



# CREATING CHANGE FOR KIDS TO THRIVE

ANNUAL REVIEW 2020



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Welcome to the Inaugural Adopt Change Annual Review. Inside you will find:

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Adopt Change Financial Reports  
can be downloaded at  
[www.adoptchange.org.au](http://www.adoptchange.org.au)







**Adopt Change** is committed to creating positive change for children and young people to thrive. We work with children and young people, families, community, government, NFP organisations, corporates, educators, media and supporters, towards a brighter future for kids in Australia and beyond, who have had difficult starts to life. When a child is displaced, and has typically experienced trauma before, during and possibly after, they need additional care to ensure they have the best opportunity to have an enjoyable childhood and thrive into their futures.

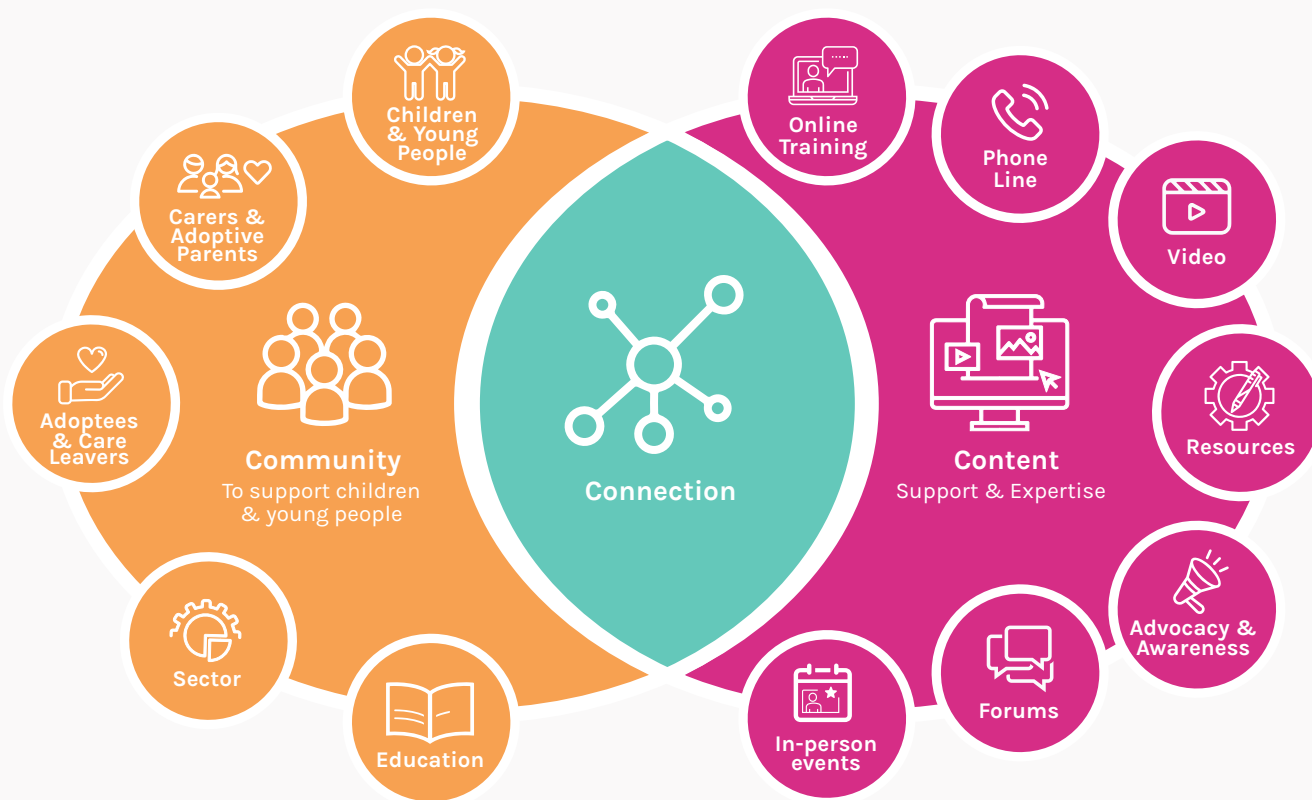
To do this we depend on the support of our community, and we work together towards this vision... homes, communities and schools, where children are supported to thrive.

Within our inaugural Annual Review, you will find some highlights of our recent work, our plans, and information on how your support, or potential support, will help us on this journey.

# HIGHLIGHTS AT A GLANCE

During a challenging 2020, we forged ahead with our work to ensure we did as much as we could to support children, young people and families experiencing the extra pressures the Covid-19 pandemic brought to households.

## Adopt Change Connecting and Supporting Children, Young People and Families



Highlights for the year and beyond include:

Over **100**  
**MYPACK**

first night back packs  
prepared and provided to  
children entering foster care

**118**  
**ONLINE**  
**LOUNGEROOMS**

to keep carers and families  
connected and supported  
launched and facilitated

**EMPOWER**  
**CHANGE**

program launched to assist  
15-18 year olds preparing to  
leave care



**Sandra Sully**  
Ambassador



**Nicole Warne**  
Ambassador

Released our

**1<sup>ST</sup>**

National Permanency  
Recommendations Paper  
as a conference outcome

**MEDIA** coverage across  
the year to raise awareness  
and shine the spotlight on the  
importance of child welfare  
and permanency

**+3**

new Ambassadors

Delivered the largest

**NATIONAL  
PERMANENCY  
CONFERENCE**

**7 STATES  
& TERRITORIES**

plus federal government  
involved and

**340**

registered delegates

**CHANGEMAKER  
MAMAS & PAPPAS**

created as a way for our community  
to share stories

**EVENTS  
for CHANGE**

established which included bringing  
the National Permanency Conference  
to an online format

Engaged Ambassadors and  
Influencers for the for the  
**#AHOMEFOREVERYCHILD**  
campaign

**110 ONLINE**

educational workshops for carers,  
families and sector workers hosted

**250**

campaign tees as part of  
**#YESVEMBER**

**1,000**

potential carer homes  
across NSW referred



**YARN  
SESSIONS**

launched to connect with  
Aboriginal kinship and foster carers

**CHILD  
PROTECTION  
CAMPAIGN**

delivered for the NSW Advocate  
for Children & Young People

# MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIR

Our goal at Adopt Change is to ensure all children have access to a safe, nurturing and permanent home, and for families to be well supported. This work is ongoing, and when speaking with government, we advocate for children, young people, families and carers on a range of issues. They are often voiceless, so we share their challenges with sector decision makers directly.

Within Australia alone, there are almost 45,000 children and young people in the out of home care system, enough to fill a stadium. It is well understood that the impact of trauma and impermanency can be detrimental for children, this drives us to continue our work towards permanency and security for children across Australia and beyond.

