

# Dozens of children are living in hotels across our Diocese due to a lack of foster carers

Every day, CatholicCare's Permanency Practice Leader, Miriam, receives between 50 and 100 requests for foster care placements. "We currently have only two sets of emergency carers, so our options are very limited to help with these requests. That's how dire it is has become, and other agencies are in the same boat."

When foster care placements cannot be found, children are placed in hotel rooms with workers on rotating rosters.

**Today, on the Central Coast there are 42 children living in hotels with paid workers, and 50% of these children are aged 10 years and under. Sadly, 14 of these children have been living like this for more than a year. The situation is similar across Northern Sydney and the Northern Beaches, where there is currently a 3 year old child staying in a hotel.**

"Five years ago, it was unheard of to have children under 5 staying in hotel rooms," says Miriam. "We used to have no issues finding carers for this age group, but the situation is now so dire that we have babies coming out of hospitals and going into hotels. It's extraordinary."

Miriam recalls one sibling group whose foster carer relinquished care of them unexpectedly this year. "The carer came to us and said, 'I can't do this. I've

got health problems that have become so severe that I need to relinquish care of these four kids today.'" Due to the shortage of emergency carers, only two of the children were able to be placed with foster carers.

The youngest two children, aged 7 and 8, were sent to a hotel in Wyong with paid workers. "They were so confused," Miriam recalls. "They were crying and asking, 'Why can't we go home?'"

The two youngest children have since been split up again, and one has been sent to Victoria. "They are like deer in headlights," Miriam says. "Their faces have no expression. They are in a constant state of 'Where am I going? What am I doing? Who will be my family?' It's heartbreaking to see. The young fella, when I last saw him, could only nod. He was so shell shocked that he couldn't verbalise. All the studies show that these alternative accommodations with paid workers deliver the worst possible outcomes for children."

Since the COVID outbreak, there has been a drastic decline in people considering foster care. "During lockdowns it was difficult for people to be assessed and the current cost-of-living crisis has also deterred people," Miriam says. The situation is particularly dire on the Northern Beaches where

there are very few carers. As a result, children from the Northern Beaches who end up in foster care must move to another district, which means changing schools, losing friendships and starting over, making an already traumatic experience much worse.

Miriam says that there are many misconceptions about becoming a foster carer. "People think that you need to give up working, which simply isn't true. With the rising cost-of-living, it's impossible to stop working so we support foster carers with daycare arrangements, even for young babies."

Another myth is around birth family contact and the level of involvement from the carer. "The reality is that if there is a security risk or any sort of safety or privacy concern, these contacts are supervised by professionals," Miriam says. "Foster carers aren't expected to manage risky situations. It's just not on the agenda."

"You don't need to be gushing with love ... you simply realise that you have the power to make a difference," Miriam says. "Everything else, your income bracket, socio-economic status and whether you are married or single, doesn't matter. Our foster carers come from all walks of life," Miriam says.

Through no fault of their own, over 15,000 children across NSW cannot live with their birth families. The role of foster carers is to give these children what they need to not only survive, but to thrive. "Initially there will be a period of adjustment," Miriam explains.

**Can you open your heart or your home to a child or young person in need? Please call Sandra on (02) 9481 2600, email [info@catholiccaredbb.org.au](mailto:info@catholiccaredbb.org.au) or visit [www.catholiccaredbb.org.au/catholic-foster-care](http://www.catholiccaredbb.org.au/catholic-foster-care).**





## David's long road to adoption

David is a young person in CatholicCare's foster care program and we have been working with his family for over five years. The family have had their ups and downs, as most families do, and CatholicCare has walked alongside the family, as they have consistently and patiently cared for David.

Three years ago, with the support of CatholicCare, David's foster family made the decision to move toward adoption to ensure David would always be part of their family. Despite the commitment and enthusiasm of all involved, the string of COVID lockdowns led to excessive delays in what is already a considerably lengthy administrative and legal process.

The family never gave up on the adoption goal and our foster care team shepherded them through the gruelling process. David's disability posed an additional complexity as the Court needed assurance that David understood what adoption was and

that he was able to submit informed views to the Court. To achieve this, David's Case Manager developed a mini adoption curriculum complete with fun quizzes to ensure that David knew exactly what to expect and what adoption was.

Obtaining the consent and support of David's biological family was also challenging but David's Case Manager worked diligently to ensure that the views of his biological family were considered and to assure David's birth mother that contemporary open adoption is very different to what it was twenty years ago. The process also saw David reconnect with his extended family, which was a tremendous achievement given they had not been present in his life for many years.

Regular case management duties don't stop when a Case Manager is tasked with an adoption matter. The team had their hands full ensuring the family had all the required supports in place long into the future

so that they would be supported post-adoption.

CatholicCare then worked tirelessly to draft the required Court documents alongside the Department of Communities & Justice, support workers, assessors and David's family to manage the Court process until happily this year David's adoption was at long last approved by the Court.

In addition to his Mum and Dad, David wanted one other person to be present to celebrate the special day, his CatholicCare Case Manager.

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*\* Story shared from our annual report. Name and photo have been changed to protect the child's privacy.*