



ANNUAL REPORT



FROM OUR FOUNDER

The little charity I started seven years ago, after realising there was no one stop shop to get all the necessities for kids entering an out of home care placement, has grown to provide care to thousands of children and carers each year. In the past 18 months we've experienced an expansion period as well as a period quite unlike any other, with the additional challenges of COVID and setbacks with our premises at Sale Memorial Hall flooding – twice!

In 2021, we opened a brand new Crisis Case Depot and donation point at Koo Wee Rup, run by our board member Tammy Topham. This is a new source of donated goods for our Crisis Cases, and a place where case workers and carers can pick up Crisis Cases and other donated essential items such as strollers.

We were also able to hire an additional part time staff member to assist myself and the volunteers with the Crisis Cases, Christmas and general administration.

We planned, got funding for and in early 2022 launched a pilot program to support gap payments for mental health services for kids in out of home care. We also now have a Mental Health Hub on our website, with information for carers on the process of getting permissions to treat and then finding the right kind of treatment for kids in their care. I've wanted to do something to help kids in care get access to mental health checks and support for so long. It's a huge issue that I hear about from carers constantly. Funding from the Sisters of Charity Foundation will allow us to pilot this program in 2022. Information we collect during the program will help us to advocate on mental health issues for children in out of home care, to government.

The number of Crisis Cases we delivered in 2021 was down on previous years, as lockdowns meant that child protection in-person visits decreased and child abuse was less visible to report given the lack of in-person schooling and other community engagements. We still delivered 684 Crisis Cases, and since lockdown lifted are struggling to keep up with demand.

It was another huge year at Christmas this year, with an enormous amount of toys and gifts donated through our giving trees at participating businesses. We want to share our enormous gratitude to these businesses who hosted a tree, to the volunteer gift wrappers who helped get the pressies looking amazing, and to everyone in the community who donated a gift, gift card or made a financial donation during Christmas. With your support we wrapped and delivered gifts to 968 children. Given we provide three gifts to each child, this is a whopping 2900 gifts!!!

While our Magenta Camp for kids in care and their carers was delayed til November in 2021, we still had 36 kids and 16 carers attend, and take part in outdoor activities.

I'm so proud of the work we have been able to continue to do through such difficult times. This has only been made possible through the generosity of our community, local businesses, and our funders. We are enormously grateful for their support, which has allowed us to finish out the year in a strong financial position for 2022.

I also want to extend my thanks to our incredible group of volunteers who attend every Thursday to pack Crisis Cases, and have done so for years, and to our Board, Jacqui Ingram, Gabrielle Costin, Tammy Topham and Heather Le Roy. Our Board have tirelessly raised funds and awareness, supported program development, assisted with the logistics of our flooded premises, and stepped in wherever I needed them through the year. I am extraordinarily grateful for their expertise, their time and their passion for what we do.

Sincerely,
Heather Baird,
Founder/Coordinator,
A Better Life For Foster Kids



KEY ACTIVITIES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Our key programs

- 2900 gifts delivered to 968 kids at Christmas
- 684 Crisis Cases delivered
- Delivered our camp for 36 kids and 16 carers
- Advice and advocacy support provided to approximately 4-6 carers who called per week
- 1 carer families provided with furniture
- 3 soon to be mums set up with everything they needed for the baby's arrival
- 5 children provided with Others Do Care Fund sponsorship for activities

Spotlight On Koo Wee Rup Crisis Case Depot



Kindly funded by Alinta Energy

Thanks to Alinta Energy, The Better Life For Foster Kids Koo Wee Rup Crisis Case Depot was opened in August 2021, and has:

- Distributed 114 Crisis Cases from Koo Wee Rup
- Collected a van-full of donated goods from the Koo Wee Rup community to fill Crisis Cases
- Been a collection point for 30% of the donated Christmas Gifts we received to distribute to children in out of home care in 2021 (around 3000 gifts distributed)

Ongoing Plans

We have recently sourced a new location for the Depot with reduced rent and bills, which will allow us to continue running the Koo Wee Rup depot more sustainably. We are currently actively seeking funding to increase Tammy Topham's days to allow her to start producing Crisis Cases as we are unable to keep up with demand with the output from our Sale Memorial Hall Crisis Case volunteer group.