It's pleasing to know while there are differences across the states and territories, all governments are committed to prioritising permanency for children and young people in care, introducing and maintaining initiatives to help them thrive. There has been progress, but more is needed. To strengthen child welfare in our country, a national, unified approach is needed.

Our Adopt Change vision is to live in a world where all children grow, learn, play and thrive in a safe, nurturing and stable environment. Under the leadership of our board, our CEO, and our growing Changemaker team, we are confident Adopt Change will make great inroads to driving change for better outcomes for children, young people and families.

The pandemic crisis environment of 2020 was a challenging year for many, and we were sharply aware of the impact on at risk children, their families and carers. We tailored our focus across the year to quickly provide supports that could reach families in the home, online, to ensure ongoing support and the reduction of isolation. We continued our awareness



**Victoria Buchan**  
Chair

raising efforts in this space, including a Child Safety campaign in conjunction with the NSW Advocate for Children & Young People, FAMS and Backtrack. The team continued their important ongoing work, in addition to the new initiatives.

To our Changemakers – our staff, supporters, ambassadors and volunteers – thank you for your contribution this past year. The more we achieve together, means more children being cared for in safe homes. Thank you also to my fellow Adopt Change Board Directors – Kerry Chikarovski, Helen Baker, and Catherine McDonnell who has chaired the board for the last four years until December and remains on the board. Thank you also to John O'Neill who completed ten years as a director until 2020 and is now an Ambassador. Welcome also to new board members Tom Bourdon and Mark Nixon. We look forward to their contribution to the next phase of Adopt Change. After my years as a Director with Adopt Change, I look forward to chairing the board as Adopt Change continues to champion the wellbeing of children, young people and families.

**Victoria Buchan**  
Chair

**44,906**   
CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

**334**   
ADOPTIONS ACROSS AUSTRALIA

AN INCREASE OF  
**20%**   
OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS



# OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of Adopt Change is to support vulnerable children in need, particularly those in government care, foster care, orphans or children without families, and their carers, families and guardians, by without limitation:

- providing resources to support these children including in times of crisis such as entering the foster care or out of home care system;
- providing support and resources to carers, families and guardians of these children with particular emphasis on understanding trauma and informed practices and parenting for these children;
- providing information to schools and the community on supporting these children and trauma support; and
- encouraging people to provide all children in need with access to a safe, nurturing and stable family environment to grow up in.

## OUR VISION

A world where all children grow, learn, play and thrive in a safe, nurturing and stable environment.

## OUR MISSION

To support and educate families and communities in caring for displaced children.



### BOLD

We are courageous in our pursuit of making our vision and mission a reality. We speak for children and families who need a voice.

### AGILE

We proactively adapt our organisation and services to be responsive to serving the needs of our community.

### INSPIRING

We bring others on the journey with us for greater collective impact by inspiring them with our vision and drive for change.

### IMPACTFUL

Everything we do is about bringing about positive change for children, young people and families for better outcomes.

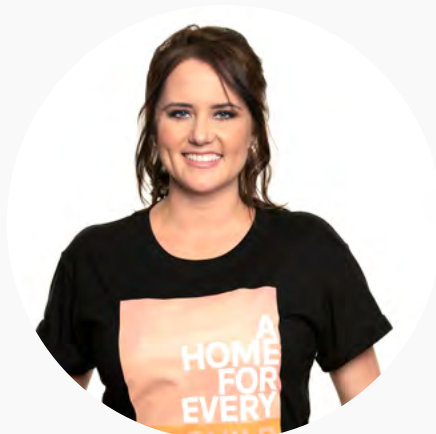
### INCLUSIVE

Listening to our community, our stakeholders and our team, we are respectful of others' cultures and views, and we seek to work collaboratively.

# MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

*"There's a lot of work being undertaken across the sector to ensure more children are able to live safely with their family of origin, and when this isn't possible, to provide stability through guardianship or adoption. Children should have the assurance of knowing where they will spend their childhoods and that they are part of the family."*

**Renée Carter**  
Adopt Change CEO



It is an honour to work with an organisation that is all about the wellbeing of children and young people. Even more so when we have a growing team of Changemakers – staff, board, volunteers, ambassadors, supporters – who share our vision for a home for every child and a supportive community and education environment. It is why we have grown, even across the challenging year of 2020 and the new hybrid environment of delivering supports in person and online.

It was during this time that our team pivoted quickly to tailor our NSW program My Forever Family, along with national services, to ensure that we were still able to support children, young people and families. Our role is increasingly to connect children, young people and families with the supports and resources so that children can thrive into their future. To ensure we are meeting needs, we involve those with lived experience. And it is through this that we identified further needs and are launching initiatives to meet these needs.

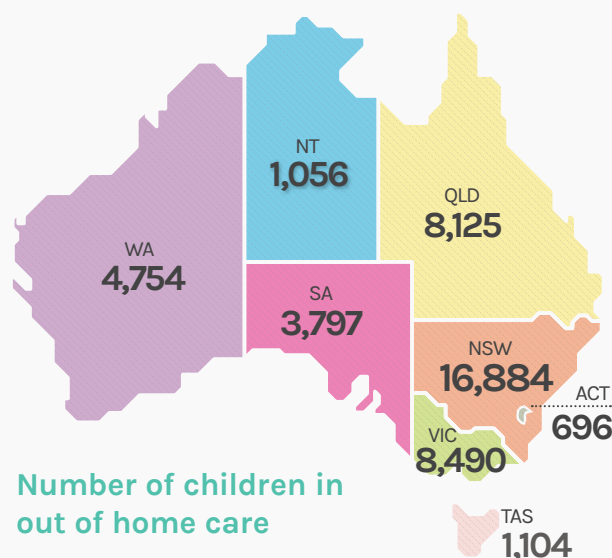
Our annual National Permanency Conference (which we established in 2017) was hosted entirely online in 2020, to ensure the critical issue of children's welfare during childhood remained firmly on the agenda. With 340 people registered to attend the two-day event, there were around 50 local and international speakers including government representatives and politicians. It was our fourth National Permanency Conference, and highly successful. Whilst there has always been vigorous public discussion about the care system in Australia, there have been few formal platforms that allow the views of a broad cross-section of people to be recorded and submitted to government for consideration.

One of the deliverables of the 2020 National Permanency Conference was to collate participants' feedback and submit recommendations to relevant federal, state and territory government ministers for consideration.

