

Friday 20 April 2018

Media Release



Foster & Kinship Carer Week 2018

This *Foster and Kinship Carer Week* (held from 22-29 April) Althea Projects are urging families across North Queensland to consider becoming foster or kinship carers and help address the growing shortage of safe, loving and stable homes available for children in care.

Recent statistics* reveal more than 8000 children across Queensland are in family-based care due to complex family issues, however there are approximately 1000 more children who are waiting for homes.

Foster and Kinship Carer Week recognises and celebrates the 5,000 wonderful and dedicated foster, kinship and relative carers in Queensland who work tirelessly to keep children safe and help them fulfil their dreams.

Foster carer Leann Pascoe, of Cluden in Townsville, who currently parents seven foster children, says the decision to foster was made 11 years ago with her husband and two teenage sons' because "we had extra room and extra places in our heart to love more children". Leann and husband Brad have fostered an amazing 35 vulnerable children, offering them stability and a home full of love.

Children who enter care are commonly from families with complex social issues, such as drug or alcohol abuse, where it has been found it is no longer safe for them to live with their family. Children may be placed with a foster family for weeks, months, years or until the age of 18 years depending on factors such as court orders.

"If everyone can just open their homes and give a child, even if it is just one child, their love and care," Mrs Pascoe says. "They didn't ask to be born into this situation; they just need to know that something's different, that there is better out there for them."

"Just that one child's life you make a difference in; maybe they will be the next Prime Minister of Australia or maybe the next Cathy Freeman. Every child just needs to be loved and be cared for so they can reach their dreams."

Mrs Pascoe says the most rewarding part of foster care is watching children grow to find their voice and independence. "For a child in care to find their voice and find they are comfortable enough to backchat us is something we look at with pride, because we have given them the stability and the home that they feel they can say what they need to say."

"They are the little milestones that you take for granted every day, but for these children they are such big steps."

Community-based not-for-profit service Althea Projects plays a vital role in recruiting and supporting foster and kinship carers in the Townsville region; as well as providing other vital family support services. Born out of the hardship of Cyclone Althea in 1971, Althea Projects continues to have the welfare of children, families and young people at the very heart of its services.

Leann Pascoe is a dedicated Althea Projects foster carer who has been supported by the Shared Family Care team along her journey. She is honest about the challenges and rewards of looking after, and coming to love, children with complex family situations.

"It's not easy. I won't sit here and tell you it's easy, because it is not," Mrs Pascoe says. "But seeing the children's faces and the difference you make – it is what keeps us going."

To become a foster or kinship carer, call the Althea Projects Shared Family Care team on 07 4779 3332 or visit www.altheaprojects.org.au for more information.

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**As at 30 September 2016, across Queensland there were 9268 children who could not live safely at home due to complex family issues. Of these children, 8176 were in family-based care; including 3949 placed with kin and 4227 placed in other family-based care (for example, other foster carers).*

Media enquiries

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Interview opportunities

(Name, Position title) is available for interview.

About Althea Projects

Althea Projects Incorporated (Althea Projects) is a grass-roots, community based not-for-profit based in Townsville. From 1974 to present, Althea Projects (formerly known as Wee Care Family Incorporated) has been consistent in our commitment to supporting and strengthening the capacity of vulnerable families, children and young people within Townsville and surrounding regions. Althea Projects operates in an integrated, place-based approach with other service providers and key stakeholders in working with families across the full range of complex issues that face families and children. The organisation operates from a child centered family focussed and culturally inclusive framework.