

# NEWSLETTER

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*The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People advocates for and promotes the best interests of young people and children under the care of the Minister for Families and Communities.*

## Flexible funds for kids in care – the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund

Each year the Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund for Children and Young People distributes around \$330,000 to young people who are, or who have been, under guardianship of the Minister.

In February and September between 60 and 100 applications are received per funding round from children and young people who apply for funds to help them achieve personal goals, pursue opportunities for self-development or improve their health and wellbeing. A board, which includes young people who have been in care, recommends how the grants, usually of \$1,000 to \$3,000, are distributed.

In the past, applicants have put the funds to a variety of uses including enrolment expenses to attend pre-vocational courses, travel expenses to participate in overseas exchange programs, musical instruments and lessons, assistance with setting up houses and computers to assist with study and obtaining employment.

Louise Hawthorne, who co-ordinates the Fund for Community Connect within the Department for Families and Communities is enthusiastic about the role of the young people on the Board.

‘They bring a range of experience and skills and most importantly are able to empathise with applicants and their needs.

‘These positions help immensely with the allocation of funding and bring diversity to the Board.’

Young Board member Jessica Parker had just finished considering some of the 105 applications for assistance in this round with her fellow Board members.

‘I’ve been on the Board now for over a year and I think that having input from young people in making these decisions is important.

‘We have to understand how the grants will help young people achieve their goals and for that we need a range of opinions and knowledge.

‘I like that we have the flexibility to really assist young people in ways they cannot be helped by other schemes. The amount of money is often not large but the impact can be.’

For more information go to the [Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund](#) website.



**Dame Roma Mitchell Trust Fund Board member Jessica Parker takes a break from considering funding applications.**



Pam Simmons  
Guardian

## Letter from the Guardian for Children and Young People

I have had the privilege recently of hearing the views of many people with great expertise and wisdom on the topic of safe keeping. Safe keeping is the statutory confinement in a specific location of a child or young person where no offence has been committed but they are detained because their safety and wellbeing is at substantial risk.

There is growing interest in this topic across Australia. Both the Layton Report in 2003 and the Mullighan Report in 2008 recommended a secure therapeutic facility and arrangements in South Australia. The authors were understandably disturbed by the state's seeming lack of ability to prevent young people from running away from state care and putting themselves at risk of grave exploitation. In June the Office of the Guardian issued a discussion paper on this topic and I thank those of you who responded to it and the participants of the round table discussion.

While listening to diverse opinions I formed the view that the government should not proceed with introducing the legislation and facilities for safe keeping for children. First, in the absence of other intensive therapeutic residential services, I am not convinced that it is necessary to detain children in order to engage them with an intensive service. Second, there is a high likelihood of abuse of purpose of the legal orders and facility because there is limited access to community-based therapeutic services and over-demand on the alternative care system. In other words, if we had tried other intensive therapeutic services first then the argument would be stronger for detaining some children to provide them with a service. But we have not. The therapeutic services for children and young people with high needs are thin on the ground.

Instead I suggest we implement a number of other reforms ahead of introducing safe keeping provisions. They are:

- Improved intensive therapeutic services for children in existing residential and family-based care, including those in youth training centres.
- Improved development opportunities and supervision for children in residential care including a higher staff to resident ratio.
- Protective behaviours training and sexual health education available to all residents of residential facilities.
- Smaller numbers of children accommodated in the residential facilities, from the 10-12 now to a maximum of six.
- Greater control over admission to residential facilities to enhance resident cohesion and the therapeutic environment, and clearer definition of purpose of each unit.
- Introduction of a strategy for assisting children with high and complex needs which recognises the need for intensive and highly-skilled case management and therapeutic care.
- An outreach service that locates, engages with and supports children who are missing from placement or who are putting themselves at high risk.
- Amendment to the *Summary Procedures Act* to restrain adults who exploit children by offering them shelter, drugs, or other goods in return for sexual favours.

There is a lot of support for better addressing the needs of children and young people who run away from their care placements and for whom the available help is not enough. I expect that we will see some changes in the next year that will make progress here. However, it will not be done by practice change and goodwill alone. We need a concerted financial and policy commitment to responding well to children and young people with high and complex needs.

# What's been done

September – November 2008

Working with our Youth Advisors, and with help from others, we have written a checklist for child-sensitive records. We use it in our office and it may help you and your agency ensure that case records and reports are written with the child in mind. It will become available on our website shortly.