The high-level recommendations included:

1. Ensure a **unified national approach** to child protection and permanency legislation, ensuring better outcomes for children in out of home care.
2. If children are not able to live with family, accessibility and timeliness of **permanency for children** in care needs to be prioritised.
3. **Integrate the voice of children** and young people in decisions that impact them and involving their input for policy making.
4. **Trauma-informed, therapeutic** services to be made available for all children in care, and ensuring all schools are trauma informed.
5. **National support approach** for foster and kinship carers, including recruitment of new carers.
6. Ensure care leavers who age out of the system are **well supported** and have life skills.
7. **Better data** collection and information sharing between services and departments around child protection issues.
8. **Increase community engagement** and opportunities to lead the change needed for child welfare.





Number of children in out of home care

Every year throughout November, Adopt Change champions #Yesvember, where we ask the community to support our work towards #AHomeForEveryChild. The campaign grew from our foundations as National Adoption Awareness and extended to include permanency in other forms. 2020 was an exciting turning point for us with a variety of new initiatives implemented. For the first time, we partnered with Australian fashion house Aje for the design and production of our campaign tees, and collaborated with our Ambassadors and their 'Influencers' to connect with new audiences. In terms of reach, engagement, awareness and funds raised, **#YESVEMBER 2020** was one of our most successful campaigns to date.

Despite the pandemic, there were also some legislative milestones achieved, including:

- ✓ In South Australia, New South Wales and ACT, adopted people will now be able to have both their birth and adopted families included on an Integrated Birth Certificate. These reforms will provide adopted people access to a legal certificate that includes information about their parents and siblings at birth, as well as their parents and siblings after they have been adopted.
- ✓ The ACT Government changed the definition of what is in the 'best interest of the child' and the 'adoption of a person 18 years old or older'. The new legislation now prioritises a child's sense of wellbeing, stability of a child's physical and emotional living conditions, and their relationship with existing carers.

- ✓ Open adoption rates rose in New South Wales, in the context of other permanency measures continuing to grow. Less children entered care – with a reduction of 44% over the 2019FY.
- ✓ Queensland Government introduced open adoption as an option in the continuum of care for at-risk children.

It's encouraging to see the ongoing commitment from the federal, state and territory governments in providing permanency for children in care.

Our focus is on ensuring that children and young people have thriving childhoods and futures, through being provided nurturing homes, schools and communities. We recognise the critical role of grandparents, extended family members, foster carers, guardians and adoptive parents – who are the unsung heroes. For without them, there may be no warm meals, clean sheets, dentist appointments, and homework support for our vulnerable children.

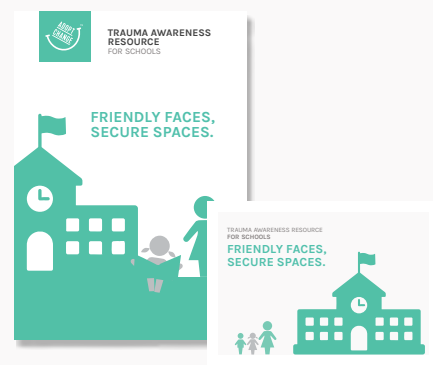
In closing, I want to say a big thanks to my team, who have gone above and beyond, particularly during the pandemic. I am grateful to them for rolling their sleeves up, motivated for whatever the day brings. Their dedication to and passion for #aHomeForEveryChild is inspiring.

Thank you also to our board, our volunteers including our Ambassadors, the Chair of our My Forever Family Advisory Committee Professor Paul Chander and the Committee members, and our valued supporters who provide support via grants, financial donations, time and lovingly prepared handmade blankets for our MyPacks.

**Renée Carter**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Adopt Change

# OUR SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES

While 2020 was a challenging year, our team stepped up and reimagined ways to support carer families and continue our work. In addition to our ongoing work we also launched new initiatives, all towards children, young people and families being more supported.



Adopt Change provides a range of supports and activities, all designed to help displaced vulnerable children and young people thrive, and to support those who support children. These include:

- Providing community supports and resources, including information and guidance on providing a permanent home for children through adoption or other forms of permanency; trauma-informed supports for families (including adoptive and foster families); community events; an online forum; and the provision of MyPack first-night backpacks for children entering the foster-care system.
- Facilitating educational workshops, conferences and information sessions for professionals, parents and carers on topics including trauma-informed care; pre- and post-adoptive supports; accessing the expertise of local and international educators, researchers and speakers.
- Conducting research to contribute to the understanding of issues for children including the importance of permanency; the impact of trauma;

pre- and post-adoptive supports for families and children; and topics surrounding adoption and permanency within Australia.

- Advocating for child-centred legislative and policy reform at a state, territory and federal level to ensure every child has access to a permanent, stable and nurturing family, and that trauma-informed supports are provided.
- Raising awareness within the community and through media of the risks faced by children who have experienced trauma and the necessity for children to have access to permanency and supports for positive life outcomes. Our campaigns to raise awareness have included the #aHomeForEveryChild campaign.
- Collaborating with the child welfare sector, politicians, policy makers and departments on the various issues surrounding permanency, adoption and child welfare through the provision of consultancy and advisory services and input (including involvement on the Advisory Panel for the NSW Institute of Open Adoption Studies).

## NATIONAL PERMANENCY CONFERENCE

On 12-13 October 2020, we hosted our 4th, and largest, **#THRIVE National Permanency Conference (NPC)**. The annual conference is held in response to the Community Services Ministers' commitment made in November 2016 to prioritise permanency for children in out of home care. It's also an opportunity to hear from state, territory and federal government representatives on the progress made in their jurisdictions since their commitment, and their plans moving forward.



*"I applaud you and your team – what a great 2 days. I was very interested in how a virtual conference would run, but it kept me engaged through its mix of documentary style presentations, side sessions and Q&A... Thanks for being pioneers in this sector at bringing all the parties together to discuss the issues. Great job!"*

#### Conference delegate

Due to the COVID-19 environment, the two-day conference was held online for the first time, with approximately 340 registrants. The conference offered delegates from across the country the opportunity to participate in conversations to bring about change, as well as hear from relevant local and international subject matter experts. The NPC brought together representatives from government, child welfare sector, academics and the community (including parents, carers, relatives and those with a care and/or adoption experience) to discuss critical issues surrounding children and young people in out of home care (OOHC).

