signed a memorandum of understanding, setting out arrangements for jointly working toward the non-government sector taking on the management and leadership of foster care recruitment and support. This transfer took place at a time when statutory foster placements were being transferred to the NGO sector, as a result of the recommendations from the Woods Special Inquiry to Child Protection Services in NSW (2008) and was designed to further augment the NGO's role of the primary provider of foster care in the sector. ACWA was charged with the management of the Fostering NSW Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers project for a period of two years between June 2012 and June 2014 and awarded funding of \$1.1 million.

At the end of this period, FACS funded ACWA another \$1.1 million to extend delivery of the Fostering NSW Recruitment and Retention Project from July 2014 to June 2016. A further year's funding of \$550,000 was then granted until June 2017, with two further extensions of 6 months until December 2017, then two further extensions of 3 months until June 2018, while preparations were made for the launch of a new program, ***My Forever Family NSW*** that would subsume both the recruitment and support of foster carers.

The project had two parts (recruitment and retention of foster carers, including sector development) and funding was to cover all costs, including staffing. The recruitment campaign, which had mainstream and targeted components, was intended to raise awareness about fostering in the community and increase traffic to the Fostering NSW website, the number of enquiries and applications to become a foster carer and, eventually, the number of authorised carers. The focus of recruitment activities was high level and included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Initially, the 'retention' of carers was also included in the brief although this aspect of the program was removed from the deliverables in July 2017.

Evaluation

This evaluation is intended to act as both a record of the program activities between July 2014 and December 2017, and an investigation into its influence and impact on foster carer recruitment in NSW. It follows a comprehensive evaluation of the first two years of the project conducted by ARTD Consultants, which assessed the delivery and early outcomes of the project, particularly the recruitment campaign, and made recommendations for its continuation.

This evaluation draws on data collected by Fostering NSW via Google Analytics, Facebook insights and, importantly, via the automated enquiry and referral system that was implemented in April 2015. It also draws on responses to an enquirer satisfaction survey conducted in February 2018 using the SurveyMonkey online tool, and a limited number of telephone interviews with key stakeholders from both the out-of-home care sector and Fostering NSW enquirer database, independently conducted by the UNSW Centre for Social Impact.

The period between July 2014 and December 2017 saw many changes within the out-of-home care sector, including two changes of Minister, a number of significant reforms as well as an extended period of contracting and accreditation. This evaluation will also explore contextual factors, including the impact of a constantly changing environment, on the recruitment program.

Key Findings

The Fostering NSW program was pioneering in being the first state-wide coordinated foster care recruitment program funded over a number of years for delivery by a peak body in Australia.

It was also pioneering in the way that it harnessed the power of social media to build a community around existing foster carers that could reach out to their networks and echo the 'word of mouth' effect as a recruitment tool. When the program launched in 2013, the use of Facebook as a marketing tool was in its infancy, but by the end of the project in 2018, many out-of-home care agencies had adopted social media, particularly Facebook, as a key platform through which to find, educate and engage their target audience.

Instead of using a small number of short, high profile advertising campaigns, ACWA adopted the strategy of an ongoing multimedia campaign with 'bursts' of paid advertising. Using this strategy, the Fostering NSW program was largely successful in achieving its key objectives of:

- Raising awareness about the need for foster carers
- Creating positive social norms around fostering

- Increasing visits to the Fostering NSW website and enquiry line
- Increasing the number of applications to become a carer and ultimately, the number of authorised carers
- Strengthening the non-government agencies' capacity to recruit, authorise and retain carers.

In the 5 years of the program between May 2013 and May 2018, there were 549,784 visits to the Fostering NSW website – an average of 9,163 per month and trending upwards over time. 11,030 online and telephone enquiries about becoming a foster carer were received and 4,980 of these were referred or passed on to service providers as 'warm leads' for follow up. As with website visits, data collected on the number of enquiries and referrals handled by Fostering NSW shows a steady increase year-on-year as awareness and audience penetration grew.

The difficulty in gathering accurate enquiry progression data from agencies means that we do not know how many of these referrals resulted in the approval of authorised carers. However, data collected by the Office of the Children's Guardian for the NSW Carers Register introduced in 2016 shows that the number of authorised carers increased by 1,674 between June 2016 and June 2017 but only by another 163 between June 2017 and June 2018. This drop in the previous pattern of increasing authorisations over the last year is worthy of examination. The nature of the environment in which agencies were operating and recruiting in retrospect appears to have brought together elements that resulted in a 'perfect storm' where systemic factors impacted on NGOs' resources and capacity to focus on recruitment and assessment. This included:

- A procurement environment that promoted uncertainty for service providers and the recruitment program. This impacted the award and rollout of the new recruitment and support program that became *My Forever Family NSW*. The two consequent six-month extensions to the Fostering NSW contract led to a halt in strategic recruitment planning and activity while awaiting the outcome (for both Fostering NSW and some NGOs).
- Accreditation and re-contracting of Out-of-Home Care agencies
- The new requirement to review all children's case plans through the permanency support lens. This resulted in a diversion of the workforce to undertake permanency pathway assessments as required by the funder.
- The shift in recruitment messaging to focus on the need for emergency, respite and restoration carers, guardians and adoptive parents rather than long-term foster carers

While paid advertising undoubtedly has a large role to play in driving awareness and website visits, carer stories in the media and social media content proved to be more effective in attracting people who would go on to make an enquiry. Analysis of website traffic revealed between 6% and 10% of people who came via social channels went on to submit an online enquiry as did 5.70% of people referred from other sources such as news sites. For example, 16% of people that visited <www.fosteringnsw.com.au> via a Foster Care Week story in the South Coast Register in 2017 went on to submit an online enquiry. In contrast, only 0.52% of people who clicked on display advertising went on to submit an online enquiry. This is validation of Fostering NSW's integrated marketing strategy that utilised a 'drip, drip' approach to maintain a steady flow of enquiries rather than create a 'boom and bust' effect with a large advertising campaign.

Research into enquirers' experiences of Fostering NSW via an online customer satisfaction survey, revealed that people largely felt very positive about their interactions with the program and the information provided to them. They also felt that Fostering NSW was useful in helping them make a decision about which type of foster care might best suit them and in finding an appropriate agency. However, they also identified that there was definite room for improvement in the system, particularly in relation to the 'disconnect' between the state-wide recruitment program, the agencies themselves and the support services available to approved carers.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Context – Sector and Societal

The period of time being explored in this evaluation (June 2014 – December 2017) was one of continuous change in the NSW Child Protection sector, including a significant reform in legislation in October 2014 to place greater emphasis on achieving permanency for vulnerable children and young people in the out-of-home care system. The *Safe Home For Life* initiative set out a placement hierarchy citing restoration to birth family as the preferred option for children and young people in out-of-home care, followed by adoption (except in the case of Aboriginal children) or guardianship where restoration will not be an option.

Between 30 June 2007 and 30 June 2014, the number of children and young people entering out-of-home in NSW care rose sharply from 12,712 to 18,192, an increase of around 43%. This was followed by a decline to 16,843 as at 30 June 2015 after a number of children in kinship placements were transferred to Guardianship orders under the *Safe Home for Life* reforms. The number has been steadily rising again and reached 17,879 as at 30 June 2017¹.

With the number of children staying in continuous placements for longer on the rise, and the more widespread implementation of best practice in reducing the number of placements made with each carer, the need to attract more carers became even more crucial. In the period 2013 to 2016, Fostering NSW aimed to attract at least 450 carers per year. This number was increased to 660 from July 2016.

The Trend Paper commissioned in 2013 identified that the ‘face’ of fostering (i.e. the demographic profile of a person likely to become a foster carer) was changing from the typical one identified in the 2004 report by Marilyn McHugh et al., ‘The Availability of Foster Carers’, as an Australian born female between 30 and 50 years old, educated to Year 10, married and not in the workforce. In fact, with more women now in the workforce and families under increasing pressure from a wider range of work and family commitments, the need to target new audiences was an essential element of the Fostering NSW campaign, including single people, empty nesters, same-sex couples and caring professionals.

1.2 The Need for a State-Wide Campaign

The state-wide campaign was initially needed to aid the transition of out-of-home care services from the NSW Department of Family and Community Services to the NGO sector, and to do the following:

¹ Figures taken from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Child Protection Reports 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

- Raise public awareness about fostering;
- Increase traffic to the Fostering NSW website, increase the number of enquiries and applications to become a carer (including from priority groups) and eventually, the number of authorised carers; and
- Strengthen non-government out-of-home care agencies' capacity to recruit, authorise and retain carers.

These objectives remained constant throughout the life of the campaign but with the addition of an even greater need to educate the public about the range of care options available, particularly in relation to permanency.

The need in NSW to increase the pool of quality carers who can offer different types of care, including crisis and short term care (including to support restoration), respite care and open adoption, has become more critical as Safe Home For Life has given way to the Permanency Support Program, which is now entering full implementation with new contracts that began in July 2018.

During this period, a shortage of suitable carers to take specific cohorts of 'harder to place' children such as sibling groups, boys 9-14 years of age, adolescents, and those with very high needs or disabilities was recognised, as well as emergency carers with the flexibility to take children at short notice for indefinite periods of time. The system also needed more Aboriginal carers (for increasingly large numbers of Aboriginal children entering the system) and carers from culturally diverse backgrounds.

1.3 Impact of Transition, Contracting and Safe Home for Life /Permanency Support Program on Foster Care Recruitment

The impact of a constantly changing environment on foster care recruitment and in particular, the statewide campaign, cannot be overstated.

To be successful in its objectives, the Fostering NSW campaign relied heavily on some key elements, such as:

- Clear and realistic objectives
- Sector collaboration and support
- Access to accurate data and information
- A shared purpose

In the period between July 2014 and December 2017, the Fostering NSW project was subject to a number of specific challenges that interfered with the smooth running of the recruitment campaign, as follows:

1. **Funding Cycle:** Due to the nature of the funding cycle and lack of certainty around the continuation of the program, key staff members were lost in May 2014, July 2015 and May 2016 because they could not be assured of continued employment. Planning and media buying activities were also delayed (particularly after June 2016 when short project extensions came into play), and general project momentum was slowed.
2. **Policy Shifts:** The *Safe Home for Life* reforms introduced a need to reframe 'foster care' as a last resort for children and young people who could not be restored to their birth families, adopted or placed under Guardianship orders. This was extremely challenging for a program tasked with attracting foster carers into the system (e.g. media reports about the new legislation named foster care as the 'last resort' and spoke of children 'languishing' in a broken system).

The project was subject to a push for a reframing of the carer role. An investigation was undertaken in October 2015 to look at re-branding Fostering NSW to better reflect permanency goals. This initiative was instigated by the Safe Home for Life NSW lead working within ACWA at the time, funded by FaCS and the results presented to the Minister at the time, Brad Hazzard.

The investigation comprised of:

- Conducting focus groups around brand awareness and understanding of the concepts of foster care and adoption;
- Developing an implementation plan for a possible project name change; and
- Adopting a greater focus on open adoption in our messaging.

The reforms required a review of the terminology and messages to ensure alignment, for example naming adoptive parents and guardians in recruitment messaging that had previously specifically focussed on a need for more foster carers. Previous strategies relied on keeping the messaging simple to encourage enquiries about foster care as an umbrella concept. This would then lead to discussion about the specific aspects of caring available, including open adoption and, to a lesser extent, guardianship. The reality was that the first step in any of these pathways was, and still is, to become a foster carer.

The reform focus on adoption also had the impact of increasing enquiries from potential adoptive parents. However, most service providers did not have programs established that could respond to enquires about adoption at that time.

3. **Politicisation of the environment:** There were several high profile media stories, particularly during 2016, which painted a negative picture of the out-of-home

care sector and its then Minister, Brad Hazzard. These included reports on the inquest into the death of a teenage girl (dubbed Girl X) who died while in residential care in 2014 (*The Daily Telegraph*, August 2016), and tabloid articles about a baby sleeping in a beanbag in departmental offices allegedly because of a severe shortage in emergency carers. (*At Risk Kids Forced to Sleep on Office Floors: Daily Telegraph*, 27 July 2016). Calls into the Fostering NSW enquiry line immediately reflected the stories being promoted in the media, with enquirers quoting these and responding directly to them. The editorial policy in the *Daily Telegraph* reflected a negative and sustained media campaign comprising relentless coverage of negative stories about out-of-home care.

In response to these stories, the Minister's Office brokered a deal in October 2016 with the *Daily Telegraph* for a weekend spread on the crisis in out-of-home care. ACWA attended meetings with key people from the Minister's office, FaCS media unit and FaCS staff to plan for this special drive in anticipation of a huge recruitment spike. The project was driven by the Minister's Chief of Staff, and a key feature was the transfer of control of the Fostering NSW enquiry line to the Housing Contact Centre due to its capacity to respond to high volumes of calls. (It was estimated that 100 incoming lines would be needed to cope with demand, and ACWA only had five). ACWA's advice, drawn from 3 years' experience of running the sustained recruitment campaign, incorporating targeted media exposure, was that this intervention was unwarranted but the transfer proceeded and the line was handled by the Housing Contact Centre for another two weeks after the newspaper spread.

ACWA successfully sought to be involved in providing the Housing Contact Centre with a phone enquiry service script and process guidelines in an attempt to safeguard the quality of the enquiry experience and brought in extra staff in over the weekend to handle an anticipated increase in online enquiries. Arrangements were made to second staff from agencies to meet this requirement, and all staff were on stand-by for three weekends before the spread finally ran.

FaCS District staff schedule inter-agency information sessions to take place in November in key locations: Newcastle, Hunter, Campbelltown, Liverpool, Orange and Dubbo as well as in Kingswood and Dee Why. At least two of these occurred before the media came out and were not well attended.

This intervention and resulted in the loss of best practice due to:

- Double handling as HCC phone line staff lacked the expertise to answer enquirers' questions about fostering and adoption.
- A delay in follow-up due to problems with collation of the manual data and passing it on to Fostering NSW, which took some weeks – HCC staff did not have access to the Fostering NSW database.

- A loss of data – vital details such as email addresses and phone numbers were not always supplied.
- Lost opportunities as several of the information sessions were held before the newspaper spread finally came out (it was scheduled and then cancelled three weekends in a row due to higher priority news items).

In terms of the actual enquiries, there was a slight increase over average numbers for an 18-day period (the length of time that the phone lines were diverted to the Housing Contact Centre). As the table below illustrates, there were 8 phone calls and 25 online enquiries during the weekend of the print spread.

Engagement Statistics	12/13 November	14 to 29 November	18 day Average
Visits to Fostering NSW website	972	6294	5026
Referrals from The Daily Telegraph	150	39	N/A
Referrals via Facebook	87	361	N/A
Online enquiries received	25	80	73
Phone calls to the 1800 enquiry line	8	52	40
No. of enquiries citing prompt by The Daily Telegraph	15	13	N/A

The enquiries that came in over the subsequent two weeks as the stories were shared via social media, were being made during a period of campaigns and news that featured out of home care and foster care:

- National Adoption Awareness Week promotions (6 - 12 November 2016)
- Four Corners program on the failings of the Residential Care system (Mon 15 November 2016)

- Ongoing media activity to support the regional Info evenings, especially in the Hunter Region (NBN News item) and Western Region (Prime 7 and WIN News' items, articles in Central Western Daily and The Liberal newspapers)
- Article in *The Age* newspaper on Foster Care entitled *A Place to Call Home*.

