



Mallee Family Care Strengthening Support for Foster Carers and Children

Mallee Family Care has partnered with Oregon Social Learning Centre Developments Inc, a non-profit, collaborative, multi-disciplinary research centre located in Eugene, Oregon, United States of America. Together we have launched the Keeping Families Supported and Trained Program (KEEP), to the Mallee region. The introduction of KEEP in the Mallee is extremely significant, as we are the only organisation in Australia delivering this program.

KEEP is an evidence-based support and skill enhancement education program that concentrates on educating foster carers with positive parenting strategies, prioritising child well-being with an emphasis on the prevention of placement breakdowns.

KEEP was developed in response to alarming findings in numerous studies, which highlighted that many of today's foster children have complex and serious behavioural and mental health problems that place them at risk of negative long-term outcomes. The enormous potential of these young people and the tough challenges faced by foster carers, inspired the development of the KEEP program in the United States.

The KEEP program includes 16 weekly 90-minute sessions that focus on practical, research-based parenting techniques. KEEP does not use a "one size fits all" curriculum, while the facilitators draw from an established protocol manual, they tailor each session to the specific needs, circumstances, and priorities of participating carers and their children in care.

Mallee Family Care were fortunate enough to host KEEP facilitators, Rohanna Buchanan, Senior Scientist and KEEP Clinical Director, and Katie Bennet, KEEP Implementation Director from Oregon Developments Inc, as they travelled to the Mallee to conduct a 5-day training block for the Care and Placement Services team from both the Swan Hill and Mildura locations.

As the program originates from the United States, the Mallee Family Care and Care Placement Services team worked closely with Rohanna and Katie, to tailor the program's content to suit the specific requirements of the Mallee region.

Eight members of our Care and Placement Services team underwent the training and are now qualified to lead KEEP sessions as Group Leaders.

The KEEP program has recently been delivered in the Southern Mallee, with a group of six foster carers successfully graduating. The group was led by KEEP Coordinator, Alicia (Ali) Knight, and Senior Family Services Worker, Anita McDonald.

Ali and Anita tailored the sessions according to the issues and suggestions raised by the group's participants, ensuring that the sessions met the needs of our carers. Weekly check-ins with group members took place, and data is gathered on child behaviour and caregiver stress, which will help monitor program results.

We have seen remarkable progress and positive feedback from the initial cohort of foster carers participating in the KEEP program. The tailored approach has fostered an environment of trust and open communication within the groups, allowing participants to address their specific challenges and concerns effectively. Many



For all media enquiries:

Nicole Manthorpe | Communications Manager

T: 03 5023 5966 **E:** nmanthorpe@malleefamilycare.com.au



caregivers have reported feeling more equipped and confident in handling complex behavioural and emotional issues, leading to improved relationships and a more nurturing home environment for the foster children.

As the program continues to evolve, Mallee Family Care remains committed to fostering a nurturing and supportive environment for all those involved in the foster care system and we look forward to developing this program further alongside all of our valued carers across the Mallee region.

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