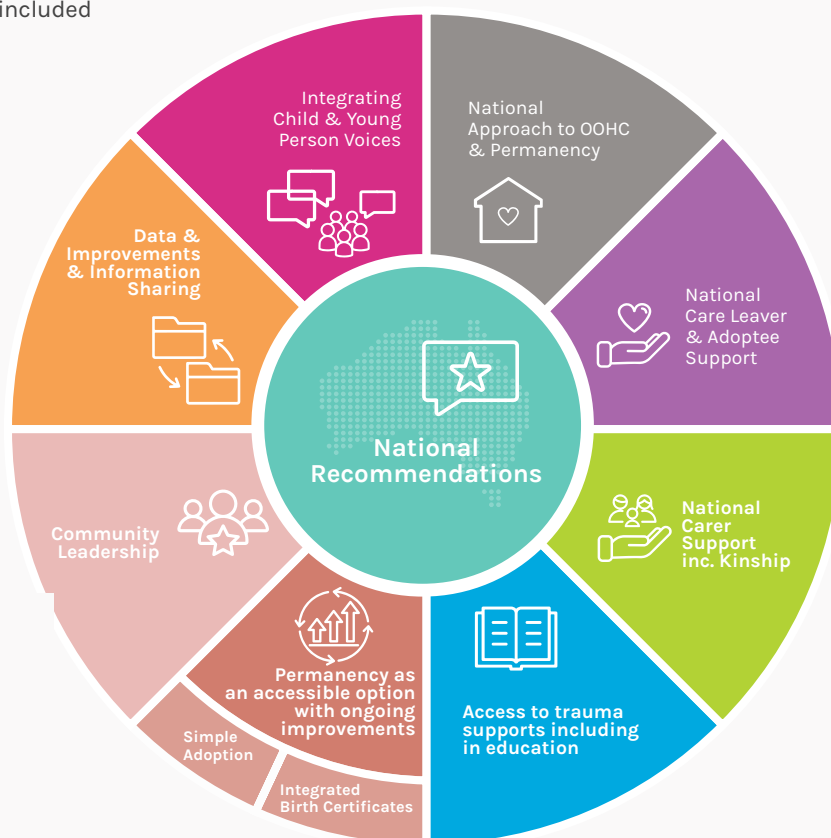
The theme was #THRIVE, which focused on creating better outcomes for children and young people in OOHC, and incorporated the importance of learn and play as children grow into voices of the future.

International keynote speakers at #THRIVE2020 included **Dr Jessica Pryce**, Executive Director of the Florida Institute for Child Welfare; **Terry Cross**, Founder of National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA); **Dr Jane Aronson**, Founder, Worldwide Orphans; and **Richard Rose**, Director of Child Trauma Intervention Services. Local speakers included

**Dr Stacy Blythe, Dr Karleen Gribble, Michael Hawton, Dr Melissa Kaltner, Damon Martin, Julie Hourigan Ruse, and Dr Amy Conley Wright.**

In addition to the main plenary sessions and breakout workshops, two National Roundtable video conference sessions were held and participants were invited to share their views on conference topics of permanency and thriving for children in out of home care. Participants were advised the discussion would be summarised into a document, which would be submitted to government as recommendations for improving permanency and care for Australia's vulnerable children.

The Adopt Change National Permanency Conference Recommendations document was delivered by the federal government to all State and Territory Community Services Ministers in 30 November 2020. Eight Recommendations were presented to government, and the paper is available for download on our website. The eight recommendations fall under the following categories:



Our conference was supported by multiple sponsors, including major sponsor Australian Government Department of Social Services. See our conference website for full list of supporters.

# ONLINE LOUNGEROOMS

In response to the pressure COVID-19 lockdowns placed on households, in March 2020, Adopt Change developed a unique approach to engage keep families connected, supported and learning – via our new initiative – Online Lounge Rooms. These virtual face-to-face sessions in safe, secure online environments helped carers and parents navigate the challenges of parenting during the pandemic and home schooling. Topics included talking with kids about COVID-19, tips for learning from home and maintaining engagement for kids with trauma, through to keeping kids connected to culture.

Designed to provide support and guidance for carers across Australia, the Online Lounge Rooms enabled groups of carers to connect and share, as well as hear from a subject matter expert and ask questions relevant to their situation.

Some carers and parents found the uncertainty and fluidity of COVID-19 impacts extremely stressful on top of their children and young people already experiencing the effects of trauma. By providing the Online Lounge Rooms, Adopt Change created an additional connection and a safe place for carers to discuss the issues that matter to them in a supportive and welcoming environment. The success of the lounge rooms has seen them continue beyond lockdown restrictions, keeping families across the country supported and connected into 2021.



**Dr Jane Aronson**

Ambassador

Regular speaker at Online Loungerooms



To assist in supporting effective interventions for children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, we delivered Online Loungerooms to Carers in ACT to assist them in providing trauma informed care to some of country's most vulnerable to homelessness – children in care. The grant from Hands Across Canberra facilitated Online Loungerooms with a goal to support carers during the Covid-19 crisis so they are best placed to help the kids in their care be as resilient as possible during this challenging time. The sessions had over 65 carers attend on a number of topics from self-care, keeping kids with trauma calm and engaged, to a Q&A session with Julia Rollings, ACT Local Hero and foster carer. In addition, carers were connected in three sessions with Dr Jane Aronson, global paediatrician with more than forty years' experience working with children who have experienced trauma, neglect and displacement. Other speakers included Nicola Sapsford and Dr Stacy Blythe.



Thanks to a grant from Australian Communities Foundation, the National Favourites Series of our Online Loungerooms brought back some of the popular online lounge room guest speakers of 2020, plus the addition of a few new experts, to support carers in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic. Topics include tips on how to aid emotional regulation, therapeutic parenting, preparing for the return to school, and understanding sexualised behaviour.



# MYPACK

MyPack is an Adopt Change initiative to provide first-night packs for children entering the foster care system, who sometimes enter care with nothing more than the clothes they are wearing. The backpacks include first night items such as a soft toy, hand-knitted blanket, pajamas, underwear, toothbrush and toothpaste, water bottle, colouring book/pad and a pencil case with textas. A huge thank you to our community who provide lovingly hand made blankets and toys so that kids know they are cared for. Thank you also to the following foundations who have provided grants, and/or support, to allow us to deliver MyPacks to more children in specific communities.



Each year, approximately 2,422 children enter the out of home care system in Queensland. Nambour, in Southern Queensland, was identified as an area of high need in relation to supports for children and young people as they enter care. Through the support of Sundale Community Foundation 50 packs have been distributed via local foster care agencies for children in care.



With approximately 208 children entering their first night of care in Tasmania each year, the Tasmanian MyPack Expansion Project aims to lessen the ordeal for this cohort of vulnerable and displaced young people. Regrettably Covid-19 has intensified the complexity of children at risk, and the foster care system is feeling the weight of the pandemic. Tasmanian Expansion Project aims to reach over 650 children and young people entering care in Tasmania over three years.



Moved by the plight of children and young people in care, and wanting to support the work of Adopt Change, Atlassian, through their foundation, funded the contents and packing of MyPack first night backpacks.