In relation to a cost benefit analysis, ACWA did not have complete knowledge of the full costs that were incurred in undertaking these activities, and while the enquiry patterns did show a small spike, perhaps the success of the intervention needs to be considered in a broader political and social sense. In general, it can be said that the planned activities were interrupted and the period during which the Minister's Office was involved in driving a campaign through the Fostering NSW program was unexpected and required agility on the part of the program staff.

2. PROJECT MANAGEMENT, STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

2.1 Project Approach

The Fostering NSW Recruitment and Retention of Foster Carers project was the first of its kind in Australia to provide a one-stop-shop for people to '*learn, think and connect*' with fostering (and adoption) through a range of communication channels. Its multi-platform approach integrated traditional advertising, PR and media, a comprehensive website, telephone enquiry line and the innovative use of social media to engage with potential carers, educate them about the ways in which they could be involved, and ultimately nudge them to take the next step and apply to become authorised carers.

A key element of this approach was to promote the positive norms of fostering through sharing stories of lived experience in the media. In September 2014 ACWA employed Elise Hawthorne of Exposure Communications to work closely with the Fostering NSW team on a media strategy for Foster Care Week. Exposure Communications subsequently assisted in developing a marketing strategy for the 2014 - 2016 funding period and continued to handle media communications for the project until September 2016, achieving exposure equivalent to over \$2,000,000 worth of advertising² over two years.

The project approach was agile in continuing to evolve and change over time, developing iteratively based on new research as it emerged, insights from increased data collection and analysis, feedback from service providers and consultation with the Statewide Reference Group. For example, decisions concerning advertising spend were based on analysis of past spend performance, and current sector needs were taken into consideration when determining the focus of social media posts, video resource creation, media placement and timing of targeted advertising.

2.2 Target Audiences

The primary target audience for the campaign was defined as women aged 30–50, and this remained constant throughout the life of the project. Secondary target audiences included empty nesters, same-sex couples, single people and caring professionals. There was also continuous targeting of the Aboriginal and CALD communities to raise awareness about the need for carers. This targeting included a specific, separate campaign undertaken in partnership with Settlement Services International (SSI) in 2013, aimed at attracting carers from five Pacific communities

² Media Coverage Report September 2014 – May 2016, and Media Coverage Report July 2016 – September 2017, isentia.insights

(Samoan, Fijian, Tongan, Maori, and Cook Islander), as well as specific targeting of the Muslim and Chinese communities through tailored content and support for community-specific information sessions.

The targeting approach was based on research in Australia (Siminski, Chalmers and McHugh, 2005)³ which found that foster families are most likely to contain women aged 35-54 and that couples accounted for two-thirds of all foster carers. It remains the case that women are generally the primary decision makers about foster care but significant recruitment challenges are created by societal changes including increased participation of women in the workforce.

The Fostering NSW campaign incorporated the need for new sources of care to be targeted and different ways of caring (including short-term and respite care) to be promoted because traditional sources of carers are being squeezed as families and working practices change.⁴ Research from Victoria showed an increasing interest in becoming carers from same-sex couples and single females.⁵ Caring professionals (including teachers, nurses and social workers) were targeted in response to a growing recognition that they are more suited to providing the support needed for more complex foster care placements.⁶



In addition, the campaign targeting drew on research by the UK Fostering Network that identified that a significant majority of foster carers (73% against a national adult population of 42%) are categorised under a system called Values Modes as 'Pioneers'. Among a range of typical characteristics, Pioneers 'have high levels of

³ Foster Carers in NSW: Profile and Projections based on ABS Census data (2005), Siminski, Peter; Chalmers, Jenny and McHugh, Marilyn

⁴ Fostering NSW, 2013, *Trend Paper: ifoster2: The Changing Face of Fostering in Australia*, http://www.acwa.asn.au/FCRC/Downloads/Fostering_NSW_Trend_Paper_FINAL.pdf

⁵ Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, 2012, *Foster Care in Context: An Evaluation of the Foster Care Communication and Recruitment Strategy*.

⁶ Fostering NSW, 2013, *Trend Paper: ifoster2: The Changing Face of Fostering in Australia*, http://www.acwa.asn.au/FCRC/Downloads/Fostering_NSW_Trend_Paper_FINAL.pdf

self-efficacy and carry a strong belief that, whatever happens, they will manage.⁷ Other research identified this group's key motivations to foster as:

- Helping children; and
- Social/community concern.

This information was useful in determining the messaging and creative that would likely resonate with this cohort, and in feeding engaging content via the Fostering NSW Facebook page and website blog.

At certain times throughout the campaign, FACS and sector representatives identified particular recruitment needs that required very specific targeting, such as emergency and respite carers, or carers of adolescents and sibling groups. Targeting potential carers for these groups required an understanding of the cohorts of people most likely to undertake these types of care, coupled with the development and dissemination of educative messaging to support the broader campaign materials.

Material for International Day of People with Disability



2.3 Key Messages and Call to Action

The original 2013 campaign tagline was '*Open your heart. Foster a child*' and accompanying key messages included:

- There is an urgent need for foster carers
- The way foster care is provided in NSW is changing
- A range of people can become carers
- Carers can choose the type of care they provide
- Carers need a sense of love, parenting skills, stability and strong values rather than a lot of money, a big house or a higher education
- Caring has benefits including making a difference to a child in need and making your family home come alive again
- Carers receive support, training and an allowance

⁷ Why Foster Carers Care, 2013, The Fostering Network UK.

As the project evolved over a second funding period between 2014 and 2016, the tagline '*Open your heart. Foster a child*' was gradually complemented by a new tagline, '*Be part of an amazing journey*', designed to reflect the idea of 'making a difference' in a child's life and give the sense of a caring continuum with a range of possible entry points.

The key messages likewise developed and shifted to include more information on the types of care available from emergency, respite and short term care, through to guardianship and open adoption from care (in line with the placement hierarchy set out in the 2014 Safe Home for Life legislative amendments).

These overarching and core key messages were regularly supplemented with more targeted messages about, for example, the need for Aboriginal or CALD carers, the importance of keeping sibling groups together, the desperate shortage of emergency carers or the welcoming of applications from the LGBTIQI community, usually around key campaign media waves (i.e. NAIDOC Week, Families Week, Sydney Mardi Gras).

The main call to action was always to visit the Fostering NSW website or call 1800 2 FOSTER. Subsidiary calls to action were to visit the Fostering NSW forum to learn from carers what fostering is really like, like and share the Fostering NSW Facebook and follow @Fostering NSW on Twitter, YouTube or Instagram.⁸

One of the key features of the Fostering NSW campaign was its agility in communicating a range of very complex and targeted messages while maintaining an overarching awareness-raising presence aimed at encouraging the broadest group of people possible to consider fostering rather than discounting themselves through a lack of information or understanding.

2.4 Creative Material

The 2013 advertising campaign '*Open your heart*' was researched and tested by creative agency, Ogilvy and Mather, and hinged on the proposition that '*you already have what it takes to be a great foster carer*'. This was built on the premise that a lot of 'suitable' people unnecessarily rule themselves out of this role, and so the campaign aimed to encourage people to consider fostering rather than 'disqualifying' themselves early on in the journey.

⁸ ACWA, 2013, *Fostering NSW – campaign key messages and proof points*.



Creative materials for this initial campaign included a series of print and digital (banner) advertisements, posters, flyers, an e-card, a thank-you card for carers, video content of carers sharing their stories and explaining the process of becoming a carer, and a foster song *'Home is Where the Heart is'*, composed in collaboration with the Banton Brothers and performed by X-Factor winner and ex-foster child, Veanka Howard.

The creative concept for the 2016 campaign expanded on the *'Open your heart'* concept developed for the previous campaign to highlight the way in which carers can *'be part of an amazing journey'* by providing stability, love and support at every stage of a child's journey to adulthood. The 2013 campaign creative focussed on the needs of the child, e.g. *'He needs someone to care'*, *'He needs someone to learn from'* etc., whereas the 2016 campaign highlighted the role of the foster carer in the child's life, *'You taught me how to tie my shoelaces'*, or *'You were there when I came off my skateboard'*.

While the 2013 campaign was deemed to be successful, it was felt that the creative could be even stronger and more affecting if it used the word *'You'* (often cited as the #1 power word in the psychology of marketing persuasion) and increased its emphasis on the positive, practical day-to-day interactions between carers and children. The creative concept of being present and engaged – *"you were there when I fell off my skateboard"* or *"you make the rainy days fun"* – demonstrates how little things that many people take for granted can be hugely significant to a child or young person in out-of-home care. Using language around teaching and mentorship, such as *"You taught me how to tie my shoelaces"*, and *"You taught me how to dream"*, taps in to the target audience's latent desire to *'make a difference'* and also speaks indirectly to a secondary target audience of caring professionals.

The flagship creative element for the 2016 advertising campaign was a 30-second recruitment TVC (a short, free to air audio-visual), which was launched on the Fostering NSW YouTube channel in April 2015. Initially promoted during Youth Week 2015, the video was successful in achieving 19,665 views on YouTube and 10,327 views on Facebook.

You taught me how to tie my shoelaces, and make the rainy days fun...



You were there when I fell off my skateboard, and when I passed my exam...



But most of all you taught me to dream.

Be part of an amazing journey... foster a child.



Radio advertising, digital MREC (medium rectangle) and leaderboard banner ads were also developed using the same creative concept to ensure consistency and promote recall across media.

The original suite of creative materials developed for the 2013 campaign included a targeted Aboriginal component designed in consultation with AbSec and Aboriginal Agency members to ensure it was culturally appropriate.

A short (1 min 57 secs) CSA (Community Service Announcement) was also created which was based on content from the FACS 'Raising Them Strong' video resource for broadcast on NITV.



In 2016, this CSA was edited to a 30-second version to achieve paid spots in timeslots with wider reach and to make it more suitable for social media promotion.

Open your heart. Foster a child.

Visit fosteringsw.com.au or call **1800 2 FOSTER**
or call 1800 888 698 for Aboriginal Statewide Foster Care Support Service



Over the 5 years of the Fostering NSW project, other creative elements included branded content for social media, such as info-graphics, Foster Care Week profile picture frames and a range of recruitment videos featuring foster carers sharing their experiences (See Appendix 1).

2.5 Stakeholder Relationships

Stakeholder relationships were key to the work undertaken by Fostering NSW, particularly those with NGO out-of-home care agencies. Other stakeholders included FACS, enquirers, existing foster carers, peak bodies, allied professionals and the media. This range of stakeholders required a range of communication and engagement channels, which included involvement in metro and regional working groups, regular sector and community e-newsletters, correspondence via the automated enquiry and referral system, and relationship building through face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations.

The project was guided throughout by a Statewide Reference Group comprising nominated representatives from NGO agencies, FACS and related peaks including

AbSec and Connecting Carers. There were also carer representatives sitting on the reference group from time to time.

In early 2017, in recognition of a drop-off in engagement with the Fostering NSW program by Aboriginal agencies, a separate Aboriginal Reference Group was established to rekindle relationships and boost existing strategies for the recruitment of Aboriginal carers. This group had only two successful meetings before the new Carer Program tender was announced and Fostering NSW began working within the confines of short, transitional contracts, which did not allow for much planning and development. However, the group was very effective in providing guidance in relation to a number of initiatives such as:

- The 'Safe On Country and In Culture' event hosted by ACWA and AbSec in June 2017
- The development of a recruitment video featuring Aboriginal carers, 'Keeping Koori Kids Connected'
- Ensuring a strong message about the need for Aboriginal carers for sibling groups in Families Week 2017 media pitching.

These activities were in turn effective in reconnecting Fostering NSW with Aboriginal agencies and partnerships, leading to collaborative, targeted recruitment through postcode promotion on Facebook and an increase in foster care enquiries from the Aboriginal community.

After June 2017, both reference groups were effectively put on hold in terms of face-to-face meetings, but communication was maintained with reference group members via group emails and telephone follow-ups with individuals when required.

One of the biggest challenges for the Fostering NSW project was maintaining agency engagement, particularly with remote and regional agency offices. One way of engaging was through the FaCS-led Regional Implementation Groups (RIGs), but as these were abandoned with the demise of the Transitional Program Office, it became increasingly hard to build and keep those relationships going. ACWA policy staff provided a liaison point between Fostering NSW and regional member agencies through the District Implementation Groups (DIGs) but this was not ideal. ACWA also introduced a video-conferencing facility during this period that was used for briefings and member consultations. In addition, Fostering NSW developed a regular e-news bulletin, which was sent to a mailing list of approximately 250 subscribers, to keep recruitment staff informed about activities and opportunities to engage with the program.

In the 2017 ACWA Annual Survey, 89% of respondents working in OOHC recruitment reported that communication about Fostering NSW campaign activities was good or very good, with 85% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the program offered a *'productive, collaborative approach to attracting foster carers'*. 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Fostering NSW's campaign activities had a positive impact on the number and type of enquiries and applications received by their agency.

Further, more detailed interviews with agency representatives conducted by the UNSW Centre for Social Impact (CSI) in early 2018, found that overall there was a feeling that the sector had benefited positively from the activities of the Fostering NSW program. The findings from this research evaluation can be seen in more detail in Section 5.3 of this document.

3. CAMPAIGN REACH

The Fostering NSW recruitment campaign under ACWA took an integrated marketing approach reflecting contemporary research, which indicates that most organisations need a variety of ways to reach their target audiences and that complementary communications can be economical, efficient and effective and can enhance individual elements. It also reflects the initial Fostering NSW campaign run by FaCS in 2010 that used a combination of advertising, positive editorial coverage and local community activity (such as stalls, information sessions and letter box drops), although it must be noted that the expenditure on advertising placements was far higher in the 2010 campaign. (In 2010, a total of \$1,064,598 was spent on advertising placements alone: \$494,404 on television, \$428,780 on print, \$75,960 on radio and \$65,454 on digital⁹, against a total project funding amount of \$1.1 million across each 2 year period from 2013 onwards).

ACWA's choice to focus on digital and social channels was originally based on advice from the professional marketing company (Ogilvy) to support the project that this approach would best suit the available budget. The use of new media (particularly social media) as a marketing tool became increasingly important over the life of the project. Facebook especially evolved as a sophisticated marketing platform through which to connect directly in a highly targeted way with potential 'customers', or audience.

The use of social media to replicate the 'word of mouth' effect of the foster carer community was a significant innovation by the Fostering NSW project under ACWA's stewardship, and one that has since been increasingly employed by NGOs as an integral part of their marketing mix.

3.1 Advertising

3.1.1 2013 - 2014 Campaign

The 2013 advertising campaign comprised of five print advertisements at a cost of \$27,730¹⁰, two waves of digital advertising at a cost of \$43,632, and \$44,454.49 on Facebook promotion¹¹. Placements were designed to reach target audiences, but there is no systematic data on targeting of expenditure.

There were four print advertisements for the main campaign placed in July - August 2013. These were in *The*

Children's Week advertisement



⁹ Community Services, 2010, *Fostering NSW Campaign Evaluation*

¹⁰ MediaCom expenditure report

¹¹ MediaCom expenditure report; Universal McCann report

Sun-Herald, (14 and 28 July 2013) with a circulation of 322,988, and an unnamed publication¹² (22 July 2013 and 4 August 2013).