The two comic books prepared by young people in care are in their final stages and should arrive at your agencies soon. Look out for them and help us distribute them to children and young people.

The 2008 field consultation is well underway and will finish in December. There are some themes coming through, including concern about children who are not allocated to a case worker and the inadequate response to children and young people with high needs. There is good news in the greater clarity about children's payments, improved inter-agency work and flexibility in creating placement arrangements around the needs of the child.

We have completed a progress report on children missing from residential care, given advice to the Minister on a secure care therapeutic facility, and commented on the national education reform agenda and the Families SA records disposal schedule. A report was also completed following our review of records of safety in the youth training centres.

The literature review on participation of children and young people in decisions made about their care was completed and released.

Our major inquiry for 2008-09 is to look at what is quality contact between a child and her or his case worker and what benefits accrue to the child. The project plan has been prepared and we will report on its progress in the next newsletter.

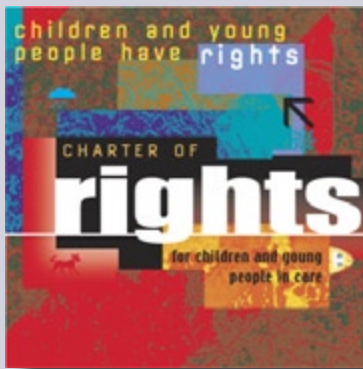
In early November two new staff members joined us to take up the newly created positions of Advocates. We welcome Lisa Firth and Gino Iuliano and we will introduce you to them properly in the next newsletter.

Our thanks to the young people at the Magill and Cavan youth training centres and the staff who supported them for their excellent entries for the Christmas card design contest this year. The cards, once signed by the Minister for Families and Communities and the Guardian, will be delivered to Families SA district centres in mid November for workers to attach their personal greetings and send on to children and young people in care.



*The winning designs from Cavan (above) and Magill (top) for the 2008 Christmas card contest*





**The benefits of being loved are profound. The bonds of love are enduring, sometimes persisting through the experience of neglect and abuse.**

## The right to be loved

In 2005, a group of South Australian children and young people in care selected 37 important rights to go into their Charter of Rights. When the Office of the Guardian came to distil the essence of these rights into a few succinct quality statements for its monitoring framework, one of the last to be added was 'This child is loved'.

It was not that we denied the importance of love but among the other precise and objectively verifiable statements it looked ambiguous and elusive. In the end, its claim to a place in the 12 quality statements could not be denied.

The benefits of being loved have been captured in *Celebrating Success: What Helps Looked After Children Succeed* published by the Scottish Government in June 2008. In a survey of young people in care, 23 of the 32 participants, when asked what helped them to be successful, immediately identified a person who cared about them.

I've got a good relationship with [my foster parents] - they treat me like their own child so I return it, you know? (Ross)

Anne, foster mother of Daniel, says 'He's one of our own, always has been and always will be' and her daughter Celia says 'He feels like a proper brother and always will be'.

But beyond reciprocal affection, feelings of nurture, warmth and safety are implied by, and imply, a caring relationship. To a young person, being loved can mean...

Having nice things and not being dirty and cold and hungry all the time.  
And not having to do work all the time, being at some adult's beck and call ... having privacy, having your own room, having simple things that others take for granted, like deodorant and sanitary towels when you needed them.  
(Claire)

The comments of the Scottish young people also demonstrate that being loved can open the way into a world of other positive connections and experiences.

They don't leave you out or nothing ... you feel like you are part of the family. They just treat us the way they treat their own son ... my foster sister, who's the same age as me, she's actually got a daughter and when I see them, whenever I see my nieces and nephews it's like 'uncle Liam' and it's cool.  
(Liam)

We were always involved...going along with my foster mother to dances and stuff like that which was actually great fun and a big treat ... and there were holidays ... it was a family situation. (Shona)

Being loved gives fundamental lessons about how positive relationships work and sends powerful messages that go to the heart of one's worth as a human being.

I think the most folk need is trust. If you can see that somebody trusts you it makes you feel happier, it makes you feel as though you want to get it right in your life. It makes you want to get your life sorted out and basically get on with it. (Darren)

My foster carers trust me, and they love me like I was their own daughter.  
(Tanya)

The benefits of being loved are profound. The bonds of love are enduring, sometimes persisting through the experience of neglect and abuse. The bonds are diverse in form ranging from the robust affection of the workplace, the obligations and connections of a clan group, to the passionate singular attachment to a parent, sibling or partner. In all forms, the healthy loving relationships of children and young people in care are worthy of our closest attention. Can the child in care who you know name people who love her? Does the child you know have people who talk of their love for him?