As part of the onboarding process at Atlassian, employees were required to spend time packing items, sewing name labels onto blankets, and hand-writing special notes for children and young people to read on their first night in care.

The packs are being distributed to front-line child protection agencies in the Central West region of NSW.



# EMPOWER CHANGE

Empower Change is an innovative and ground-breaking program to support youth transitioning from out of home care with community, information and resources. Thanks to St George Foundation, we are launching the program in 2021 in regional NSW. Care Leaver Reps will be co-facilitating sessions and instrumental in providing key inputs across the year.



Among the most disadvantaged and vulnerable cohort of society, care leavers are at a greater risk of poorer life outcomes such as homelessness and substance abuse issues. Through Empower Change, young people preparing for independence will have access to a supportive community, care leaver mentors, and a wealth of resources to assist them in navigating exiting the care system. The pilot group up to 48 young people in regional NSW will access an online portal to participate in peer support discussions and training sessions on topics from how to cook nutritious meals on a budget and how to access housing, through to safe internet usage and how to set healthy relationship boundaries, as well as being able to access valuable tips, tools and resources to assist them on their journey to independence.





# Virtual Gala Party



**Jack Thompson**  
Ambassador



**Daniella Boutros**  
Ambassador

Our sparkly shoes were getting lonely in the cupboard thanks to COVID-19 lockdowns, so we hosted an Adopt Change online gala in May 2020, where we could wear our finest frock, suit, fancy dress... or mixing it up with party and pj's! Adopt Change Ambassadors and special guests joined us for an hour of fun, messages, games, and prizes – to raise awareness and support so that more kids can be safe at home.



## CAMPAIGNS

Each year, Adopt Change champions a national campaign, where we ask the community to turn November into #Yesvember and support our work towards #AHomeForEveryChild. It brings together politicians, community, celebrities and media to focus on key issues surrounding permanency for Australian children. With its inception in National Adoption Awareness, the campaign extends to raise awareness for all children who cannot live with their family of origin and need support and a home to thrive.

Within the COVID-19 restrictions environment, we delivered a fully digital campaign and partnered with Australian fashion house Aje to deliver the campaign t-shirt. The shirts were designed, manufactured and sold exclusively by Aje, with all proceeds donated to support the work of Adopt Change. Over 250 shirts were worn to raise awareness, Aje Influencers and Adopt Change Ambassadors assisted to connect with new audiences.

A Community Service Announcement was created with our Adopt Change Ambassadors sharing

their personal stories of what 'home' means to them, and why they believe it's so important for all children to have a place to call home. Throughout the month, the emotive 'Our Journey Home' screened in a 30-second Community Service Announcement on Channel Nine and Foxtel during prime breakfast television, as well as individual more detailed stories rolled out across social media. The detailed stories were captured in a final 3-minute video, complete with childhood photos, and released toward the end of **#YESVEMBER**.

Adopt Change received significant social media traction throughout #Yesvember as Ambassadors and Influencers shared images and content.

Media engagement was extensive, with national coverage on programs such as The Morning Show and Studio 10, as well as local radio networks, newspapers, online media and podcasts.

The campaign was one the whole community could get involved in, with a list of ways people could become involved, from knitting blankets, providing an internship, sharing stories and volunteering.

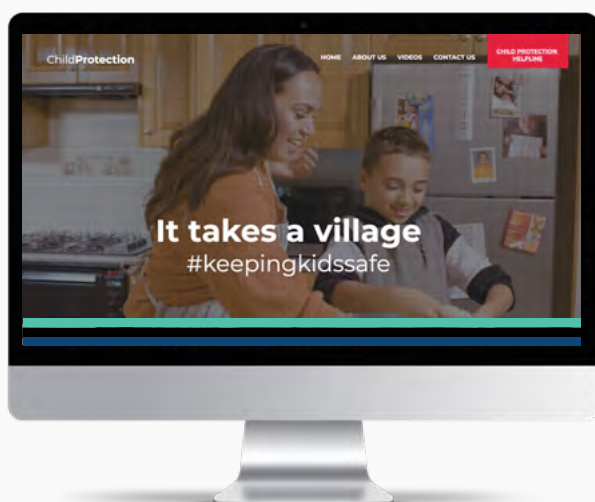




Aje.

Adrian Norris and  
Edwina Forest, Aje

YESVEMBER



During the Covid environment, Adopt Change was commissioned by NSW Advocate for Children & Young People to produce an awareness raising campaign for child safety, and collaborated with **FAMS** and **Backtrack**.

[www.keepingkidssafe.org.au](http://www.keepingkidssafe.org.au)





Caring for those who care for kids



## MY FOREVER FAMILY NSW

Today, in NSW alone, almost 17,000 children and young people are in out of home care. These children and young people require out of home care because they cannot live with their family, either for the short term or long term. Sometimes they have experienced neglect, abuse, and/or domestic violence. At My Forever Family NSW, we care for those who care for these children and young people so that they and support and nurture the children in their homes. We also seek out potential new carers, and connect them with agencies so that they can start their journey of providing care for children.

My Forever Family NSW is funded by the NSW Government and operated by Adopt Change, with contributors Professor Paul Chandler as Chair of the Advisory Committee and Continuum Consulting as a major training provider.

We are a first point of contact for potential carers, providing them with information about out of home care. Partnering with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and with accredited foster care agencies throughout NSW, we work to ensure that there is a pool of quality carers available across the state.

For authorised carers we provide training opportunities across the state, a dedicated Carer Support Team to support them with any issues, questions or advice and opportunities to connect with other carers for support and guidance. We aim to improve the experience for carers leading to better outcomes for families and the children and young people in their care.

\* Figures on p15 based on data available in 2020



OVER

**1,000**

CARER HOUSEHOLDS  
PROVIDED WITH SUPPORT

OVER

**600**

PRE-SCREENED  
REFERRALS TO  
AGENCIES

SHARED LIVES TRAINING  
DELIVERED TO OVER

**300**

POTENTIAL CARERS

OVER

**2,300**

CARERS SURVEYED  
ACROSS NSW

**1,308**

PEOPLE REGISTERED FOR  
THE ONLINE LOUNGE ROOM  
TO CONNECT AND SHARE

**3,868**

ATTENDEES AT OUR  
IN-PERSON TRAINING  
SESSIONS

**42%**

REDUCTION OF CHILDREN  
AND YOUNG PEOPLE ENTERING  
CARE BETWEEN 2016-2019

**35%**

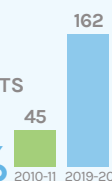
REDUCTION OF ABORIGINAL  
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

CHILDREN  
ENTERING CARE  
BETWEEN  
2015-2015 AND  
2018-2019

NSW  
RECENT  
ACHIEVEMENTS

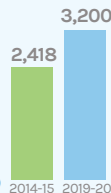
**260%**

INCREASE IN OOH  
ADOPTIONS SINCE 2011



**32%**

INCREASE IN GUARDIANSHIP  
ORDERS SINCE 2015





## SUPPORTING CARERS ON THEIR JOURNEY

Our dedicated Carer Support Team provides friendly, personal, expert advice and information via phone, email and sometimes in person. The team provides guidance through processes and resources to empower carers with knowledge. They attend Carer Reference Groups, a model supporting carer participation with non-government agencies and the Department of Communities and Justice to work towards improving foster care. The team also assist carers to set up Carer Support Groups (peer support groups), allowing carers to build their carer community through connection, and are involved in training and online lounge rooms.