Static advertisements were also developed for Children's Week and distributed to suburban and regional newspapers with a request that they consider using them as filler if the opportunity arose. It is not clear how many newspapers used the advertisements.

3.1.2 Digital



There were two waves of digital advertising: one in July - August 2013, and another in February - June 2014. The two waves delivered 6,103,097 impressions, i.e. views on the web¹³, 4,021 clicks and an overall click-through rate (CTR)¹⁴ of 0.07%, (an average cost per click of \$10.85). Performance and cost per click varied substantially across the different publishers. SBS placements achieved the smallest number of impressions (6,620), but the highest click-through rate (0.41%). Placements across other network channels by ad tech company Cadreon achieved the highest number of impressions (4,389,732), but the lowest click-through rate (0.04%).

3.1.3 2014 Additional Burst

In November 2014, there was a small burst of digital advertising with a budget of \$20,000. This campaign delivered a total of 1,290,538 impressions and 1,228 clicks at a CTR of 0.10% and a cost per click (CPC) of \$10.26. This campaign was booked on impressions and due to a limited cookie pool (visitors who had previously been tagged when visiting specific web pages), the retargeting element under-delivered significantly taking the overall delivery rate down to 49%.

The Mosaic segments¹⁵ outperformed the Behavioural Retargeting¹⁶ in terms of CTR at an average of 0.20% compared to 0.16%. The highest performing segment was empty nesters at 0.21%.

A refresh of the rotation of creative material was actioned halfway through the campaign to see if different creative against different audiences would drive further

¹² MediaCom expenditure report does not name the publication and ACWA's Fostering NSW Project Officer (Media and Communications) has left, but ACWA is seeking qualification from MediaCom. Expenditure on the *Koori Mail* advertisement was not a separate line item.

¹³ Impression: When an Internet user is shown a creative advertisement placement on a website. This is different to the number of media placements, as an impression relates to the number of times a placement on a particular website is seen by Internet users.

¹⁴ Click-through rate refers to the number of times an impression (page viewed) leads to a web-user clicking on an advertisement, expressed as a percentage. For example, 100 clicks for 10,000 impressions make a click-through rate of 0.01%.

¹⁵ Mosaic is a classification system that defines households or individuals according to geo-demographic information.

Segmentation allows further break down based on key characteristics,

¹⁶ Behavioural retargeting is a form of online, targeted advertising by which consumers are marketed to based on their previous online actions.

engagement or help refresh the message. Prior to this we had seen the CTR lowering week on week. The amended creative rotation saw this stabilise, however it did not pick-up significantly. CARE was the highest performing creative piece, though it should be noted that it was the only creative to run against all audiences, suggesting that repeated exposure to an advertisement may be more influential in driving engagement than the nature of the content itself.

3.1.4 2016 Campaign

The next significant peer-reviewed¹⁷ advertising campaign occurred in August - October 2016 and comprised a mix of regional TV, radio and a digital media partnership with premium digital publisher, Mamamia Women's Network, comprising of a series of five native posts supported by digital advertising, social, 30-second video pre-roll and podcast. The budget for this advertising burst was \$135,000.

The rationale behind this particular strategy was a recognition that previous digital advertising alone, while successful in driving traffic to the website, had resulted in very high bounce rates. However, referral traffic generated from carer stories placed in the media and engaging content shared via Facebook was much more likely to result in an online enquiry submission. The decision was made to use the 30-second TVC as the main awareness driver for this campaign, supported by research provided through the Nielsen Multi-Screen Report¹⁸ that revealed that TV remains the preferred viewing device for video content and that our primary target audience of women aged 30 - 50 are known to be multi-taskers, and are commonly found 'multi-screening' between the hours of 6pm and 10pm each night (<https://www.nielsen.com/au/en/insights/news/2015/marketing-to-the-modern-woman-tapping-into-the-multi-screening-multi-tasking-australian-woman.html>).

This strategy was found to be very effective, with the TV component of the campaign exceeding planned TARP¹⁹ levels by 50% in both Northern and Southern NSW. The Mamamia partnership also performed very well, far exceeding engagement and dwell time rates for similar content. The average rate of shares on a piece of native content is 80. The Fostering NSW content over-achieved this by receiving 87 to 555 shares per post, with a total of 1,294 shares for the five articles. Average dwell time across the five native posts was 3 minutes 21 seconds, which is a 39% increase on the average dwell time of 2 minutes 25 seconds for content on this network. The Mamamia content drove 959 visitors to the Fostering NSW website during the

¹⁷ All government-funded advertising must be peer-reviewed which means that the advertising strategy is subject to scrutiny against a set of criteria by a group of marketing specialists from a range of government departments in order to gain approval to proceed.

¹⁸ Nielsen Australian Multi-Screen Report Q4 2015

¹⁹ TARP: Target Audience Rating Point, meaning 'the average viewing audience for a specific demographic expressed as a percentage of the potential audience.'

campaign period. One thing to note here is that not only were Elise Hawthorne of Exposure Communications and Fostering NSW team responsible for finding the carers to tell their stories, but also that every native post submitted by a Mamamia journalist for approval had to be significantly re-written due to poor writing quality. This type of partnership both increased costs and was labour intensive, however, the value-add was in having robust pieces of content to share via the Fostering NSW social media channels, especially Facebook.

3.1.5 2017 – 2018 Campaign

Anticipating that the Fostering NSW project would end in June 2017, no further plans were made for major peer-reviewed advertising campaigns. However, there were a couple of short bursts of advertising promotion to support the placement of media stories around key events such as Families Week (May 2017) and Foster Care Week (September 2017), as well as a four-week promotion of the 30-second Aboriginal recruitment TVC in March 2018.

In May 2017 (Families Week 15 - 21), a small budget of \$30,000 was invested in a four-week TVC campaign across NITV, Facebook, digital RON and Catch Up TV (Plus &, Nine Now, TenPlay, MCN and SBS).

Results for this campaign were good, particularly on Facebook where the generic TVC achieved 102,000 views (more than twice the original estimate) with a 10% completion rate and a click-per-view (CPV) of \$0.05. The Aboriginal TVC achieved 116,294 video views over the four-week period with 44% of total video views coming from women in the 45 - 54 year old age range, and an impressive \$0.04 CPV rate. Catch Up TV also performed well with a 78% completion rate. These results were reflected in visits to the Fostering NSW website which almost doubled monthly visits during this period to around 17,000, and there was a 21% increase in enquiries that month over the previous two months.

A final \$25,000 was spent on two short bursts of 30-second TVC promotion through Foster Care Week 2017 and in November 2017 with similar results in terms of audience engagement and each burst drove a small spike in website visits and enquiries.

3.2 Social Media

Social media has played a vital role in the success of the Fostering NSW campaign. The exponential growth in the use of social media by people of all ages, and from all walks of life over the last decade had provided a wonderful opportunity for the FNSW campaign to provide information and, more importantly, engage in conversations with the target audiences. We shared interesting and engaging content, as well as answering questions and providing information about fostering to interested individuals via these channels. This low-cost option supported the

campaign to build a healthy following and allowed momentum to continue to grow across the life of the project. The use of social media in this way served the project aims of informing the general public about what foster care is, the need for more foster carers, and to promote ‘good news’ stories around fostering to help change social norms about how fostering is viewed more broadly.

These platforms have been able to harness and leverage the reach of earned media, as well as promoting custom-made content to inform and encourage people to consider foster care. Through this use of social media the campaign was also able to directly reach many individuals in a way that traditional advertising is unable to do. Two-way communication meant conversations



could flow out of engagement. Many, many times the same questions needed to be answered, indicating the very low level of awareness and broad misinformation circulating about the nature of foster care amongst the NSW general population prior to the campaign.

These platforms also served to drive huge volumes of traffic to the Fostering NSW website across the life of the campaign:

- A Facebook page with over 41.7k followers.
- Twitter @FosteringNSW
- YouTube channel hosting all FNSW campaign videos.
- An Instagram account

These platforms were created to support the PR activity to raise public awareness about the campaign. We used a weekly plan of activity, which comprised of regular posts and tweets. The Fostering NSW social media platforms targeted the general public and specifically some of the targeted groups, often at specific times in the calendar (e.g. Families Week, Foster Care Week).

ACWA worked with NGO agencies to build our social media audience and raise awareness of foster care. At the beginning of the project in 2013, social media was not generally used by the sector, and was in some cases viewed with suspicion or fear, due to its capacity for negative engagement. The FNSW Project helped to inform and train the sector in the use of digital and social media, and led the way to what is now standard practice, through the Recruitment Manual, as well as training

courses for agency workers, e.g. *Social Media Fundamentals for Foster Care Recruitment*. Most agencies now have their own successful social media pages and communities, and these form part of a broader communication and outreach web on behalf of the sector.

The FNSW social media pages were started in May 2013 at the launch of the campaign, except the YouTube page, which was inherited (with some pre-existing resources) from the original FACS Fostering NSW Campaign in 2010, and the Instagram page, which was started in November 2017 as a new outreach tool.

The Fostering NSW Facebook page was significantly the most successful tool in reaching new audiences and generating ongoing discussion around issues related to fostering and adoption. At the end of July 2013, after the second full month of the page's existence, page likes had jumped up from 146 at the beginning of June to 2338 page likes, and through paid advertising, had reached 125k people with a single post promoting the need for respite carers. By the end of 2013 the page had leapt to over 16k followers. By the end of the next quarter (March 2014) page likes had nearly reached 22k, and one post in that quarter reached over 208k individuals.

By the middle of 2014, the Fostering NSW Facebook page had over 30k followers, and ACWA had taken on in-house the promotion of the page, due to poor results and return on investment using the government buyers. By the end of 2014 the page had 38k followers, and had seen success through sharing custom made content, such as the Fostering NSW videos, educational sequences such as the 12 Myths of Foster Care series shared in the lead up to Christmas 2014, and motivational sequences such as the "Foster to..." series shared in Foster Care Week 2017. This type of engaging, sharable content bolstered organic reach when followers of the page shared these resources with their own networks, allowing the campaign to reach people who were not (yet) followers.



Other smaller articles became surprise successes. In June 2015 an article was shared from the Illawarra Mercury featuring same-sex carers – Brent & Jamie. It reached 249,728 individuals, received 5228 likes, and was shared 306 times. This article received an early negative comment regarding same-sex carers, and this spurred on

a huge community response supporting this particular couple, and others like them, totalling 436 comments! This sort of engagement helps drive post reach, and once it was seen to be travelling well, a small amount of advertising spend was put behind it.

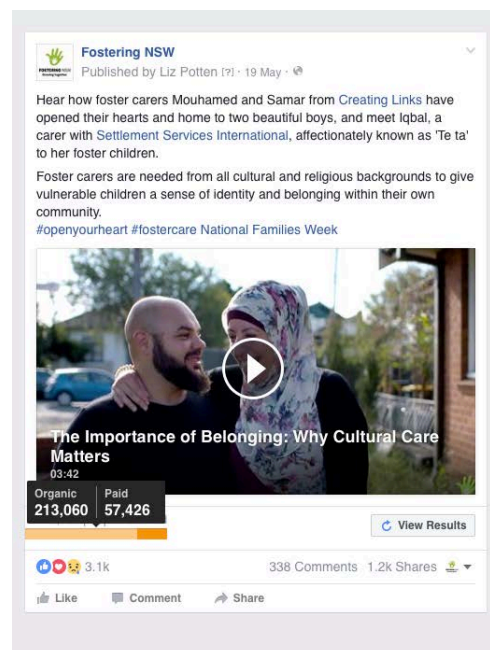
By the end of the project, the Facebook page had a following of 41.7k followers. Over time it was consistently the best way to reach a broad audience in either a low cost or free way.

Videos produced by Grainger Films played a large part in the success of the Fostering NSW Facebook page. The various vignette videos produced by the project were invaluable resources that engaged a wide range of people, as well as informing them about the various types of foster care and the need for different people willing to provide all these types of care, as well as the process to becoming a carer.

These resources were owned and branded by the campaign, which meant that when followers shared these videos (or any of our branded content) it took our brand and message to a wider audience than just the people following the page, in expanding circles.

Current foster carers appreciated and were encouraged by seeing other carers being represented in a positive light, in direct contrast to much of the media coverage about carers. For example, one carer commented on the “Growing Together” vignette released in Foster Care Week 2015: *“Well done, Fostering NSW. This is without a doubt the best video you guys have produced. Proud to be a foster mum.”*

The most successful of all the FNSW vignettes was on the need for foster carers from all cultural backgrounds and the importance of appropriate cultural care. It was shared in Families Week, May 2016, and featured Muslim carers from Creating Links and Settlement Services International. The post reached 279,706 individuals (222,280 organically, and 57,426 through paid promotion), received 11,901 reactions (likes, love etc.), 1,321 shares, 1,392 comments and 59,181 post clicks. The video got a secondary boost through the sad circumstances of one of the featured carers passing away unexpectedly only a month after it was originally shared.



The video was viewed over 112k times and opened up a whole new audience sector to the FNSW Facebook page amongst the Australian Muslim Community.

One of the most successful posts in 2017 was sharing the new self-assessment tool for foster care eligibility. This tool was in the form of a quiz created on the Fostering NSW website. The original post only reached 24k individuals but garnered great engagement, supplying 880 direct clicks through to the FNSW website. By the close of the FNSW Project, the quiz had been taken over 15.2k times by nearly 12k users!



In 2017, a blog was commenced on the FNSW website. This was to gain more traffic to the website, as well as providing a place for campaign-generated content. Sixteen blog posts were published between May 2017 and May 2018. These posts often linked in with campaign weeks, and these were mainly publicised on the Facebook page. The most popular, and second most popular posts on the Facebook page in the first quarter of 2018 were from the FNSW Blog.

3.3 Media Coverage Achieved Through Public Relations

One of the key strands of the Fostering NSW marketing strategy was the placement of positive carer stories in the media. Throughout the campaign, Fostering NSW worked with agencies to identify and promote engaging stories about all types of carers from families, to single people and same-sex couples, as well as Aboriginal and CALD carers, providing all types of care from emergency to both short or long-term care, through to open adoption.

Media placement was generally concentrated around key events in the calendar such as Foster Care Week (September) or National Families Week (May). Other events leveraged for media in the period between July 2014 and December 2017 included Youth Week (April), Reconciliation Week (May/June), National Adoption Awareness Week (November) and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (February/March). This spread of events offered a good range of opportunities across the year to highlight different types of care and target particular audiences.

Working with advertising and public relations firm Ogilvy Australia and non-government agencies, ACWA generated 273 campaign-related media stories in the initial Fostering NSW campaign period between 1 June 2013 and 31 May 2014. This included coverage for the Aboriginal component, but excludes coverage for discrete campaign components such as the Pacific Carer Recruitment Project with SSI, and

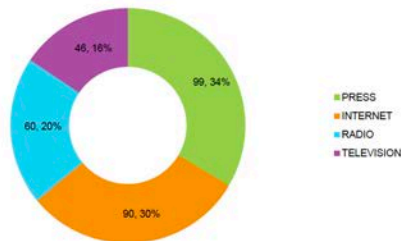
the release of disability vignettes on International Day for People with a Disability (December 2013).²⁰

In the period between July 2014 and December 2018, Fostering NSW worked primarily with Elise Hawthorne of Exposure Communications to achieve over \$2-million equivalent advertising value of free media placement across TV, radio, print and online channels²¹.

