

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



FROM OUR FOUNDER

This year was a whirlwind year for me, slowly returning from health scares of 2022. It felt so good to be back doing what I love, and that is making these children lives better.

With interviews and events the year has buzzed by very quickly, I am looking forward to 2024 with new board members and exciting plans ahead. We are hoping to open more depots and offer more training for our carers. We will be rallying hard, calling on politicians and departments to make changes to the out-of-home care system. We want the child and their best interests to be the first the consideration and to see policy followed far more closely than it is currently.

Crisis Cases are returning to pre COVID numbers, thankfully, as it means we can reach more kiddies. In 2023 we sent out over 1700 cases. We have set up multiple young Mums with an entire nursery and clothing from birth to one year old. We have provided for carers that needed bedding, furniture and other goods to be able to take on a placement.

Gippsland's Biggest P.J. Day - Wow what can I say - what an amazing day! Andrew and his team broke last years records with schools and money raised. Our volunteers attended every school they possibly could and loved every minute of it. It was so special to see businesses get really involved and there were people in their P.J.'s everywhere. My local shopping centre had a fantastic turnout. A big thank you to Ace Radio and the Gippsland Times for their wonderful coverage and promoting of the day. Here's to a bigger and better day in 2024!

Our Gala Dinner was a huge success, the feedback was amazing and it was lovely to see everyone dressed up enjoying a delicious meal with good music, company and atmosphere. We are looking forward to the next Gala Dinner.

Advocacy keeps me very busy, with an average of six new issues each week. Some advocacy cases can easily be resolved and other go on for months. I have had four supporting court appearances with carers and been a support person for nine carers in interviews over the year.

What a time it has been for awards. I have to say, credit belongs firstly to all my wonderful volunteers and secondly to the beautiful community that is always there to support us. I am very humbled and honoured to do the work of giving a voice to children in out-of-home-care and their carers. What an amazing team of volunteers we have, always there to lend a helping hand and go the extra mile to ensure we have Crisis Cases at the ready.

Tammy has been busy in Koo Wee Rup meeting donors and attending presentation for ABLFFK. The depot is now accessed by appointment, helping to supply carers across the region, supported with amazing local support. We had two carers lunches in 2023, with carers enjoying a lovely meal and catching up with other carers. The kids loved playing and some even caught up with their previous carers.

Special thanks to outgoing board members Jacqui Ingram and Gabrielle Costin for their dedicated years of service. Your time and board roles have fundamentally supported our organisation, impacting thousands of children across Victoria.

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



KEY ACTIVITIES

Our key outputs in 2023

- 1,700 Crisis Cases delivered.
- Over 6,000 Christmas gifts delivered to 2,014 children.
- Infant safety equipment supplied to carers across the state: such as prams, cots, bassinets, highchairs, and car seats. An average of five items delivered each week.
- Advice and advocacy support provided to approximately six carers who called each week.
- Two carers dinners for 49 people.
- Six home set-ups with everything from furniture, clothing and pantry needs.
- 19 children provided with Others Do Care Fund sponsorship.



Corporate Donations

Loy Yang B is a strong local supporter, providing people-power on the ground at Sale Memorial Hall at a working bee and essential funds for Crisis Cases, along with funding for Others Do Care.

Another integral local supporter **ExxonMobil Australia** funded the videography for Gippsland's Biggest PJ Day in 2023 and supported Crisis Cases.

ProTen donated to both Crisis Cases and the 2023 Christmas present drive.

Corona Worldwide raised funds from their global network for our work. **Westfield Local Heroes** provided funds for Crisis Cases.

Good2Give enabled workplace giving for our cause. **Rio Tinto** and **Providence Philanthropic** Foundation have generously provided donations towards Crisis Cases.

Thanks to our **Cuppa A Week** campaign regular donors, providing stable ongoing funding for the core needs of children entering emergency out-of-home care.

Local fundraising efforts in 2023, huge thanks go to **Gala Dinner** attendees, **Gippsland's Biggest P.J. Day** supporters and **Giving Tree** host locations and donors. There are so many amazing local individuals and businesses who enable our work.