On average, the Carer Support Team assists 140 carer households across NSW per month.

*"I don't want to imagine a life without My Forever Family NSW... Thank you for the support and understanding. Fostering is a very lonely life, as many cannot or will not enter into the life of a traumatised child and supports such as My Forever Family NSW make life just a little easier and sweeter."*

Carer

*"It is important to have support as a foster carer. It was really priceless talking to you, and I felt really supported."*

Carer

## TRAINING

Ensuring carers have the skills and know-how to provide the best possible care for children and young people — many with trauma backgrounds—is absolutely critical. This is why My Forever Family NSW has hosted **261** training events across the state, in person and online, plus a series of **24** recorded training courses accessible at any time. Over **6,535** attendances by foster and kinship carers, guardians, and adoptive parents for training sessions have been recorded since launch.

Popular training topics have included Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Memory, Understanding Children that have been Exposed to Violence, Tentacles of Trauma presented by Sarah Dillon (UK) and sessions on guardianship and reparative parenting.

*"I have to say I love the online training sessions - all your facilitators so far have been amazing and experts in their topics!"*

Rose, Carer



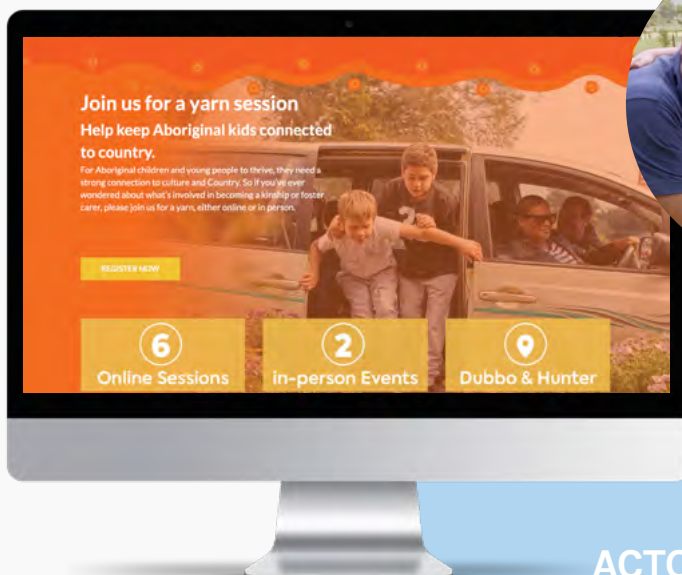
## CAMPAIGNS TO FIND MORE HOMES TO CARE FOR KIDS

Since July 2019, we have successfully run 16 campaigns to recruit carers for children and young people in need of a safe, secure and stable home.

These have included campaigns for siblings, part time care, special needs, foster and kinship care, guardianship and adoption, emergency care, and to engage with potential Aboriginal kinship and foster carers for Aboriginal children.

*"Thank you so much for referring us to <agency>. We have been approved and are actually fostering two young girls!"*

Carer



**Luke Carroll**  
Ambassador

## ACTOR & MY FOREVER FAMILY NSW AMBASSADOR LUKE CARROLL

Almost 40% of the children and young people living in out of home care in NSW are Aboriginal, so there is an urgent need for more Aboriginal families to assist those in their community unable to live at home. Keeping Aboriginal children connected to country and culture, whilst providing a safe and nurturing family home, is critical.

Proud father and Australian Film Industry nominated actor, Luke Carroll, has called on the Aboriginal community to come together and support Aboriginal kids in need. "As a proud father and Aboriginal man from the Wiradjuri nation, my kids and my culture are a big part of my life. My late mother was a kinship carer, providing a safe and loving home to my cousin, and keeping us connected to our culture," ~ **Luke Carroll**.

# OUR FOUNDER, BOARD & CEO



**Deborra-lee Furness**  
Founder

Deborra-lee Furness is an internationally acclaimed actress as well as a passionate supporter of children and defender of their human rights across the globe. Deborra-lee's humanitarian work for children is a driving force in her life.

It is her passion that children all over the world be given every chance to live a fulfilled life and achieve their full potential. As founder of National Adoption Awareness Month (NAAM) and Adopt Change in Australia, Deborra-lee has been a driving force for improving adoption programs, procedures and legislation, and raising awareness and understanding of the issues of vulnerable children.

She is Patron of the Lighthouse Foundation for displaced children in Melbourne Australia; World Vision Ambassador, Patron of the Bone Marrow Donor Institute for children with leukemia; Patron of International Adoptive Families of Queensland; she sits on the board of World Wide Orphans Australia and is newly appointed on the board of the UN Women for Peace Association in New York. Deborra-lee has been honoured extensively both in Australia and internationally for her work to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children.

For her advocacy work she has been honoured by World Wide Orphans in New York, The Joint Council USA and in 2013 was given the prestigious award of Angel in Adoption by



**Victoria Buchan**  
Chair

the Congressional Coalition on Adoption in Washington DC. Harlem Village Academies honored Deborra-lee and her husband Hugh for their philanthropy work in 2012. She was presented with 2014 International Humanitarian Award in Utah by Mentors International. She was named NSW Australian of the Year 2015. Also in 2015, Deborra-lee was honored in Washington as Advocate of the Year by Kidsave.

Deborra-Lee is the co-founder of the newly launched Hopeland organization which is a US-based platform driving awareness around the issue of vulnerable children. The mission of Hopeland is to ensure children belong in loving families. Hopeland is about family strengthening and community empowerment and driving creative solutions for vulnerable and abandoned children globally.

**Victoria Buchan**  
Chair

As Director of Communications and Public Relations at the Nine Network Australia, Victoria Buchan has extensive experience in the corporate communications sector. Previously Victoria owned and operated The Lantern Group and still retains a role as Director of the company that specialises in publicity and media relations in the entertainment industry.