Two media monitoring reports were commissioned from iSentia covering the periods from September 2014 to May 2016 and from July 2016 to September 2017. The first report (Sept 2014 – May 2016) details 295 media mentions with an audience/circulation of 4,439,071 and an advertising space rate of \$906,833 During this period the highest audience came via print media²². (See Fig. 3.3.1)

Coverage by Media Type

Chart 1 All Media



NOTE

CHART 1 SHOWS THE VOLUME AND PROPORTION OF COVERAGE IN EACH MEDIA TYPE, WHILE THE TABLE ALSO SHOWS THE AUDIENCE OR CIRCULATION AND ADVERTISING SPACE RATES OF THIS COVERAGE.

Table 1

MEDIA TYPE	VOLUME	AUDIENCE/ CIRCULATION	ADVERTISING SPACE RATES
PRESS	99	3,522,427	\$164,336
INTERNET	90	52,044	\$369,785
RADIO	60	490,600	\$118,660
TELEVISION	46	374,000	\$254,062
TOTAL	295	4,439,071	\$906,833

Fig. 3.3.1 Media Coverage achieved through Public Relations September 2014 – May 2016

Compared to this, the July 2016 - September 2017 period attracted 875 media mentions with an audience / circulation rate of 5,000,361 and an advertising space rate of \$1, 398,805. This time the highest audience came via the Internet²³, which is consistent with media consumption trends (See Fig. 3.3.2). According to the Roy Morgan State of the Nation Report 2017 reading of any major newspaper in print is down from 84.5% in 1998, to 44% while use of the Internet has risen from around 15% in the late 90s to near ubiquity at 94%²⁴.

²⁰ Evaluation of the Fostering NSW Recruitment and Retention Project, Oct 2014, ARTD Consultants

²¹ Media Coverage Report September 2014 –May 2016, and Media Coverage Report July 2016 – September 2017, isentia.insights

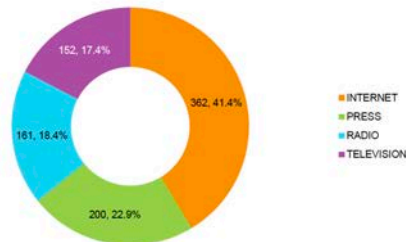
²² Media Coverage Report September 2014 –May 2016, isentia.insights

²³ Media Coverage Report July 2016 – September 2017, isentia.insights

²⁴ <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7315-roy-morgan-state-of-the-nation-media-report-august-2017-201708231655>

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Table 1

MEDIA TYPE	VOLUME	AUDIENCE/ CIRCULATION	ADVERTISING SPACE RATES
INTERNET	362	191,879	\$903,273
PRESS	200	3,535,382	\$256,899
RADIO	161	517,100	\$92,017
TELEVISION	152	756,000	\$146,616
TOTAL	875	5,000,361	\$1,398,805

Fig. 3.3.2 Media Coverage achieved through Public Relations July 2016 – September 2017

3.4 Local and Agency Promotion

The Fostering NSW project was always intended to support the recruitment efforts of out-of-home care agencies through the provision of over-arching campaign messaging and materials, facilitation of workforce development opportunities such as state-wide forums, and the coordination of joint promotional activities such as hosting inter-agency information nights and stalls at community events.

In the period between July 2014 and December 2016, Fostering NSW provided materials, coordination and promotional support, including media pitching, for at least ten joint information sessions across Sydney (Metro, South West and Western), the Illawarra, Southern and Central Coast regions as well as providing template materials to interagency groups for sessions held in the Hunter, Northern and Western regions.

A standard PowerPoint presentation was developed in collaboration with agencies, as well as other materials such as an information session checklist, promotional flyer, sign-in sheet and audience satisfaction survey. These items were made available to any region wishing to host a collaborative information session.

In addition, a page was added to the Fostering NSW website for the promotion of both interagency and individual agency information sessions and was promoted regularly on the Fostering NSW Facebook page. Targeted postcode promotion for joint events was also offered.



In 2016, Fostering NSW coordinated a number of agencies to march in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Parade under the Fostering NSW banner. This provided an opportunity to attract media exposure aimed at encouraging enquiries from the LGBTQI community, an identified target group with untapped fostering and adoption potential. Fostering



NSW also hosted a stall at the Mardi Gras Fair Day in both 2016 and 2017, and liaised with the event organisers to have a 'fostering and adoption' corner where participating agencies could be stationed together, enabling potential carers to easily find the information they required.

Fostering NSW also coordinated a group of Sydney-based agencies to share a stall at Parramatta Pride Picnic day in October 2017 and in the last weeks of the program, also shared an exhibition booth with FaCS and NGOs at the 2018 NSW Seniors Expo.

The program strived to ensure that regional and remote agencies benefited from any state-wide initiative by endeavouring to place positive foster carer stories in local and regional media where possible, and by engaging with agencies, particularly Aboriginal agencies, to provide targeted postcode promotion on Facebook of relevant campaign content such as videos, media stories or local events.

A list of 32 agencies that collaborated with Fostering NSW to provide carer stories for video content and media stories is attached as Appendix 2

3.5 Targeted Components

In the period between July 2014 and December 2017, Fostering NSW ran a number of activities targeting specific audience groups.

3.5.1 LGBTQI Community and Same-Sex Couples

During Sydney Mardi Gras 2016, Fostering NSW hosted a stall at the Fair Day and also organised staff from a collection of agencies to march in the Mardi Gras Parade under the Fostering NSW banner. These activities were supported with media stories across print, radio, digital and social media. Mardi Gras subsequently became a key date in the Fostering NSW promotional calendar during which time we engaged with the LGBTQI community with targeted content such as positive same-sex couple carer stories and educative blogs.

3.5.2 Aboriginal Community

The call for Aboriginal carers ran constantly through all of Fostering NSW's key messaging, media stories and advertising, with dedicated promotional materials including a 30-second advertisement, which aired regularly on NITV and was also reconfigured for radio in the 2016 campaign. Alongside this, the program created additional targeted content including a video carer story, *Keeping Koori Kids Connected*, which reached over 25,000 people, was viewed over 11,000 times, and was promoted to target audiences in specific post codes to support Aboriginal agency recruitment.

A blog post explaining why Aboriginal kids need Aboriginal carers posted in recognition of the 10th Anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2018 reached 11,805 people, attracted 130 reactions and drove 435 clicks through to the Fostering NSW website.

In addition to targeted content, there was support for grassroots activities such as the annual Kids in Care Cup. Fostering NSW not only attended this event for several years in a row, but also provided media support and produced promotional videos as well a short documentary *For the Kids*, which featured in two high profile Australian film festivals and aired on NITV between October 2016 and December 2017. This beautiful short film featuring Aboriginal grandparent and kinship carers, Eddie and Rose Vale, was officially launched at an event in Sydney, *Safe – On Country and In Culture*, that brought together representatives from Aboriginal agencies, Peaks and other Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) for a day's reflection on recruitment of carers within the community. The event was profiled in the media on both NITV and SBS, and video highlights were promoted across Fostering NSW's social media channels.

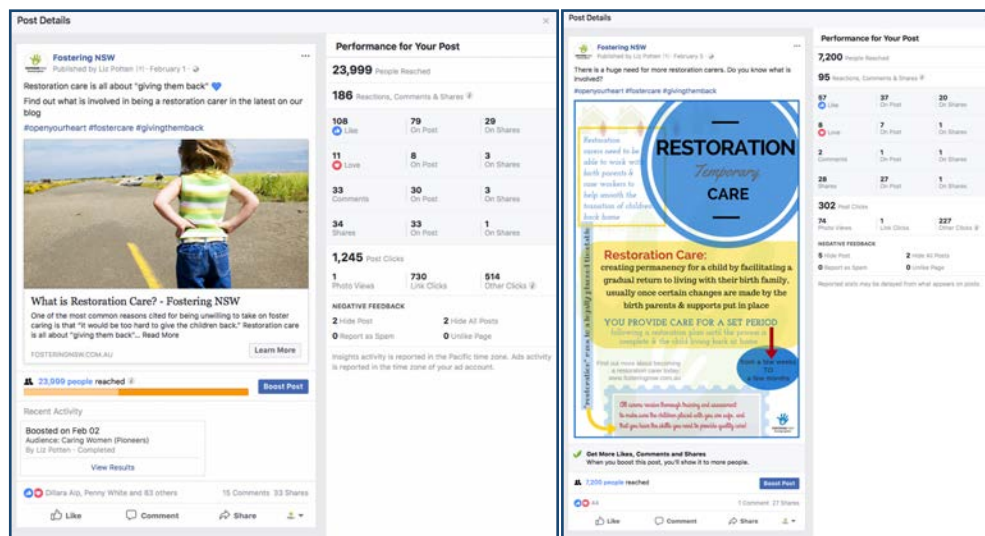
3.5.3 CALD Communities

Arguably Fostering NSW's most successful piece of content promotion was a video featuring Muslim carers from SSI and Creating Links entitled '*A Sense of Belonging – Why Cultural Care Matters*'. This video was first released on Facebook in celebration of Families Week in May 2016. In just a couple of days it reached 190,875 people and was watched 74,452 times with 8,094 reactions, comments and shares. Both agencies reported a phenomenal response from the Muslim community, with the video even spawning the setting up of a Muslim foster carer information and support group. When one of the carers, affectionately known as 'Te Ta' died later that year, the video took on another life, ultimately reaching 270,486 people and achieving 107,740 views.

3.5.4 Types of Care

The project also produced and promoted targeted messaging aimed at attracting people to specific types of care, such as:

- *Immediate 'Crisis' Care* – a carer story video featuring Barnardos carer, Sharon, plus an info-graphic explainer to illustrate the key aspects of emergency care.
- *Open Adoption* – a carer story video featuring Wesley adoptive parents, Ralph and Melinda, was released for National Adoption Awareness Week in 2016. It was shared on Facebook where it was watched 14,345 times. The post reached 37,825 individuals (9,224 organically and 28,601 through paid promotion), received 439 reactions, 66 shares, and 880 post clicks.
- *Restoration Care* – info-graphic and blog post that collectively reached over 31,000 people and attracted almost 300 comments, likes and shares.



4. CAMPAIGN IMPACT

4.1 Enquiries – Online and via 1800 Enquiry Line

One of the key elements of the Fostering NSW project was the management of a central state-wide information and referral service comprising a 1800 Enquiry line and online enquiry submission facility via the Fostering NSW website.

Prior to the introduction of a customised database (Integra) in April 2015 for handling enquiries and referrals, Fostering NSW used a time-consuming manual process for data capture and referral to agencies with multiple spreadsheets and emails, involving a lot of copying and pasting of data. It was error prone and not easy to track or follow up on enquiries and referrals. (Initially no referrals were made to agencies and enquirers were given information and agency contact details.)

During the second funding period commencing July 2014, the new database was developed to streamline the enquiry and referral process and enable greater capacity to both capture data and follow up on referral outcomes. This new system went live in April 2015 and provided a seamless link between online enquiries and the population of the database. The whole process was automated from enquiry, through referral, to automatic follow-up emails and response-capture from foster care agencies and enquirers, which enabled very easy tracking of enquiries and referrals. As with other elements of the project, the database was modified and improved over time to make it as user-friendly as possible and to enable more sophisticated matching of enquirers to agency through greater data collection.

This data collection was invaluable in providing insights into the demographics of people enquiring about fostering, the types care of care they are willing to consider and in tracking the impact of Fostering NSW recruitment activities on enquiry levels. Figure 1. Below shows how we were able to see spikes in enquiries at times of high activity, including during promotions around Foster Care Week, Families Week etc. We were also able to see specific spikes in enquiries related to our messaging, for example, an increase in enquiries of people willing to provide emergency care after an intense promotion on Facebook of our immediate crisis carer video story, or an increase in enquiries from a particular region after publication of a carer story in the local media.

Website visits, phone and online enquiries, and promotional activities over the campaign period April 2015 to December 2017

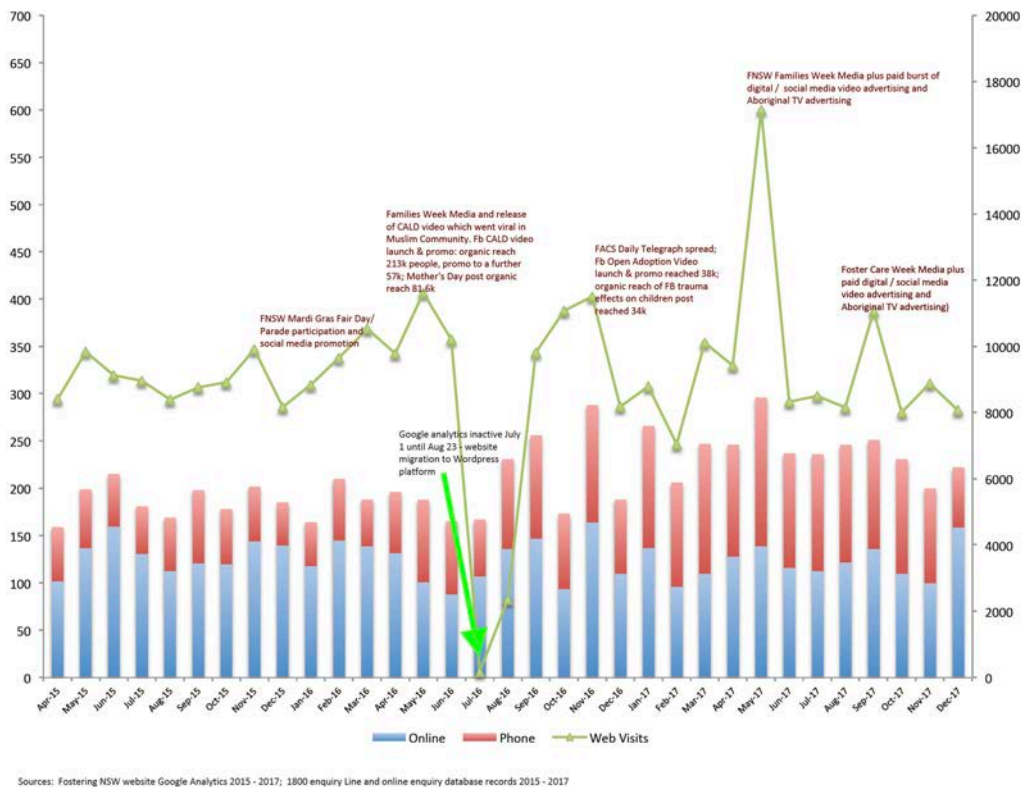


Figure 1. Fostering NSW website visits and enquiries against key promotional activities April 2015 to December 2017

4.1.1 Data Insights from Fostering NSW Enquiry and Referral Database April 2015 – June 2018

Enquires were made to FNSW predominantly via the online application form or by phone, with a small number coming in from FaCS. The FNSW team and additional ACWA staff were trained in answering phone calls, giving information and talking through the questions raised as a part of the screening process. The average time that calls took was 15 minutes, and demographic data was recorded at each phone call, a database was established to capture this information in April 2015.

During this stage of the program, the approach moved from focusing on providing enquirers with accurate information about fostering that allowed them to consider the information and to then decide whether they wanted to take the next step and call one of the services they had seen on the website and talked about. This evolved into a more proactive approach where the phone call was used to actively match the enquirer to an agency, resulting in a direct referral. This change was made in response to a view that enquirers who made the effort to ring and talk to us were demonstrating a high level of interest that was commensurate to a 'nudge' and referral.

