

The proposed increases to financial support to carers (and ultimately children in OOHC), along with proposed changes to improve transparency and consistency from NGOs and DCJ, are a step in the right direction. However, I don't think they adequately address the true cost of supporting and raising children in OOHC, nor are the proposed changes significant enough to curb the alarming numbers of experienced carers leaving the 'system'.

My partner and I have been authorised foster carers since 2018. We have multiple spare bedrooms at home and the skills, knowledge and compassion to provide a safe, trauma-informed, supportive and loving home for a children in OOHC. However, our experience of the OOHC system has been so damaging, we have decided not to continue as foster carers for the foreseeable future.

While not the only factor, the lack of adequate financial support has certainly informed this decision to some extent - for all intents and purposes, we have been paying to be foster carers. That is neither a fair, nor a sustainable arrangement for our family.

Further, meeting the needs of the kids in our care as well as non-negotiable commitments associated with being a foster carer take time. For example; attending multiple medical/health/therapeutic appointments, carer reviews, home visits, advocating for children in your care, attending mandated training, case plan meetings, biological family contact, but to name a few. Accordingly, I have worked part time since becoming a foster carer.

Although hard to quantify exactly, the loss of income, superannuation and opportunity for career progression, are factors that should be taken into account when considering financial support of carers. Particularly given this is likely to disproportionately and adversely impact women.

While this consideration seems out of scope for this review, it shouldn't be.

Ultimately, it should not be incumbent upon foster and kinship carers to bear such a personal and financial load for opening up our hearts and homes and providing care to our state's most vulnerable children and young people. Simply put, the cost of caring for kids in OOHC is the responsibility of the Government, not individual foster and kinship carers.

It is my resolute position that until carer retention and support is addressed, the intolerable practice of placing kids and young people in motels and caravan parks (albeit now with registered providers), instead of a home with a loving and safe foster family, will continue and worsen. Therefore, greater consideration and resources should be dedicated to the support and retention of current carers, so that it is prioritised alongside carer recruitment. Further, subsequent review of financial support should be subject to review at much more regular intervals (3-5 years) to ensure it is commensurate with the current cost of living.

Failure to adequately support carers, including financial support, is akin to a failure to meet the needs of children and young people in out of home care, something I can no longer play a part in.