Victoria began her career as a journalist on the Daily Mirror before joining Network 10 as a



**Helen Baker**  
Board Director

publicist during the booming production years in the late 1980s. She has worked with some of Australia's most influential media groups, including Fairfax, Fox Studios Australia and the Australian Broadcasting Commission where she was Director Of Corporate Affairs.

Victoria's journey with the adoption community began whilst working with Deborra-lee Furness and discovering the injustices families encountered via media stories on the issue. Inspired by those who have the courage to fight for change and the rights of children around the world to have a loving family, she and Deborra-lee have continued along this path together. Since beginning this work she has been touched by so many people, including her own family and friends who have some experience with adoption.

**Helen Baker**  
Board Director

Adopted from the Philippines, Helen is a passionate and determined advocate for adoption who believes all children have the right to grow up in a loving and permanent home. Helen brings her professional and personal adoption experience to the Board. With a background in legal and professional services (currently in senior management at Deloitte), together with owning and operating a legal recruitment



**Dr. Tom Bourdon**  
Board Director

company for over ten years, she is a highly motivated and driven individual. When Helen is not running around after her three children, she is running marathons; the Great Wall of China marathon being the highlight so far. Helen is currently in the process of searching for birth family in the Philippines.

**Dr. Tom Bourdon**  
Board Director

Dr. Tom Bourdon is an organizational leader and consultant who has worked at the helm of multiple Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), social justice, LGBTQI, and education-focused organizations. Over the past two decades, Tom has served as Head of Inclusion & Diversity at Staples, Executive Director of Greater Boston PFLAG, and Director of LGBT Centers at UCLA, NYU and Tufts University (where he also led Tufts' Social Justice Leadership Initiative).

Tom has coached, trained and consulted with thousands of individuals at countless organizations in the corporate, non-profit, education and government sectors. He has also been an Adjunct Professor at Merrimack College since 2013, where he teaches graduate-level courses on diversity, social justice and identity development. Most importantly to Tom, he



**Kerry Chikarovski**  
Board Director

holds the title of 'out and proud gay husband and father' and he enjoys nothing more than spending time with his husband Jimmy and their children, Lukas and Maya. Tom and Jimmy became parents through an open adoption process in the United States and have been fortunate to know countless other parents and children who have gone through a similar journey. Having relocated to Australia in 2019, it is Tom's hope to increase education and awareness in Australia around the many positive aspects of adoption.

Tom hopes to help create a cultural shift where adoption is seen as a loving and viable option, particularly for birth parents who find themselves in a situation where they are unable to raise their child(ren). Tom received his Doctorate in Organizational Leadership from Northeastern University, his Masters of Education from UCLA, and his Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from Babson College. He also holds a certification in Life Coaching from New York University.

**Kerry Chikarovski**  
Board Director

One of the country's most respected and admired former politicians, Kerry "Chika" Chikarovski began her career as a solicitor before making the decision to enter parliament. Encouraged by a brief but memorable meeting with a dashing young Robert Kennedy,



**Catherine McDonnell**  
Board Director

Kerry knew from an early age that she wanted to be a politician and in 1991 she won pre-selection against the odds for the safe seat of Lane Cove on Sydney's north shore - one that had been earmarked for a male colleague. In Government Kerry held a number of Portfolios including Minister for Consumer Affairs, Assistant Minister of Education, Minister for Industrial Relations, and the first Minister for the Status of Women appointed in NSW. In 1998 Ms Chikarovski was elected Leader of the NSW Parliamentary Liberal Party, the first woman to lead a major political party in NSW.

Today Kerry is a highly sought after and successful businesswoman. Chika's own government relations business, Chikarovski & Associates, advise clients across a range of industry sectors on policy and regulatory issues, as well as in relation to major projects and procurement.

Kerry brings to the Board of Adopt Change her strong political background, vast experience in dealing with government and business, and an ability to understand complex issues across a broad sector.

**Catherine McDonnell**  
Board Director

Catherine has been practising media and entertainment law for over 25 years and has actively served on the Board of various not-for-profit organisations for over eight years. Catherine brings significant corporate governance experience to the Board of



**Mark Nixon**  
Board Director

Adopt Change and joined the Board to use her skills to improve the future for children needing families.

**Mark Nixon**  
Board Director

Mark is an Partner with Professional Services EY, who has a passion to assist those most vulnerable in our community. His passion comes from his public sector experience being in the Senior Executive Service but primarily from his time as a NSW Police Officer. He saw first hand the impacts of child abuse and poorer life outcomes for those who have suffered from abuse.

He is committed to improving the life outcomes of children and young people and has been working in the sector for the past 15 years. He knows that every child deserves a stable home and is to be loved and cherished.

He has joined board of Adopt Change because he sees this organisation as making a difference to the lives of children and young people through educating parents, advocacy but above all providing a home for life. It is the fundamental tenet of safety and security for a child's wellbeing.

Mark is married to Sarah and has 2 young daughters who keep him busy. He also spends time with his two older boys by playing waterpolo with them. It's one of life's great pleasures playing sport with your kids.



**Renée Carter**  
Chief Executive Officer

**Renée Carter**  
Chief Executive Officer

Renée Carter is the CEO of Adopt Change, which also operates the program My Forever Family NSW. Renée is also a member of the Institute Advisory Group for the independent research centre Institute of Open Adoption Studies (The University of Sydney) and is Vice Chair of the NSW Committee on Adoption and Permanent Care (COAPC).

Renée is a member of Australian Institute of Company Directors, and has a strong background in communications and executive management, along with board level experience in corporate and not-for-profit sectors. Her experience includes three years as Chair of charity Child Abuse Prevention Service (CAPS), an organisation focused on early intervention, education and support of families and communities; and was previously Managing Director of corporate communications specialists Designate Group.

Renée is passionate about influencing child welfare policy and practice to deliver timely and effective outcomes for children so they can have better childhood experiences and a brighter future, by garnering community, sector and government support.





## BECOME A CHANGEMAKER – SUPPORT OUR WORK

Email us for information or to get involved!

[changemakers@adoptchange.org.au](mailto:changemakers@adoptchange.org.au)

If you want to support Adopt Change as we work towards **#AHomeForEveryChild**, you can become a Changemaker:

- ✔ **Sign up to our community** to receive updates, newsletters, event invitations and learn how to support the cause. Follow us on social media and share our campaigns.
- ✔ **Become a Changemaker Volunteer** and provide your time and skills in a variety of ways including social media, writing and assisting at events. If your company allows volunteer hours for you and your team, there are larger projects you can assist us with as we all work towards positive change for children and young people.
- ✔ Speak with us about **becoming a foster carer or adoptive parent**. We need all kinds of carers, including part time carers for one weekend per month.
- ✔ **Donate** to support our work towards every child having a safe, nurturing and stable home, school and community environment.
- ✔ **Knit a blanket** to include in our first-night foster care backpacks, to show kids someone cares.
- ✔ **Provide an internship** at your organisation for a care leaver. Get in touch with us to find out more.
- ✔ **Support our Yesvember campaign** in November to raise awareness and create change. Visit our website for more information.
- ✔ Donate items to support care leavers. 18-year-olds still need support too! Computers, vouchers, new supplies... Get in touch to find out what items are needed.