The total number of enquiries for the whole period of the program (2013 – 2018) was 11,030. Of these, 8,351 enquiries (75% of total) were received in the period April 2015 to June 2018 after the introduction of the automated database. With this new technology in place, it became much easier to collect and analyse a wide range of demographic data that ACWA was able to share with agencies as snapshots via Enews updates. All of the data below was captured in the new system and relates to this period of the project.

Of the 8,351 enquiries received, 4,691 were submitted online, 3,391 were via the 1800 telephone enquiry line, 105 were calls transferred from Community Services and 164 came via Fostering with FaCS.

FNSW enquires between April 2015 and June 2018

Online	By Phone	Via FaCS	Total Enquires 2015-2018	Referrals made to agencies
4,691	3,391	269	8,351	4,261 (60%)

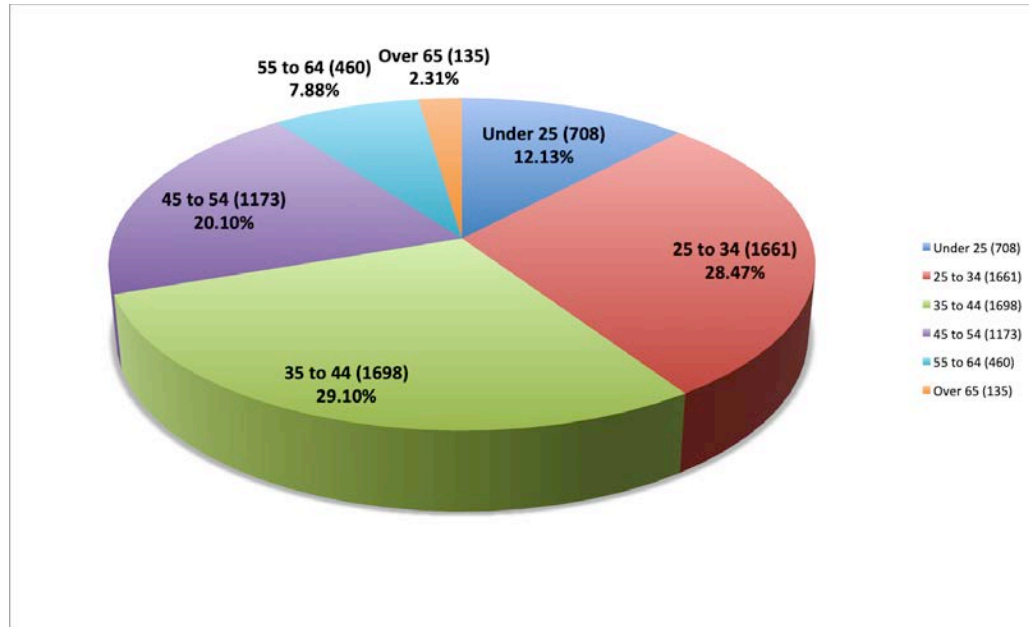
7,014 enquiries were 'on topic', i.e. enquirers wished to know more about fostering, adoption or guardianship (these are referred to as 'legitimate' enquiries). Of these enquiries, 4,261 (60.75%) were ready to be referred onto agencies to begin the application process.

In terms of demographic data, please note that the data below was supplied voluntarily – not everyone chose to complete these categories.

- 728 enquiries from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which is 10.38% of legitimate enquiries.
- 1,187 enquiries from CALD people, which is 16.92% of legitimate enquiries.
- 248 enquirers identify as LGBTQI, which is 3.53% of legitimate enquiries.

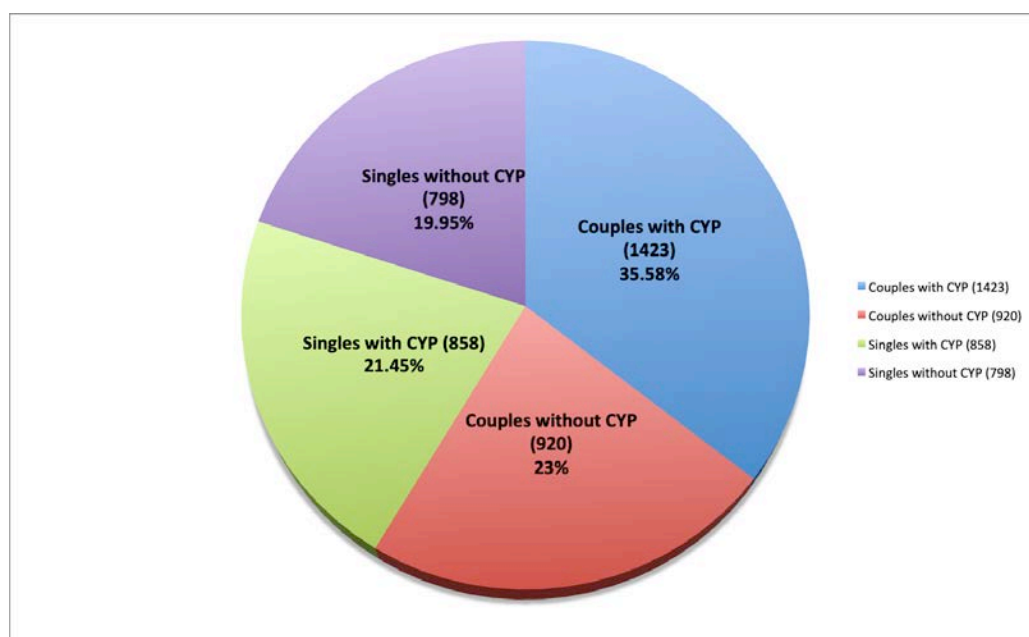
Age of enquirers (5,835 field completed):

As the chart below shows, the vast majority of enquirers who told us their age were aged between 25 and 54, the identified target audience for the Fostering NSW campaign.



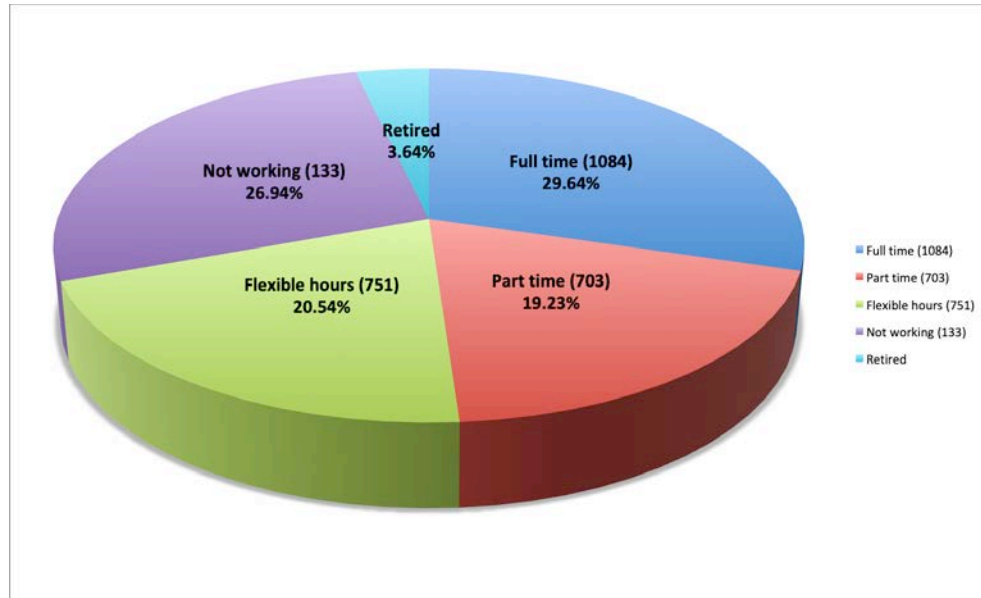
Household (3,999 field completed):

Of those enquirers who told us about their household, couples with children were the largest cohort, but there were also numerous enquiries from single people and couples without children, suggesting that our messaging was reaching cohorts that had previously thought themselves ineligible to foster, including same-sex couples and empty nesters.



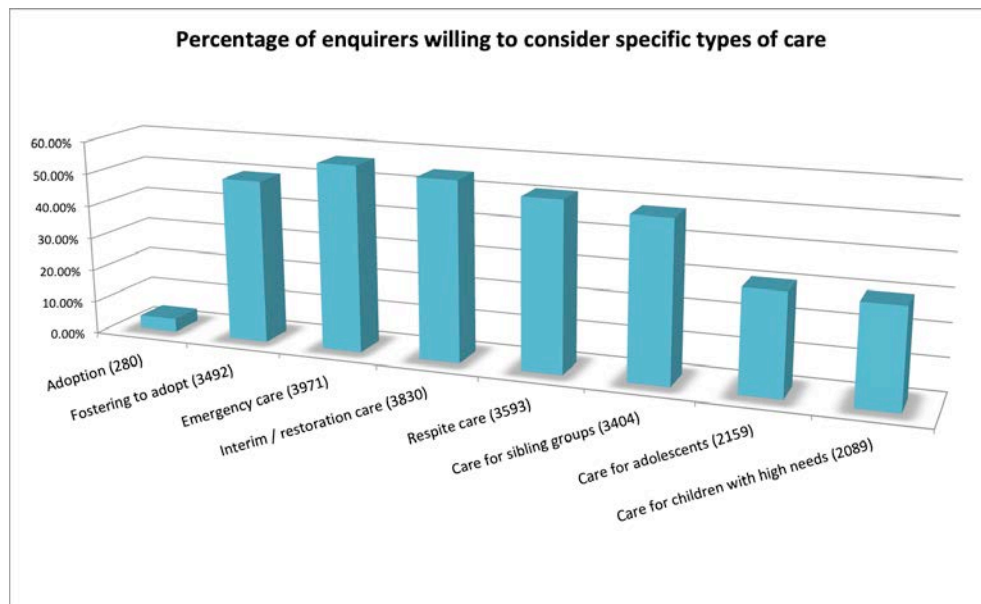
Work Status (3,656 field completed):

Of those enquirers who indicated their work status, most were in work of some kind, again suggesting that Fostering NSW was successful in busting the myth that foster carers needed to stay at home to be considered.



Types of care considered:

Most enquirers were initially fairly flexible in their thinking about which types of care they would consider providing, as the graph on the next page highlights. In the April 2015 - June 2018 period, only 280 enquirers were interested specifically in adoption, with most stating that they were open to the idea of adopting a child from care once a bond had been formed. Very few enquirers stated that they would not wish to consider open adoption or guardianship, and those who did were generally interested in providing emergency, interim or respite care rather than long-term care.



Experience working with children:

To further build profiles of potential carers for recruitment targeting and to track our messaging to ‘caring professionals’, we introduced more fields about people’s experience of working with children in the areas of health, education, disability, criminal justice, and later, childcare and out-of home care. The data shows that 2,082 enquirers stated that they have worked in these areas, representing 29.68% of legitimate enquiries. However, quarterly data tracking after the introduction of these fields regularly returned a percentage close to 45%.

Authorisations:

One of the most crucial measures of the impact of the Fostering NSW campaign was the number of new authorised carers. However, even with the automated referral system, this data remained almost impossible to collect. What we do know is that at the end of the project, the number of enquiries with a status of either ‘authorised’, ‘assessment in progress’ or ‘accepted and proceeding’ numbered 13% of all legitimate enquiries. We can also see from the key statistics published by the Office of the Children’s Guardian that there were 1,674 new carers authorised between July 2016 and June 2017, and that there are an additional 692 newly authorised carers reported since the end of June 2017. These figures exceed the 660 yearly target estimated by FACS as a key outcome metric for the Fostering NSW project from 2016 (previously set at 450 per year).

4.2 Website and Foster Forum

The Fostering NSW website was launched in April 2010 by Family and Community Services as a critical component of the Fostering NSW program. Evaluation of the 2009/2010 Fostering NSW campaign shows that there were a total of 20,154 visits to the website between 21 April and 30 September 2010 (an average of around 3,664 visits per month).

A key objective for the ongoing Fostering NSW campaign was to continuously increase the number of visitors to the website

In the five years after ACWA took over the Fostering NSW campaign, there were 549,612 visits to the website, averaging 9,160 visits per month with a general trend upwards over time (see Fig. 2 below).

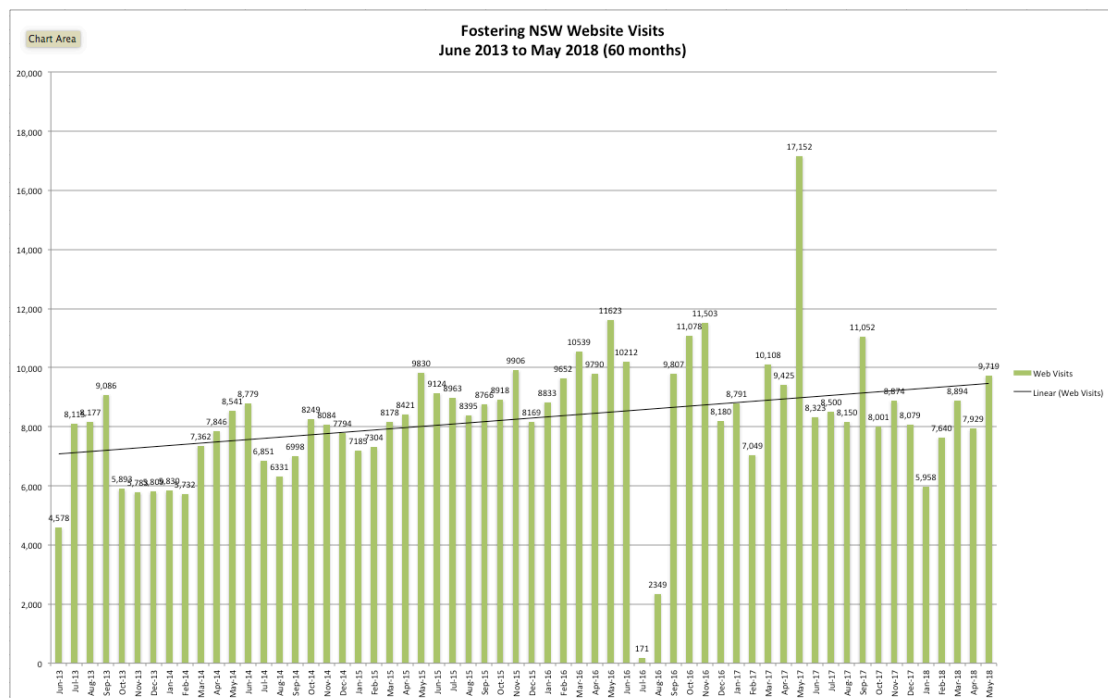


Fig 2: Fostering NSW website visits per month June 2013 to May 2018

This graph shows that website visitation spiked during key periods of advertising and promotional activity, such as Foster Care Week (September each year), Families Week (May 2014, 2016, 2017 and 2018), Youth Week (April 2015), and Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (March 2016, 2017 and 2018). In November 2016, the Minister's Office brokered a spread with the *Daily Telegraph*, which also created a small spike. The extraordinary spike displayed for May 2017 can be attributed to the high level and mix of activity taking place at the time, i.e. a four-week burst of video advertising via Facebook using the generic and Aboriginal 30-second TVCs, a good range of media exposure across TV, radio and print during National Families Week and promotion of a new self-assessment quiz on the Fostering NSW website.