Media and awareness raising

Heather spoke with local media Gippsland Times and ABC radio programs to raise awareness of the needs of kids in care and to talk about her own experience as a ward of the state.

WALL OF GRATITUDE



Thank you to our Grant Funders

Tucker Foundation funded two vital programs for our smallest kids, firstly: Emergency Baby Care transporting second-hand infant safety care items, e.g. a double pram, urgently needed for a new out-of-home-care placement. Secondly: Premature Infants Crisis Cases, filled with both clothes and nappies in the correct size to fit early arrivals.

Stronger Communities Grants through MP Darren Chester's office provided us with funding for key office resources for the volunteers working from Sale Memorial Hall.

William Angliss Charitable Foundation supported activities from our Koo Wee Rup location.

The Andrews Foundation and **The Felton Bequest** contributed vital funds to our core program, Crisis Cases for regional, volunteer run depots.

The Cardinia Foundation also grant funded local Crisis Cases.

AusPost funded carer dinners in 2023, fostering connection and community.

South East Water grant supported Crisis Cases from our Frankston volunteer run depot.

Ballarat Connected Communities grant supported Crisis Cases from our local volunteer run depot.

Garry Nash & Co Community Fund and **GIVE Wangaratta** both provided Crisis Cases grants for local volunteer run depots.

Harcourts Foundation and **Nelson Alexander Charitable Foundation** funded Colour My Story trauma-informed resources for Crisis Cases.

Sisters of Charity funding for mental health was used to support trauma-informed online training for carers across the state.

Awards - 2023

A Better Life For Foster Kids:
**Community Achievement Awards for Victoria - Nectre
Regional Service Award**

Heather Baird:
Westfield Local Hero finalist
Victorian Women's Honour Roll - Trailblazer



GIPPSLAND'S BIGGEST P.J. DAY

Gippsland's Biggest P.J. Day is a partnership between a group of hardworking volunteers and ABLFFK. Thank you so much to the schools from the 2023 Gippsland's Biggest PJ Day for your generous donations:

Save the date



September 6th 2024

Albert Street Primary School, Cobains Primary School, East Gippsland Specialist School, Fish Creek and District Primary School, Gippsland Grammar St Anne's Campus, Guthridge Primary School, Kosciuszko Street Primary School Traralgon, Longford Kindergarten, Longford Primary School, Meeniyon Primary School, Morwell Central Primary School, Moe Primary School, Nyora Primary School, Nilma Primary School, Powlett River Primary School, Sale College, Sale Primary School, Seaspray Primary School, St Thomas' Primary, Stratford Primary School, Woodside Primary School, St Patrick's Primary School Stratford, Bundalaguah Primary School, Maffra Primary School, St. Michael's Primary School Heyfield, Newborough East Primary School, Koo Wee Rup Preschool, Duke Street Childrens Centre, Sale north kindergarten, Hyland Community Kindergarten, Gumnuts Early Learning Center, Nagle College, Wonthaggi Primary School, Wurruk Primary School, St Mary's Catholic Primary School Sale, St Mary's Catholic Primary School Maffra, Yarram Primary School

The day raised a total of \$32,000.00 in funds and value of new pyjamas and clothes. Thank you to the wonderful Volunteers for organising such an amazing fundraiser! **Andrew Williamson, Rebecca Matthews, Desley Tulloch, Michelle Murphy Shaw and helpers.**

Thank you to the businesses, MP's and local supporters who made the day a success. **DMG Financial - and their partners PAC Capital, Clearwater and Count Charitable Foundation. Esso Australia - with a special mention to Esso Longford Plants and Flounder Offshore Platform. SkyPhoto Gippsland, TRFM and Gold1242 studios, Sale RSL Club, The Jolly Dolly Takeaway, Toora Lions Club, The Star Hotel Sale, Gippsland Centre - including 20+ shops that got involved! Ashleigh house, Phillipsons Accounting Services, Payless Promotions, Finley & Weymouth Pharmacy, Opal Health Care, MYLI Foster Library, Australia Post York St Sale, DFP Recruitment - Traralgon, Zienna Hair & Co, Bairnsdale Horse Centre, Bairnsdale Salvation Army Thrift. The ABLFFK volunteers and board.**



GALA HIGHLIGHTS



Gala Dinner

The 2023 Gala Dinner event, hosted by A Better Life for Foster Kids on March 31st, was a resounding success. The event brought together a diverse and supportive community, with attendees expressing gratitude for the opportunity to contribute to such a meaningful cause.