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# The Convention on the Rights of the Child

In July this year, the federal government closed submissions for its report to the United Nations regarding our compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Non-government organisations are in the process of finalising their own report. Both reports will eventually make their way to the United Nations which will assess how well Australia has promoted the rights of children and young people over the last five years.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) is an international agreement that sets out rights and protections for children and young people aged under 18. They include the right to protection and assistance; decisions made in the best interests of the child; the right for children and young people to develop to their fullest potential; and the right to grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding.

CROC is an attempt to put into practice the principle that ‘humanity owes the child the best it can give’. Whilst human rights instruments can seem esoteric and even irrelevant to some, CROC makes an important statement about how we view and value our children and young people.

Countries that are signatories about CROC are required to report periodically to their implementation of CROC’s principles. When governments submit their reports, non-government organisations sometimes do the same. The differences in the content of these reports can be illuminating.

In June 2008, the Children’s Rights Alliance (CRA) for England submitted its report on the UK’s compliance with CROC. The CRA found serious deficiencies in the UK’s implementation of CROC with serious findings being:

- Young people are commonly represented as criminals and thugs.
- Imprisonment of children and young people is not always used as the last option.
- Measures of social control, including Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and dispersal orders are disproportionately acting on children and young people.

The CRA queried whether the UK enjoyed, respected or values its children and young people. The same, unfortunately, might be asked of us.

Here, children and young people are often moved on from public spaces and actively excluded through curfews and other strategies. ASBOs have been on the agenda in South Australia for some time now and youth justice legislation was amended last year to more easily allow the incarceration of children and young people against criteria other than the child’s best interests.

Many young people, particularly young Aboriginal South Australians and young people from diverse backgrounds, do not have the opportunity to develop themselves to their fullest potential and we remain frustratingly far from the objective that children and young people all enjoy the right to grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding.

So as we gear up to submit Australia’s latest report under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is timely to ask ourselves; “are we really delivering to our children the best we have to give?”

**Jennifer Duncan, Executive Director, Youth Affairs Council of SA**

This piece first appeared in the Advertiser 28 August 2008.

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# Youth Advisors' Page

## Cooking your first meal

Nothing symbolises more the freedom and responsibility of being out on your own than cooking a meal. When food does not appear on the table and take-aways become boring or expensive, there is no escape - as three of our Youth Advisors recall.



David

'I can't remember the very first thing but it was probably something like spaghetti bolognese and it was probably terrible. My first housemate was a bit better at cooking than me so he did that and I did the cleaning. . . When it comes to cooking my specialty is gingerbread houses – that and biscuits and cakes generally.'

'John'

'I did a bit of cooking in residential care – helping out in the kitchen. But when it came to living by myself, I just figured it out. You need to say "I can do this." Mostly it was simple stuff like pasta or fried steak with salad which worked pretty well.

'I made a curry once. I put in the usual veggies and some beans and then about eight of these little red chillies. I couldn't eat it, it was so hot. My Mum and sister managed to eat a bit but not me. I've never made a curry since.'



Sara

'I can't really remember the first thing I ever cooked! But when I first moved out of home, stir fries were the best things that ever happened to me. Just chuck it all in stir it around for a while and eat it! Cheap and healthy . . . that's how it was!'

Here is a cheap, easy as, YUMMY recipe!

### Sara's Fettucini Carbonara

*Ok... you need*

Fettucini

2 onions roughly diced

About ½ kilo of bacon roughly chopped

3 mushrooms cut into slices (if you like them)

Small tub of cream

Teaspoon of nutmeg to taste

Ground black peppercorns to taste

*Here we go...*

Start by preparing the pasta. Fettucini is awesome, cook as per directions on back of packet.

Once you have started boiling pasta, start on the sauce.

Fry onion, bacon and mushroom in frypan. Grind black pepper into frypan as cooking.

Add a teaspoon of nutmeg and stir.

Once onions and bacon have browned reduce heat to low and add cream to fry pan.

Drain pasta from the saucepan, once **TOTALLY DRAINED..** put pasta back into the saucepan and add sauce.. mix all around and . . . EAT