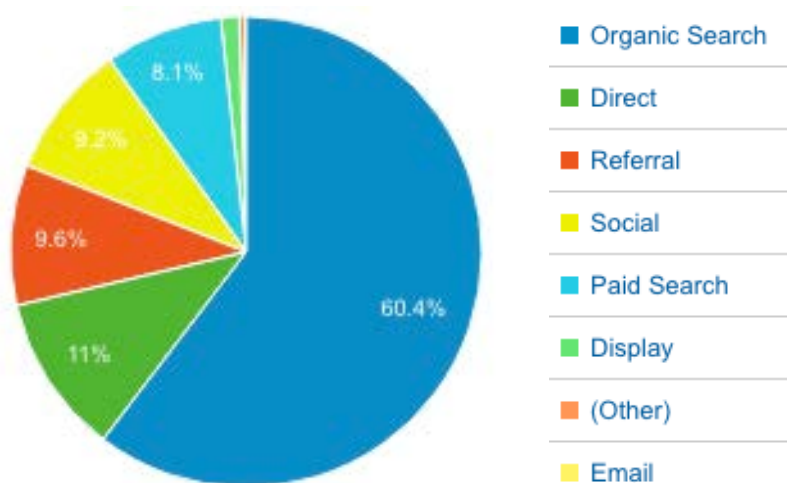
The loss of data for the period July to August 2016 represents the point at which the Fostering NSW website was migrated from the original Joomla platform to Wordpress following the liquidation of the hosting organisation, Energetica. During this time the connection to Google Analytics was not functioning.

4.2.1 Traffic Sources

In terms of where visitors came from, organic search (i.e. simply typing key words into Google or other search engines) using search terms such as 'fostering nsw', 'foster care nsw', 'fostering children' or 'adoption nsw' consistently outweighed all other source channels at 60%. The remaining 40% of visitors arrived at the site by directly typing in the Fostering NSW URL (10.97%), via referral from another website such as Community Services or a media outlet, e.g. Mamamia, *Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Daily Telegraph* (9.63%), via social channels - mainly Facebook (9.23%), and via paid search via our Google AdWords advertisements (8.09%). A relatively tiny amount of visitors came through display advertising (1.26%).

Sources (channel grouping)

60.36% Organic Search, 10.97% Direct, 9.63% Referral, 9.23% Social, 8.09% Paid Search, 1.26% Display, 0.42% Other, 0.04% Email.



It is interesting to note that while approximately 30% of website traffic came from social media, referral from another web source or directly typing in the Fostering NSW URL, less than 10% of traffic came via paid online advertising, while the vast majority came via organic search, or people simply typing key words into a search engine.

This suggests that potential carers connect with the concept of fostering through a range of sources (word of mouth, articles, advertising) before they connect to any specific brand or provider through advertising alone.

Analysis of the website visitor journey also revealed that visitors who came via social media or referral channels were more likely to continue through to the 'submit an enquiry' page, while paid digital advertising resulted in almost no enquiry submissions. ACWA was able to use this knowledge to inform campaign planning and shift the focus away from digital advertising towards storytelling via social and traditional media, mixed with traditional advertising (TV and radio) for general awareness raising.

4.2.2 Foster Forum

It is important for prospective foster carers to be provided with information that will help them make the right decision for their individual circumstances. Research conducted by ACWA and its partners at the beginning of the Fostering NSW Campaign indicated there was a unique opportunity to provide a Foster Forum to answer the questions that prospective carers had.

The project decided to meet this need through engagement of current foster carers providing first-hand knowledge and real-world experience. We hand-selected (via foster care agencies' expertise) a small but diverse group of current foster carers to be part of this initiative, which launched with the re-vamped FNSW website in May 2013. Through Fostering NSW, ACWA launched the first local, online, dedicated fostering forum with fully searchable content, to support and assist people who may be considering fostering or who are currently fostering.

The Foster Forum also aimed to support people who are currently fostering by providing a place for guidance and a safe environment to have their questions answered by those with foster care experience. Without personal and individual engagement by experienced carers, it is often difficult to provide this level of expert advice and support. The online FNSW Foster Forum helped to provide this service that was available to every foster carer, regardless of his or her location around the state.

ACWA staff moderated the Foster Forum. Anyone was able to view the Forum, but in order to join the conversation individuals needed to create a user profile with a valid email address, and agree to the Forum's terms and conditions. This gave moderators the ability to delete inappropriate posts, or warn and block spammers or malicious users.

Confidentiality was maintained for individuals through the creation of usernames and passwords, and for children in care via strict moderation of adherence to our non-disclosure rules. We also requested that no agencies or caseworkers be specifically named to avoid any inadvertent negative publicity. The Forum was designed to be a safe, reliable resource with a wealth of searchable information on fostering, and it quickly became so.

Over time, engagement with the Forum dropped, but there were still many visitors who came to read the information contained on it. At other times there was spammer engagement with the Forum. The worst example of this was in May 2017, when over one weekend, over 100 spam accounts were set up, and posted 966 spam posts. Moderators shut down the Forum for two days to block spammers and delete spam posts. After this incident, new spam filter software was installed, which showed that in a little over a year it had blocked 25k spam posts or accounts.

The Foster Carer Ambassadors received training and were then encouraged to regularly log on to answer questions and offer advice to those who posted questions on the Forum. The Forum Ambassadors were a network of foster carers from all over NSW, and from all walks of life, so forum users could be assured they were receiving trustworthy information from a voice of experience. Our Ambassadors were carers affiliated with UnitingCare Burnside, Life Without Barriers, Allambi Youth Services, MacKillop Family Services, Samaritans, Challenge Children's Services, Lifestyle Solutions and FaCS. ACWA further supported the Forum by linking to it via the Fostering NSW social media channels to raise awareness of the Forum, and drive traffic to it.

By the end of the Fostering NSW project, there were 1,122 registered Forum users, which included 13 Forum Ambassadors. There were 232 topics, which had gained 1,100 replies. The Forum itself had had over 42,511 visits across the life of the project.

5. INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Interaction with Political/Service Environment

The positioning of the Fostering NSW campaign within ACWA – an established child welfare peak body – had a number of important implications. Firstly, ACWA called on the member-association relationship to establish methods of working together that relied on brokering agency collaboration in peak campaigns. This was important in ensuring effective use of advertising and encouraging media interest that spun off from events.

Secondly, ACWA's established role and expertise as a policy, advocacy and training body with understanding of foster care assessment and training, casework and agency issues, meant that in-house expertise could be accessed by consulting teams within the ACWA structure. The wealth of practice wisdom, research and current member feedback about current operational issues was used by Fostering NSW to interpret and respond to the changing policy and service environment, and service provider feedback.

The service environment in which the program FNSW was transferred to ACWA in 2012 was one that was in the midst of reform as the process of transferring children and their carers to the NGO sector occurred at the commencement of the campaign. The period covered in this report, 2014 - 2017, continued to be characterised by major policy reforms, negative media interest and political involvement. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was underway throughout this time and served to highlight the vulnerability of children in care. There were also a number of tragic deaths of children who were in foster or residential care during this time. This environment heightened the awareness of the risks involved in finding families and carers for vulnerable children. Foster care recruitment is therefore located in a sensitive and high-risk service area of human services. Having enough suitable carers is a critical element of a care system.

One of the insights from the program is the sensitive position of the work undertaken by the program in relation to the media: the program was impacted by external media messaging while at the same time, it attempted to contribute positive messages to shape the public's perception about foster care as a volunteering option.

The tragic death of 'Girl X', who had died as a result of a drug overdose while in the care of a residential unit, was the subject of an intense negative media campaign over a two-week period in August/September 2016. This included front cover stories, features and associated articles that highlighted weaknesses and failings of the child welfare system, implicating the government department, service providers and the Minister. The editor of the paper declared he was running a campaign to

‘bring about reform’ and to make sure such events did not happen again (Dore, 2016). Despite this not being directly linked to foster care recruitment, the government’s response was played out through the Fostering NSW Program as the Minister’s Office brokered an agreement with the paper to shift the narrative away from failings of the system to the need for foster carers, using the same paper to run a recruitment feature, and the Fostering NSW phone line and website were linked to support this effort.

While this strategy was not successful in creating a surge of enquiries as was originally hoped, (there were 132 from this timeframe, an increase of only 19 above an average 18-day period) it may have helped to bring about a cessation to the negative campaign.

This episode points to the intrinsic politicisation of the child welfare area, and is also illustrative of the nature of the relationship of contracted services to the government as funder: Fostering NSW became the conduit for the government’s response.

The messages created by the media and the power of this messaging was also demonstrated after a leaked photo of a sleeping baby on a beanbag appeared on the front page of a tabloid paper. The story accompanying the photo was that the baby had been removed and there was no foster carer for them. This negative article prompted the highest level of enquiries of any media or campaign strategy. The quality of the enquiries was however low, with many of the enquirers wishing to care for that particular baby and not interested in being a foster carer for any other children. Many of the calls did not proceed once people knew that the baby in the photo was safe and in care. This example highlights the relationship between the nature of the message and the quality of the enquiries. Generating a large number of enquiries in itself may not be beneficial in the search for people who are motivated to be child-focused in a sustained way.

The key data in evaluating the impact of the activities of an on-going foster care recruitment campaign and the authorisation of carers are: the media and public relation events that generate awareness and positive perceptions about foster care; quality enquiries generated; quality referrals made to services; number of applications; assessments undertaken; and authorised carers. Once the referral has been made to the agency the statewide recruitment team loses control over the timeliness of the agency’s response, and the quality of the interactions, assessment and training. These elements are crucial in converting an enquiry to an authorised carer. In an attempt to manage this, FNSW set out best practice expectations in sector training and in the manuals provided to the sector to establish commonly understood standards of practice and also followed up enquires to see how they had been treated by the agency that they had been referred to.

One of the challenges of working in recruitment of foster carers, is that it is difficult to be precise about the impact that the campaign has made. This is because of the many variables that are present that may be contributing to a higher awareness about foster care, and the length of time and number of times people have to hear messages about foster care as an option for them, before they act and call an agency about becoming a foster carer. Establishing a baseline of awareness and of people's views would be useful to use to undertake more rigorous evaluations of the impact of campaigns in the future.

The next section of this evaluation details some of the feedback obtained from enquirers and service providers on their interactions and levels of satisfaction with the Fostering NSW program and its team.

5.2 Customer Feedback – Enquirer Survey Results and Analysis

5.2.1 Initial Enquirer Survey - Digital

In February 2018, a customer experience survey was sent out to 1,482 enquirers from our database who had indicated that they would be happy to have further contact. We received 241 responses, of which 152 were complete.

The questions were designed to explore enquirers' foster care experience from their very first interaction with the Fostering NSW website or telephone line, right through to a child being placed with them after becoming an approved foster carer.

In terms of demographics:

- 89% of respondents were female.
- 75% were between the ages of 25 and 54 (with slightly more in the 25 - 44 age group).
- 36% were in a couple with children living at home.
- Interestingly 43% of people who made an online enquiry were full time workers, as opposed to 28% of those who enquired by phone.
- The majority of enquirers had some experience of working with children in areas such as education or childcare. 47% of respondents had worked with children in a volunteering capacity through school, sport, church or community activities.

Roughly half of the respondents had been thinking about fostering for 1 to 5 years before making an enquiry, and 40% stated that they were prompted by hearing that there was a need or by feeling that it was the right time for their family.

Respondents reported general satisfaction with the Fostering NSW website stating that they were able to find the information they needed, particularly in relation to the provision of services in their area via the postcode search. However, when it came to making an enquiry, people who had enquired by phone were much more satisfied with their initial experience than those who had submitted an online application. Feedback identified that respondents felt their initial interaction with Fostering NSW to be prompt, helpful, empathetic and encouraging. There were some, however, who felt disappointed that they were not contacted after their initial enquiry or that the information they were given was incorrect.

One of the challenges of managing the enquiries for Fostering NSW was ensuring that referrals to agencies were followed up in a timely fashion, or at all. This became easier with the introduction of an automated referral system in 2015. The system generated automatic follow-ups with both the agency and the enquirers, but even so there was a significant amount of chasing up of agency referrals that needed to occur on a regular basis. It is not surprising to hear from some enquirers that no-one contacted them after they first enquired – this was an issue that required constant vigilance by the Fostering NSW team, and communication was greatly improved by the end of the program in 2018.

Levels of satisfaction with agency interactions were similar to the results for Fostering NSW. Interestingly, people who had begun their journey with a telephone enquiry continued to have much higher levels of satisfaction with the whole experience than those who initially enquired online. This outcome was not interrogated by this survey but might benefit from some deeper research. Is it, for example, possible that people enquiring online do so because they are unavailable during work hours, and does this lack of time and flexibility translate into decreased suitability to foster caring?

When it came to the application, assessment and training process, satisfaction levels dipped significantly, with an average of only 43.5% being quite or extremely satisfied with the application and assessment process, and only 36% being quite or extremely satisfied with the training they received. The main concerns that people reported included:

- ***Length of the process*** – one respondent stated that their assessment process took so long that they were asked to repeat their initial training, while another filled out the same forms four times.
- ***Intensity of the process*** – Some respondents were clearly unprepared for the level of scrutiny that would be applied to all aspects of their lives.

- **Lack of communication** – several respondents reported having to continually chase agencies to find out where their applications were up to, when they might be able to attend training etc.
- **Focus on negativity in training** – some respondents felt shocked and overwhelmed by the initial ‘Shared Lives’ training, which suggests that they were not well enough informed about what to expect. Again, there was a greater dissatisfaction amongst respondents who had initially enquired online.

For those respondents reporting a positive experience overall, the critical difference was the level of communication they received and the willingness of their agency to consider and accommodate their needs.

As one respondent wrote, *“I found this process easy although more was involved than I was initially expecting. [The Agency] have been aware of my full time work commitments and have given me ample time to complete each step of the assessment process”*.

5.2.2 Enquirer Telephone Survey Conducted by UNSW Centre for Social Impact

The Association for Children’s Welfare Agencies (ACWA) engaged the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) UNSW to conduct in-depth interviews with enquirers and stakeholders (stakeholder interviews are presented in 5.3). Over 30 enquirers who completed the initial online survey had given approval to be contacted for further research. From this selection of enquirers, CSI contacted 10 enquirers and six agreed to be interviewed. While enquirers differed by characteristics such as gender, relationship status, sexual orientation, age (all factors that may impact fostering), due to the inability to select a representative sample across all these characteristics, the interviewees were selected based on the stage of their foster care experience (i.e. whether they had become a foster carer, were in the process of becoming one, or did not proceed).

The six enquirers engaged with CSI in 20 to 30 minute semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted over the phone and participation was approved by the UNSW Ethics Committee and recompensed with a \$50 Coles-Myer voucher as a ‘thank you’ for participants’ time and effort.

Interview questions focused on the participants’ level of engagement with FNSW, with FNSW resources and campaigns and their communication with FNSW. As FNSW ended in early 2018 and a new program was due to be delivered from July 2018, participants were also asked what they thought could be improved in the new program.

With participants' consent, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a transcribing agency. Responses were then de-identified and thematically analysed by CSI researchers.