Carer Survey

In early 2021 we ran a survey of carers to enquire about the barriers to accessing mental health care for children in their care. From this survey we produced a report, available to the public on our website, which has informed the creation of a Mental Health Hub of information on our website, as well as a pilot program providing financial support for gap fees for childrens' mental health treatment for carers experiencing financial hardship. From the report findings, we wrote a letter to MPs to share our findings on the barriers to accessing mental health care for children and young people in out of home care.

MP Melina Bath raised our concerns in the Victorian State Parliament. We are enormously lucky to have such a wonderful Parliamentary advocate for the needs of children and young people in care.

Westfield Local Heroes award

In October 2021, A Better Life For Foster Kids' Founder Heather Baird was awarded a Westfield Local Heroes Award. Westfield provided \$10,000 in award money, which was used to provide 130 Crisis Cases. Westfield Southland Shopping Centre provided a space for us to gift wrap during the Christmas holidays, with wrapping costs donated to A Better Life For Foster Kids. Westfield have been enormously supportive of our cause in the past year.

Media and awareness raising

Heather spoke on several podcasts and radio programs last year to raise awareness of the needs of kids in care and to talk about her own experience as a ward of the state. She did an episode with Geoff Griffffin of the Inspirational Australians Awards Australia Podcast, and featured on ABC Gippsland Breakfast radio to talk about our mental health survey findings. We also featured in a news article on mental health support for kids in care in the Latrobe Valley Express and the Gippsland Times.



WALL OF GRATITUDE



We want to thank everyone who donated or supported us with volunteering, item drop offs, gift wrapping, hosting a Christmas tree and attending our fundraising events in 2021.

A Better Life For Foster Kids is able to provide for kids in care and support their carers because of your generosity.

Thank you to our Major Donors and Funders

Acmena Group

Alfred Felton Bequest funding allowed us to expand our staff, providing funding for an Office Administrator for 12 months, which has been incredibly helpful during our move back into the hall, and getting everything set up again to run smoothly. This role will help us to provide a solid foundation to continue to expand the types of programs and activities we are able to provide, and help us get Crisis Cases in even more locations across Victoria.

Beyond Bank doubled donations to support our work on November 23 and 24. Our supporters donated \$5640, and Beyond Bank matched this to a total of \$11,280!

Bass Strait Charitable Fund and Exxon Mobil teamed up to provide support for our Magenta Camp outdoor activities to challenge and inspire our kids.

Loy Yang B supported us to get back on our feet after the flooding of the Sale Memorial Hall, sending a team of amazing volunteers to help us clean out all the flooded donations and furniture, and paying for removal. To top it off they funded 70 Crisis Cases!

Mantana Foundation thank you once again for supporting our Crisis Cases for so many years running. It's incredible to have their support!

Sisters of Charity have funded our Mental Health pilot program, to provide financial support for gap fees for mental health treatment of kids in care for carers who are experiencing financial hardship. This grant also supported the development of our Mental Health Hub on our website, with information for carers on mental health treatment for kids in care.

Stronger Communities grants through MP Darren Chester's office provided us with funding for a defibrillator and First Aid training to help keep our volunteers safe.

VivCourt Trading

Westfield Southland Shopping Centre





HIGHLIGHTS

What was the best thing about camp?

We asked carers at our camp what was best about it. They told us they valued meeting people who had similar experiences to them. That it had been a hard year and it provided a moment to breathe before the Christmas period. And our favourite quote:

"The waterfight was hilarious and somuch fun for all. We had an absolute amazing time, it's amazing what you do for everybody."

Thanks to Exxon Mobil and Bass Strait Community Fund for making sure the kids had heaps of great activities at camp!



Feedback on Crisis Cases

Have you donated items or funding to help us get Crisis Cases to kids in care? This feedback from carers tells us how valuable it is to be able to access Crisis Cases!

Made life so much easier with my new placement - he came straight from hospital with the outfit he was wearing and was a preemie so it was so helpful and made me less stressed

The knitted rugs are the biggest hit . They get carried around, loved, slept with and often cover my dogs ;-)

Having new clean clothes always made them walk taller.

Better Life for Foster Kids is the most generous agency I've ever been supported by