The event itself was a delightful evening filled with entertainment, delicious food, and fun. Guests were treated to live music by Beats Workin' while enjoying an award-winning three-course meal catered by the Tinamba Hotel.

The night raised awareness about the challenges faced by foster children and the importance of providing them the resources they need to thrive. A key highlight was the moving talk from carer Andrea about her experiences. The event raised crucial funds through once-off donations and Cuppa A Week subscribers dedicated to regular support.



Volunteer Powered Work

Our volunteers show up week in and week out because they love:

“Knowing that I am helping to support the transition to out-of-home-care and hopefully making the experience less traumatic.”

“Working with others who feel committed to making a difference purely because they care. No one feels the need for any recognition. Our reward is knowing we are making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children.”

What keeps the volunteers going:

“I taught many children who were in out-of-home-care, so saw first hand some of the challenges they, and their carers, faced. ABLFFK is a fantastic organisation which provides assistance to children and carers without judgement. I want to do what I can to ensure it keeps going because even though the organisation has grown, sadly so has the number of children and carers requiring support.”

“Helping children. Friendly atmosphere, knowing that you are making a difference in some way.”



Core Programs

Crisis Cases for out-of-home-care

What carers said about our core program in 2023:

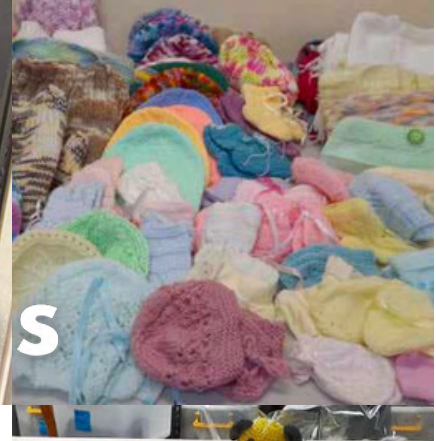
“They came without anything and left with a case full of belongings.”

“It made a huge difference - kids arrive in night time with P.J.'s or clothes they have been in for days. It's an immediate reaction from a child, to know they have their own belongings and clothes, making them feel special. All of the things in the case are of great value.”

“The kids enjoyed the toys, the knitted blanket and bear especially.”

“It meant more than I can say. When a child has nothing, being given a suitcase with items that are just for them makes a hard situation just a little bit better. It also meant I did not need to drag the young person to the shops to get basic items.”

“They knew others were thinking of them. A Crisis Case meant they 'owned' something and felt a little bit in control.”



Spotlight On - Christmas

Christmas in 2023 was absolutely enormous. This was the first year we have ever had to close off our list, as we did not have enough resources to reach everyone requesting help.

The demand was so great the charity spent \$25,000 of funds on gifts and gift vouchers - we have never had to dip into donated funds before to meet demand.

We are desperately seeking corporate sponsorship for gift cards or postage costs ahead of Christmas in 2024. Gift cards for single department stores, such as Target, Big W and Kmart allow teenagers to enjoy Christmas with a small measure of independence and choice.

Our community supported our 2023 Christmas drive with over 22 local Giving Trees. A big thank you to Tammy, Olivia, Denise, Leah and friend for attending charity gift wrapping stall. Thanks to Westfield Southland for the fundraising opportunity.

In 2023, an estimated value of \$120,840 worth of individual Christmas gifts, were wrapped and posted to more than 2,000 children in need. Thank you to all that helped!