The analysis is presented in the following sections:

- Contact with FNSW
- Resources provided by FNSW and the agencies
- Communication and relationship with FNSW and the agencies
- Recommendations for the new program

5.2.1.1 Initial Contact with Fostering NSW

Participants talked of hearing about and connecting with Fostering New South Wales in various ways. Most recalled seeing/hearing advertisements, on TV, on the radio or billboards and doing a Google search to find out more – for example: *“I remember seeing ads on TV (...), I did some research (...), Foster Care New South Wales’ website was always very helpful to hear other carers, how they’ve dealt with things, and their stories.”* Advertisements appeared to help build interest, while ‘life stories’ helped make it ‘more real’.

For example: *“I would watch (...) the advertisements about (...) foster kids that there’s no home for them, there’s not enough foster carers and they were moving from one home to another, so that actually started to create some interest in me to see, maybe I could help, you know?”*

These advertisements highlighting personal experiences appeared to be highly effective, with another participant stating that hearing the stories of other carers similar to her age opened her mind to her potential as a foster carer, which she had previously assumed she was too young for. For most participants, after seeing the initial advertisement, the next logical step was to do a search online to find out more. The website was described as *“intuitive”* and that it *“wasn’t too difficult to find where things were”*.

A few of the participants also talked of finding out and connecting with FNSW through word of mouth – for example: *“I got really close with this little person’s foster mum, and she just told me about what I need to do, and I’ve just been doing what she says”*. Another participant was told to contact FNSW by her previous foster parent from when she was a child in foster care. Throughout the interviews, it appears that people are clearer on which initial steps to take when directly referred through a friend or family member who has already been through the process.

5.2.1.2 Resources and Support Provided by Fostering NSW

The participants talked of the resources provided by FNSW with mixed feelings. While the majority of participants found the resources “pretty useful”; others felt the information they needed was not provided.

For example: *“there’s a lot of little things Fostering New South Wales doesn’t tell you initially or assist you initially with (...) you have to ask for it or you find out from another foster carer (...)”*.

For this respondent the initial information provided to them was not sufficient – *“I don’t think the process is as transparent as it should be, and I don’t think Fostering New South Wales or anyone or any of them provide enough information and enough resources so that you can access the information”* – referring to both the resources provided by FNSW and the agency. Furthermore, they suggest that FNSW could provide more information at the start of the process on what the potential challenges may be, so foster carers are more prepared for *“potential landmines you’re going to get when you’re walking in”*²⁵

Most participants, however, found the resources provided directly by FNSW to be helpful and sufficient in providing them with the information to begin their foster care journey. One respondent commented on the resources provided by FNSW:

“Yes, and I found them very helpful, because when I first became a foster carer, or started the process, I was really like... I had no idea on what the protocols were, how it all worked. So I found the resource guide really good. They went through step by step on what was going to happen, and how everything worked. It just gave me a better understanding for when I did choose the agency that I wanted to be with. I was kind of aware of what the next steps were. And yeah, it was very, very helpful”.

This was mirrored by another respondent, who described the support as *“quite comprehensive”* and *“gave me enough information to actually decide what I should do”*. According to one participant, however, while these online resources were *“informative”*, ultimately they *“didn’t replace the orientation or discussion”*. This suggests that online resources are helpful but complementary to the face-to-face training, which is the most effective way to gain information.

Other resources that the enquirers spoke of were the carer stories and videos. Hearing about other carers and *“how they’ve dealt with things, and their stories”*,

²⁵ It must be noted that the primary role of Fostering NSW was to provide information about how to apply to become a foster carer and guide the enquirer towards a suitable agency. It was anticipated that more detail about what to expect from the application onwards would be provided by the agency and through the initial ‘Shared Lives’ training process.

was described as helpful by one participant, with another saying that *“individual stories... actually make you think about the situation”*. The personal experience aspect appeared to be very important to several enquirers, allowing for a connection between carers. One participant suggested that perhaps more could be done by FNSW to connect carers at the start of the process, perhaps through providing *“the contact number of a mentor or someone that's being doing it for a while”*, to create a peer support system.

5.2.1.3 Communication and Relationship with Fostering NSW

The majority of participants felt that their communication with FNSW, while sometimes limited, was positive and helpful during their initial contact, *“any questions, I just ask, and they tell you”*; *“the dealings I've had with them were fantastic. They were always really helpful, very there to answer any question that I had at the time”*. Another participant appreciated the fact that after they expressed interest through the website, someone from FNSW called them, giving them a chance to have their input about how they pursue the next steps.

While most of the participants who were already caring for a child recognised that they did not have much interaction with FNSW since becoming a foster carer, they acknowledged that they were treated with respect and listened to. Another participant appreciated the referral process that FNSW provided in connecting them with an agency, saying they were *“quick in connecting me to the right people”*. This was mirrored by another participant who valued the options of non-government agencies given to her by FNSW, from which she was then able to decide on *“what worked for me, and what agency was going to best suit myself, and my family”*. This demonstrates the need for an effective referral process and shows that while enquirers appreciate being provided a range of options and support throughout the process, they ultimately like to make the final decision themselves.

Others, however, spoke of a disconnect in the communication with FNSW and the overall process. One participant discussed a time at the beginning of her foster care journey, when the teenager she was caring for had an anger lash-out late at night. The carer spoke of feeling lost and not knowing who to turn to for advice, as neither the case-workers nor FNSW were able to be contacted due to it being after hours.²⁶ Without a streamlined network of support, she suggests that amongst *“Fostering NSW, the agencies... Family Services.... there are lots of gaps in the whole process”*.

²⁶ This enquirer's response demonstrates how confusing the system can be for someone on the outside navigating their way around fostering. It was not part of Fostering NSW's role to provide support to approved foster carers. This level of support lies with the agency. However, there was another government-funded program delivering support via a 24-hr hotline, Connecting Carers, that the carer should have been introduced to that could have helped in the situation described.

Another participant mentioned a lack of transparency and communication in informing the enquirers about their progress, *“I found out that there was actually a third agency I could go to, I was told that wasn’t an option, but I wasn’t told why”*. This was reflected by another participant who said they would have appreciated a more transparent process and perhaps an online system where they could access this information.

5.3 Sector Engagement – Agency Survey Results and Analysis

Using the same methodology (in-depth interviews), the Centre for Social Impact (CSI) also examined how stakeholders engaged with Fostering NSW (FNSW) with particular emphasis on engagement during the final two years of the project.

Sector stakeholders were agencies (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) that were in contact and engaged with FNSW.

Due to the characteristics of agencies engaging with FNSW and ethical approval needed for the research, the investigation was to be conducted in two separate stages:

- Interviews with non-Aboriginal agencies
- Interviews with Aboriginal agencies

Findings from these stages were to be presented to ACWA in two separate mini-reports.

However, the following response and analysis represents input from the non-Aboriginal agencies alone (including CALD focused agencies). Unfortunately, the rigorous processes of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW Ethics Committee, and the movement of key Aboriginal agency staff, have meant that we have been unable to complete the Interviews that would have provided insight into the impact of the Fostering NSW program on recruitment of Aboriginal foster carers. Instead, we must offer our own observations based on feedback that we have received from Aboriginal agency colleagues over the course of the program and through the annual ACWA survey of all agencies. This will be explored at 5.3.2.

5.3.1 Non-Aboriginal Agencies – Interview Responses and Analysis

Around twenty non-Aboriginal agencies (including those with a CALD focus) that engaged to some extent with FNSW throughout the past two years were contacted via email by FNSW and invited to reply directly to the CSI research team if they wished to be interviewed. These agencies had previously indicated they were willing to participate in research. Twelve of these agencies engaged with CSI in 20 to 30 minute semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted over the phone and participation was approved by the UNSW Ethics Committee and recompensed with one free day of training with CCWT as a ‘thank you’ for participants’ time and effort.

Interview questions focused on participants’ level of engagement with FNSW, with FNSW resources and campaigns, their perceived impact of FNSW on the number of enquirers the program brought to their agency and inquirers’ level of knowledge about being a foster carer. As a new program was to be delivered from July 2018, participants were also asked what they thought could be improved in the new program.

With participants’ consent, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by a transcribing agency. Responses were then de-identified and thematically analysed by CSI researchers. This analysis is presented in this report.

5.3.1.1 Agency Engagement with FNSW Resources, Communication and Relationships

The questions integrated in this section are:

- Q1 & Q2 (involvement),
- Q3 (resources),
- Q4 (communication),
- Q5 (relationships) (see Appendix 4 for interview questionnaire)

Participants talked of connecting with Fostering New South Wales in various ways: from receiving support and guidance at the *“media liaison”* level to collaborating with them for *“delivering the packages to recruit new foster carers”*. For participants it was important *“to find like an operator to work, like only one, working around and doing the logistics”*. FNSW was seen as filling this gap; it was referred to as *“the main conduit”*, *“the people that kind of glue it together”*.

While one of the participants’ agency provided support to FNSW, e.g. *“providing advice or input and support around different campaigns, the structure of them, what’s being included, what’s not, and making suggestions around anything else that we feel needs to be covered off, and right down to the planning of how the event’s [sic] going to happen”*; most connected with FNSW through their media campaigns.

The participants most often referred to the help FNSW provided with featuring their positive carer cases to increase the numbers of enquiries and translate those into successful fostering experiences. As one of the participants stated, this was especially beneficial for small agencies:

“Most of the local, the smaller agencies, they don't have dedicated people for that, and they rely solely on more traditional ways of advertising to recruit carers, which doesn't really work. And [FNSW] has been amazing for marketing that”.

Others talked of wider campaigns aimed at engaging cohorts such as gay, lesbian, intersex, not traditionally “on the radar as potential carers”.

Participants also talked of FNSW providing help through organising ‘interagency events’ and promoting those to the media, thus helping bring in potential carers to information sessions. For example, a participant stated: *“they have played a really practical role in coordinating some of that media, whether it is paid or editorial, so they are coordinating that as a background for the inter-agency work”.*

While the participants referred to FNSW’s media campaigns, they appeared most impacted by the way FNSW acted as an information-share point – *“that one stop shop”*. For example:

“I was new to this sector and this role in 2012, so I was on a steep learning curve, I had never worked in out of home care and so forth before. So for me to start in mid 2012 and then find, sort of a year later when Fostering New South Wales had this big sort of refreshed campaign and all of this information being, flowing from there and then the whole referral system coming into place I think in 2015, has been of huge value to me”.

“They obviously are the conduit, so anyone who's inquiring on the internet... they kind of pass them onto different agencies... so that's been really helpful. It allows applicants to decide which one they want because they can go and see, and they have a conversation. In terms of just being at the information sessions really helped, because as I said, they are like the glue, they manage the majority of the recruitment, the advertisement. We just come along for the ride as such”.

The resources provided by FNSW benefited the participants in various ways. While some talked of the resources needing *“fine tuning”*, the carer’s manual was mostly well received by all, it was seen as *“absolutely necessary”*, and *“very helpful”*. The manual was said to allow consistency between agencies as well as establishing a benchmark.

Others participated in forums such as the statewide practice sharing forum and found it *“really beneficial”*, and to be *“a huge value in the sector”* and a way to *“achieve best practice”*. One agency representative further stated: *“I appreciated that opportunity that Fostering New South Wales, in fact, you know, I would love to see that thing organised annually just to really keep improving how agencies do things”*.

Overall, most participants found their relationship with FNSW *“very helpful”* – FNSW was *“very easy to work with and very well-researched. They had a lot of information that other people didn’t”; they were easy to get a hold of... and really quite responsive”*. The participants appeared appreciating *“that back up and support and knowing, as an agency, that you are not on your own in that area of recruitment”*, while realising FNSW had *“a really difficult job because they’re trying to keep all the agencies happy”*.

Open communication channels seemed core to how the participants referred to their work relationships with FNSW. For example: *“...if I ever had any questions, had ideas, we were able to share things”; “the staff there can always contact me, and they do and likewise, I can contact them, and we do”; “...I’m always talking to them... we always have an open channel”*. The participants talked of *“clear and effective”* communication amongst FNSW and the agencies as well as externally thereby *“raising awareness of the wider community to fostering. That impacts... positively on our marketing efforts too”*. One agency representative of identified FNSW’s role as so critical that no alternative seemed appropriate:

“[agencies] can’t be left just to be overseen by any other place. I can’t see that happening. It would be absolutely disastrous.... It keeps everybody working together really well. That’s how I see Fostering New South Wales. They create a fair ground for all the NGOs to work in collaboration. They’re the holder of the central... they’re like the central intelligence”.

5.3.1.2 Impact

The question integrated in this section is Q6: Impact (see Appendix 4 for interview questionnaire).

The findings showed that for most participants, engaging with FNSW helped their agency increase the quantity and quality of the enquiries they receive, i.e. attract and retain suitable foster carers.

For one agency, FNSW's work impacted most on their agency's individual recruitment strategy: *"we have a fairly successful recruitment strategy, something we have been developing ourselves, but always minding the direction that Fostering New South Wales is going. Sometimes we disagree a little bit, and sometimes we agree, but it's always good to have a reference point"*. For others, FNSW has been successful at increasing the pool of potential foster carers:

"They are picking up cohorts that have not traditionally been picked up, ... that is because Fostering New South Wales has been using market research and more recent research to inform trends over the younger generations".

Others found that FNSW helped getting more information across so enquirers would be more knowledgeable: *"What I can say is that definitely people who come to... through them, they do have a better understanding... of those roles... when they come to us they are a bit more knowledgeable than the average inquirer"*. This agency's representative further stated: *"if I were to get, you know, a bunch of people contact me I'd probably without them saying where they'd been referred from, I'd expect to be better able to identify those that have come through Fostering New South Wales. They usually have a better grounding"*. This appeared to resonate with carers too: *"...from the feedback that I get from carers, like when they've called Fostering New South Wales they've had quite a lot of information given to them"*. All in all, it seemed participants agreed FNSW was successful in increasing awareness and providing information to the community: *"because of this awareness and ongoing awareness and these messages... potential applicants would have an idea and an insight of why they want – like regarding their motivation to care and the quality is really there"*.

Others were a little more reserved about the benefits that engaging with FNSW had brought them: *"they do seem to have a little better understanding than a cold call, that hadn't seen the campaign"*; *"Fostering New South Wales helps to attract, but then the rest of it is up to the agency and what they need to do"*.

One agency representative stated that the numbers of inquiries had *“pretty much doubled from 2013 to 2014 and so [there was a] ... very a strong level of inquiries and that coincided when Fostering New South Wales was doing a lot of campaigning”*.

The conversion between enquiries and successful fostering, however, needed to be thought of in the long term: *“it is not always a quick conversion... people take a lot of trigger points to eventually want to apply to be a foster carer”*. To the representative of another agency, the best approach is a long term vision, one involving collaboration: *“all of these different avenues of having like a state-wide approach and then the individual agency approach working hand in hand as part of a long term vision because... in some cases, people have been thinking about it for 10 years or more”*.

A small number of the agencies, however, did not feel they had benefited from FNSW as much as they might have hoped – for example: *“I guess we didn't feel overall that we got a lot of benefit from them. We keep track of all our inquiries and where they come from so we might get between one and, say on a really good month, 5 inquiries sent from Fostering New South Wales”*.

For one agency's representative, while the campaign events were *“positive in terms of being able to go out and engage with the community”*, they did not have a *“significant impact on our recruitment outcomes”*. While for another agency's representative, there was no evidence that enquirers had gained more information: *“I think what you find is some people research a lot, and so some people who had gone to Fostering New South Wales had researched a lot and they had more information and more understanding about fostering because they've researched more”*.