**Emily Hikiati**  
Ambassador



**Joel de Carteret**  
Ambassador



# MEET TWO OF OUR CHANGEMAKERS

Adopt Change Changemakers are passionate about improving the lives of children and young people, and include Volunteers, Ambassadors, Influencers, our board and staff team. We work with some extraordinary Changemakers.

Joel de Carteret and Emily Hikiati – both Adopt Change Ambassadors with lived experience of living away from their family of origin – are two of those making a positive difference.

## Emily Hikiati

Emily spent most of her childhood in foster care and was homeless six times. Emily's early years were certainly turbulent, and she did not have the safe, stable and nurturing environment Adopt Change strongly advocates for, so that children and young people just like her to thrive. Despite this, Emily was determined to break the cycle—and the foster kid stereotype.

An esteemed member of her local Youth and Wellbeing Council and shortlisted for the Advocate for Children and Young People's NSW Youth Advisory Council three years running, Emily is not letting life pass her by. She is a valued member of the CREATE community, having been a Young Consultant, as well as leading CREATE's government caseworker training, and speaking and emceeing at various national and state conferences and launch events.

Changemaker Emily is passionate about reducing youth homelessness by extending the leaving care age and providing young people in care with better support networks. This has recently been executed through her newest business – providing advocacy and consultation on an individual, group, and systematic level around Australia. She is following her dreams too, owning and operating two businesses, including a successful photography business. But her greatest achievement to date is her adorable five-year-old.

At only 20 years of age, Emily is already breaking through barriers. Her involvement in our recent conference and #Yesvember campaigns are only the beginning, and we are excited to see the changes our newest and youngest Adopt Change Ambassador will lead and be part of, particularly of our new initiative Empower Change – a program to assist 15-18 year olds preparing for independence from care and providing them with a community of support.

## Joel de Carteret

At five years of age, Joel's life in the Philippines changed in an instant when he was separated from his family and found in a busy marketplace. Words cannot express the grief and despair Joel felt as he desperately tried to find his loved ones, which was, as the saying goes, like looking for a needle in a haystack. Heartbreakingly, Joel was unsuccessful in his attempts and was taken to an orphanage, where he was adopted by an Australian family almost two years later.

Fast forward three decades, and Joel was living a positive and enjoyable life in Australia as a renowned film maker and world-class storyteller. However, the gaping hole in Joel's heart was growing increasingly impossible to ignore, so he set out to find his birth mother in a country with over 110 million people. With virtually nothing to go on except knowing the date and location he was found, it was Joel's sheer grit and determination that overcame the most insurmountable odds, and he was reunited with his long-lost parents.

Joel – whose story was featured on 60 Minutes – is a sought-after keynote speaker, and combines film, music and photography into his unique talks. He says, though, that if it wasn't for his adoptive parents providing him with a safe and nurturing home, he doesn't know where he would have ended up. Joel's experiences have made him the person he is today—a committed Adopt Change Ambassador using his amazing talent, significant passion for and commitment to **#AHomeForEveryChild**.

# IN THE MEDIA

To ensure the wellbeing of children and young people remains on the agenda in Australia, Adopt Change has a focus on raising awareness through media opportunities. This assists with finding new potential carer homes for children; raising awareness around permanency (including adoption) matters; and ensuring children are kept safe and supported at home, at school and in the community.

Some of the media outlets that featured Adopt Change and My Forever Family NSW content throughout the year included; SBS World News, ABC News Breakfast, Studio 10, Channel 7 The Morning Show, NITV News, 2GB, 4BC, B105, WSFM, 2SER, 2CC, SBS News Radio, Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Daily Telegraph, The Canberra Times, The Courier Mail, The West Australian, The Daily Mail, various community radio stations and numerous other outlets.

Some stories also received syndication across numerous mastheads throughout the year and the organisation featured in the above media outlets on multiple occasions in some instances.

A sample of some of the media appearances included are as follows. Media articles can be located on our website.

## Yesvember

### TV

Adopt Change CEO Renee Carter on ABC News Breakfast

### Radio

2SER – The Wire (Community and Indigenous Radio) – Simulcast to 110 Community radio stations, ‘Challenging Australia’s out of home care with Yesvember’

### Print

The West Australian – Yesvember: Australian businesses need to do more to help kids in out of home care

## Aboriginal Carers

### TV & Online

SBS – NITV News  
– New campaign urgently calls for more Aboriginal foster carers

### Print

National Indigenous Times  
– Braidon Burns and Luke Carroll faces of new First Nations carer campaign

## Australian Capital Territory

### Print & Online

The Canberra Times  
– ‘Advocates welcome changes to ACT adoptions to put children’s needs first’

### Radio

2CC in Canberra  
– Stephen Cenatiempo spoke with Renee Carter about the changes to the adoption laws in the ACT.

## Australian Capital Territory

### Print & Online

The Canberra Times  
– ‘Advocates welcome changes to ACT adoptions to put children’s needs first’

### Radio

2CC in Canberra  
– Stephen Cenatiempo spoke with Renee Carter about the changes to the adoption laws in the ACT.

## Queensland

### Print & Online

The Courier Mail  
– Shameful stat lays bare child safety crisis

### Print

The Courier Mail  
– It’s time we adopted some real solutions – Print Only

### Radio

4BC – Breakfast with Neil Breen  
– Renee Carter discusses her article in the Courier Mail (23:23 to 27:04)



#### **The Morning Show**

Founder Deborah-lee Furness spoke on the importance of supporting Australia's most vulnerable kids



#### **ABC TV ABC News Breakfast**

CEO Renée Carter spoke with ABC News Breakfast about the impact of COVID-19 on families, Yesvember, and how everyone can do something to support #AHomeForEveryChild.

#### **Future Women Leadership Series Podcast with Helen McCabe**

Renée Carter had a candid conversation with Future Women founder and host Helen McCabe about finding purpose through work, transferring skills across different sectors and the difference between leading in corporate and not-for-profit sectors.

# #A HOME FOR EVERY CHILD





### Want to get involved?

Enquire about joining our  
Changemakers team  
[changemakers@adoptchange.org.au](mailto:changemakers@adoptchange.org.au)



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