Overall, the feeling was that the participants had benefited positively from FNSW involvement. In one agency representative's words:

“I think that despite the challenges they have had, they have provided an excellent product, an excellent service. As I've said, it's the best out of all the jurisdictions around the country. They are providing leading edge work and the secret to it is, using current research, practice and understanding of the cohorts, genuine understanding and engagement with the younger generation cohorts. The programme has always been extremely professional”.

5.3.2 Aboriginal Agencies – Observations on Engagement with the Fostering NSW Campaign

Around 37% of children in out-of-home care are Aboriginal. Many of these are placed with extended family in kinship care arrangements, but a significant number still require placement with foster carers, preferably Aboriginal foster carers from within their own communities. This proved to be quite a challenge from a state-wide recruitment perspective.

As detailed elsewhere in this report, the Fostering NSW program integrated specific Aboriginal recruitment messaging into all of its activities across advertising, social media and PR as well as providing agencies with promotional posters, flyers, magnets, balloons and tattoos for use in their own recruitment. In the 2014-2017 period of the program, targeted activities included the creation and social media promotion of a video carer story, *Keeping Koori Kids Connected*, the hosting of an event to launch a short documentary entitled *For the Kids*, and a blog on our website explaining why it is important for Aboriginal children to have Aboriginal carers.

One of the biggest challenges for the program was how to effectively communicate our activities to the sector and nowhere was this more apparent than in our interactions with Aboriginal agencies. In recognition of this, we created a separate e-news communication for Aboriginal agencies, which increased engagement from 28% for the first edition to 48% by the final one of the program, and also convened a small reference group to help guide our messaging and activities. However, the program's relationship with the Aboriginal sector continued to be challenged, not least by the reforms and the need to promote open adoption as a permanency option. Some Aboriginal agencies already felt that the state-wide recruitment effort was not able to meet their needs, and the increased inclusion of adoption messaging only served to cement this sense of alienation.

With continued communication efforts by Fostering NSW, however, a number of Aboriginal agencies engaged on a deeper level with the program during the latter part of the 2014 – 2017 period. Wandiyali in the Hunter, for example, enlisted Fostering NSW's expertise to help promote information sessions through Facebook as well as provide a branded Powerpoint for use at those events. Wandiyali and KARI both assisted in sourcing fantastic carers to share their stories in a promotional video which achieved over 15,000 views and generated positive engagements.

Feedback from these agencies included the following: *"The video is fantastic! I will share it on our Facebook today. Going forwards we would be happy to share any of Fostering NSW's relevant content,"* and, *"It is a great video. I commend you and your team."*

AbCare in Coffs Harbour responded to a call out for an agency in the Northern region to talk about the need for foster carers on the local TV news and worked with us to promote Fostering NSW's Aboriginal carer videos and blog post to targeted local postcodes.

A number of Aboriginal agencies were represented at ACWA's Safe On Country and in Culture event in June 2017, including Burrun Dalai, KARI, Myimbarr Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation, South Coast Aboriginal Medical Service, and partnerships such as Uniting Ngurambang, Uniting Gaba Yula and Barnardos Narang Bir-rong. Participants engaged in a yarning circle, where barriers to foster carer recruitment were discussed and a Statement of Intent was articulated to galvanise the whole sector in supporting Aboriginal self-determination in the context of child welfare. This event attracted great media coverage across SBS and NITV broadcast and online platforms, all of which was amplified through Fostering NSW social media channels.

The reality is that the recruitment of Aboriginal foster carers sits more comfortably within Aboriginal agencies themselves, with support from FaCS and their Aboriginal peak, with a greater focus on family preservation, family finding and restoration. While ACWA worked hard to build and maintain relationships with Aboriginal agencies, there was always a sense that they did not feel appropriately represented under the same umbrella as non-Aboriginal agencies and this feeling was exacerbated by the reforms, that while clearly setting out an Aboriginal placement hierarchy, drew much more attention to adoption as a permanency option.

5.4 Opportunities for Improvement

Fostering NSW was only one part of the out-of-home care service system and as such, was sometimes frustrated by an inability to properly follow enquirers' journeys through to approval (and beyond). The bringing together of carer recruitment and support under one program (My Forever Family NSW) is a welcome initiative which brings with it the potential for improved outcomes for children and young people, and importantly, their carers. This is because it offers a level of continuity that was lacking within the parameters of the Fostering NSW program alone, and encourages a greater level of collaboration between agencies and the state-wide program. This joining up of some of the dots will hopefully give carers a sense of security, a feeling that they are part of a supportive community that can add value to what they are already getting from their agency.

Any awareness-raising campaign benefits from endorsement by someone, or a number of people who are in the public's consciousness, ambassadors or 'champions' to help spread the message. Interestingly, discussions with Aboriginal Community Controlled Agencies (ACCos) have highlighted the need for local,

recognisable personalities to promote the idea of being a foster carer in their community. The approach of having a local ambassador would align with the Aboriginal placement principle and the importance of extended family and place in the Aboriginal community.

In our efforts to identify and engage a national champion to promote foster care, ACWA discovered that the concept of fostering remained a 'hard sell' in terms of attracting champions – possibly because fostering is a complex concept to communicate, especially in the context of media that can easily focus on failures of the child welfare system instead of the opportunity to make a significant change to a child's life.

The challenge remains then - to successfully promote the positive narrative that is the heart of the work of recruiting carers for our children who are unable to live with their families - the opportunity for changing a child's life for the better.

6. CONCLUSION

The Fostering NSW Recruitment of Foster Carers program was an innovative and successful program which laid the fertile ground for the ongoing recruitment of foster carers and adoptive parents, not only for NGO out-of-home care agencies, but also for the new recruitment and support program, My Forever Family NSW.

Using its distinctive integrated mix of traditional advertising, steady media presence and pioneering social media engagement, the program was able to maintain increasing levels of public awareness and drive a steady flow of enquiries through the pipeline.

This approach was deemed to be so effective and innovative in its initial stages that it inspired the Victorian Government to follow suit with its own program, *Fostering Connections*, which was modelled closely on the Fostering NSW program.

The proposition of fostering or adopting a child from out-of-home care is not for everyone, but awareness of the options and education about what to expect are key to finding the right people and prompting them to come forward. As seen in testimony from some of the NGO providers of out-of-home care, The Fostering NSW program attracted high quality enquirers, equipped with a level of understanding that stood them in good stead for their caring journey.

Through the innovative work of Fostering NSW, and the gifting of the foster care on-line community to the new program providers, *My Forever Family NSW* program will have a strong foundation on which to build its recruitment efforts and relationship with existing carers, leading to a stronger future with much better life outcomes for the many vulnerable children and young people in NSW.

APPENDIX 1: LIST OF VIDEO RESOURCES

Dec 2013	The Story of Kim, Tom, Matt & Matt
Dec 2013	Disability Carers Share Their Stories
Dec 2013	The Journey of Disability Kinship Carers Lynda & Bruce
Dec 2013	Kids in Care Cup - Aboriginal Kids Need Aboriginal Carers
Dec 2013	Kids in care Cup - Raising Awareness about the Need for Aboriginal Carers
April 2014	Becoming A Foster Carer - A Step by Step Guide
April 2014	Fostering NSW Step By Step
May 2014	FNSW 'Home is Where the Heart Is' Music Video
May 2014	FNSW Home is Where the Heart is Video
July 2014	Fostering NSW Values Foster Carers in National Families Week 2014
Oct 2014	FNSW - Immediate 'Crisis' Foster Carers Needed
Feb 2015	Kids in Care Cup 2014: Aboriginal Kids Need Aboriginal Carers
March 2015	FNSW - Foster Care Week Picnic 2014
June 2015	Raising Them Strong TVC (1 min 56 secs version)
(Re-launch)	
Sep 2015	FNSW - Growing Together: Denise & Ross' story
Feb 2016	FNSW - Be Part of An Amazing Journey - Foster A Child's future
May 2016	FNSW - The Importance of Belonging: Why Cultural Care Matters
July 2016	Aboriginal Foster Carers Needed - FNSW TVC
Nov 2016	FNSW - Open Adoption: Melinda & Ralph's Story
July 2017	Safe on Country and In Culture Vox Pops
Aug 2017	ACWA Safe on Country Event Highlights
Aug 2017	Keeping Koori Kids Connected
Feb 2018	Keeping Koori Kids Connected (60 sec version)
May 2018	We Need Carers from All Cultural Backgrounds

APPENDIX 2: AGENCIES

33 accredited out-of-home care service providers in NSW contributed positively to the Fostering NSW campaign either by providing access to carers and their stories for use in media pitching and video resource development, by amplifying Fostering NSW messaging through their own channels or by participating in one of the project reference groups. Those agencies included five Aboriginal agencies and two CALD-focussed agencies, and are listed below:

Abcare	Foundations Care	Settlement Services International
Allambi Care	KARI	St Joseph's Cowper
Anglicare	Key Assets	St Saviours - Anglicare
Barnardos	Life Without Barriers	Stretch-A-Family
Burrin Dalai	Lifestyle Solutions	Uniting
CatholicCare	Mackillop Family Services	Uniting - Ngurumbang
CareSouth	Marist180	UPA Youth Care
CASPA	Marymead	Wandiyali
Challenge	Ngunya Jarjum	Wesley Dalmar
Creating Links	Pathfinders	William Campbell Foundation
Fostering Young Lives – The Benevolent Society	Samaritans	

APPENDIX 3: GOOGLE ANALYTICS DATA FROM FOSTERING NSW WEBSITE

Key Search Terms

Across the period from June 2013 to April 2018, the top 10 key search terms used to find the Fostering NSW website were as follows:

- Fostering NSW
- Foster care NSW
- Foster care
- Foster care stories
- Fostering children
- Adoption Australia
- Foster children stories
- Fostering
- Adoption NSW
- Foster care Australia

Top 10 Sources/Mediums

Across the period from June 2013 to April 2018, the top ten key sources of traffic to the Fostering NSW website were as follows:

1.	Google/organic	57.40%
2.	(direct)/(none)	10.93%
3.	Google / cpc	8.06%
4.	m.facebook.com/referral	7.52%
5.	community.nsw.gov.au/referral	5.98%
6.	bing/organic	2.10%
7.	facebook.com/referral	1.09%
8.	yahoo / organic	0.80%
9.	1541139/display	0.72%
10.	l.facebook.com/referral	0.47%
11.	lm.facebook.com/referral	0.38%
12.	yahoo / organic	0.36%
13.	maitlandmercury.com.au /referral	0.32%

Top Referral Sources

Across the period from June 2013 to April 2018, the top 10 referral sources (i.e. links hosted elsewhere on the internet) to the Fostering NSW website were as follows:

14. m.facebook.com	31,343	39.92%
15. community.nsw.gov.au	24,916	31.73%
16. facebook.com	4,549	5.79%
17. l.facebook.com	1,966	2.50%
18. lm.facebook.com	1,062	1.35%
19. acwa.asn.au	1,012	1.29%
20. mamamia.com.au	976	1.24%
21. abc.net.au	545	0.69%
22. floating-share-buttons.com	505	0.64%
23. challengecommunity.org.au	486	0.62%
24. theprojecttv.com.au	355	0.45%

APPENDIX 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CSI STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS WITH AGENCIES

This interview relates to the following deliverables under the Fostering NSW Program Level service Agreement (PLA)

- Foster Care agencies report that Fostering NSW offers a productive collaborative approach to attracting carers.
- Foster care agencies report they are aware of the ACWA Foster Care Recruitment activities, resources and training.
- Fostering NSW contributes to increase in enquiries and new applications – with the goal of recruiting 660 newly authorised foster carers in 2016-2018 funding period.

Q1. Over the past two years, has your agency connected (or engaged) with the Fostering NSW campaign in any way (for example your agency being featured in the media as part of a FNSW campaign, or delivering a joint information session)?

Prompters:

- Carers from your agency featuring in positive local or regional media stories using the Fostering NSW call to action (ALREADY ASKED IN EXAMPLE)
- Carers from your agency featuring in Fostering NSW branded recruitment video resources
- Promoting your agency information sessions via the Fostering NSW website or social media channels
- Your own agency media being shared on the Fostering NSW Facebook page
- Involvement in joint information sessions supported and promoted by Fostering NSW (ALREADY ASKED IN EXAMPLE)
- Engaging with Fostering NSW messaging and resources (e.g. recruitment videos, social media posts) via 'liking' and/or sharing via your own agency communication channels

Q2. Would you be able to discuss further how members of your agency were involved with FNSW and how useful this engagement was? For example:

- Participating in events such as state-wide forums or campaign briefings, or specialist events such as Mardi Gras Parade or Parramatta Pride Picnic day
- Using resources created for joint information sessions, or to develop workforce capacity
- Assessing specialist training, or some joint training (and make sure they make note which kind, see the list below)

LONG LIST (DON'T READ ALL OUT – these were grouped above)

- Participating in events such as State-wide Forums, campaign briefings or special events such as 'Safe On Country and In Culture'
- Receiving regular E-News sector updates from Fostering NSW

- Being a member of the Fostering NSW State-wide Reference Group or Aboriginal Reference Group
- Joining Fostering NSW at special events such as Mardi Gras Parade or Parramatta Pride Picnic Day
- Using resources created for joint information sessions supported and promoted by Fostering NSW (e.g. Powerpoint presentation, checklists, sign in sheet, survey facility)
- Using resources created to develop workforce capacity e.g. Recruitment of Foster Carers Manual, Supporting Carers Guide
- Attending CCWT training developed jointly with Fostering NSW i.e 'Growing Carer Capacity' or 'Partners in Care'
- Accessing Fostering NSW expertise on recruitment or marketing matters or initiatives
- Attending specialist training developed and delivered by Fostering NSW i.e. Social Media Fundamentals

Q3. Do you think that the resources provided by FNSW were sufficient? (Recruitment of Foster Carers Manual, Supporting Carers Guide, training provided, etc.). Are there any points you might want to bring forward (good or bad experiences).

Q4. How did you find the communication with FNSW? (such as their newsletters)

- Was communication effective?
- Did you find this communication useful?

Q5. And throughout your engagement with FNSW, how would you describe your relationship with FNSW?

Q6. And finally, please tell us about the extent to which this engagement helped your agency achieve the quantum of enquiries and good quality enquiries. In terms of your agency's ability to attract and retain suitable foster carers over the last two years, do you have any comments or observations about:

- The level of enquiries received by your agency – would you say this has changed at all?
- Or would you have noticed any changes in the level of enquiries to your agency during or following key campaign waves such as Foster Care Week?
- How about the quality of enquiries received by your agency?
 - Suitability of referrals made by Fostering NSW to your agency
 - Changes in the level of applications that convert to authorised carers
- Did the enquirers appear to have a good/better understanding about foster care and options available to them?
 - Level of understanding about the available care options displayed by applicants to your agency
 - Level of understanding about what's involved in the caring role displayed by applicants to your agency
 - Willingness of new carers to actively support birth family contact

- Understanding of the need to provide trauma-informed care displayed by applicants to and new carers within your agency

Before finishing this interview, you might be aware that from June 2018, there will be a new carer recruitment, training and support program (Caring for Kids)²⁷ in place.

Q7. How do you think this new program could do things differently to better support your agency's recruitment efforts?

Q8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you for participating in this study.

²⁷ Caring for Kids was the working title given to the new carer recruitment and support program that became My Forever Family NSW.