Winners of the 2014 Foster and Kinship Carer Excellence Awards

03 November 2014

Greater Darwin

Rose Campbell – Along with husband Terrance, Rose provides care to a male pre-school aged child “A” with complex disability and care needs. A was not expected to walk. With Rose’s dedication and consistent implementation of advice from specialists and physical therapists, A can now walk, run and climb up and down. Rose has cared for many children with disabilities and unique care needs. She is a very experienced carer who, with the support of DCF, has established positive relationships with many families of the children she has cared for, which can soften the impact of separation.

Michelle Bush and Ian Brown – This dedicated couple care for high needs twins who were born premature and had complications with eating. Michelle and Ian have followed every direction by specialists, every medical appointment and every emotional and physical need of the twins. Ian even made special beds so they could each have a bed that suited their size and be closer to each other through sharing a room. The couple has taught the twins how to eat solid foods which took much patience as the twins had trouble chewing and sucking. The couple has also engaged with resources to maintain the twins’ language and regularly attend cultural activities with them. Michelle has ceased working as a teacher to look after the twins.

Julie and Dom Crea – Julie and Dom were first time carers when they were approved to care for a set of young twins. The children had suffered from abuse and neglect and had developmental delays and mental health issues as a result of their complex trauma. The Creas have provided the twins with a stable environment and encourage and support them which has helped grow their confidence, minimize anxiety and create a sense of safety. The couple actively encourage the children reconnecting with their extended family and ensure contact with their siblings is positive and meaningful for all the children.

Selma Tom – A single Torres Strait Islander woman, Selma Tom is caring for four young relatives in addition to her own three daughters. Selma does not have a car and walks and uses the public bus to get the children to school, take them to access visits, attend appointments, do the family grocery shop etc. She helped one of her young charges, who was presenting with significant complex behaviours at the time of entering care, to transition successfully into pre-school. Reflective, insightful, responsive, loving – Selma has taken in her stride the complex challenges the children have demonstrated throughout their placement with her. She and her daughters turned their world inside out, deferring their own wants and needs, in order for the children to stay within the family, live within their culture and reduce the fear and grief they would experience following separation from their parents.
Jackie Williams – Jackie Williams cares for T, a liver transplant recipient and baby G who has cardiomyopathy. Jackie often puts her own life on hold to cater for the medical needs of both children. She has spent lengthy periods in Brisbane for T’s medical treatment – an isolating time for both. Jackie continues to support T to aim for good health, work hard at her education and maintain her relationships with family and connection to culture. Jackie will and has dropped everything – including deferring her own life – to respond to the imminent needs for children in her care.

Katherine/Northern Region

Kristy Bazevski – Kristy and her family care for Z who is now 18 months old. The first several months of Z’s life were spent in hospital due to extreme prematurity, until Z was discharged into Kristy’s care. Z’s physical needs were overwhelming with a long list of medical issues. Z’s physical needs have become less apparent as Z has thrived through having social and emotional needs met at a high standard. Kristy’s innate positivity and background in childcare have enabled her to provide an optimal nurturing and stimulating environment for Z with great results. Kristy’s determination that Z should have every opportunity to meet Z’s potential has seen the toddler develop above any expectations held by professionals overseeing Z’s medical care.

Jamie and Shawn Gordon – The Gordons have been carers for five years and in this time have provided short term, emergency and respite care for a number of Yolngu children. They currently provide long term care for two siblings. Both these children are receiving exceptional care. The couple’s capacity to provide care in Nhulunbuy has meant children from surrounding East Arnhem communities have not moved into placements in Darwin and have been able to maintain their culture, family connection and language while in care. Last year the couple cared for a new born baby for six months. They worked with DCF and the child’s kinship carers to enable the child to be transitioned into a kinship placement at a remote outstation. The couple continues to provide respite and support to the child and family on a regular basis.

Robert Austral – A kinship carer at Daly River, Robert provides his young relatives with stable accommodation, sound role modelling and much needed emotional support. Robert has supported a young relative released from detention to adjust to life outside of detention. Robert supported J with reporting obligations, linking with Centrelink and assisting in an application to the Defence Indigenous Development Program. Over a number of years Robert has been continually prepared to offer support to his young relatives, regardless of the circumstances and their life choices. He has demonstrated a commitment to continually offering them the opportunity to make different decisions in their lives, through his role as a kinship carer in a non-judgmental manner.
Central Australia Region

Kellie Hughes – With her partner Matthew, Kellie cares for two young children as well as their own daughter. J first came into their care as a baby with a traumatic background. J has progressed from falling behind and failing to thrive to being a happy, outgoing toddler. Kellie cared for J through a difficult health phase and the child is progressing “in leaps and bounds”. M is a 13-year-old who has had behavioural issues which has been a challenge for both Kellie and Matthew. Kellie patiently explains to M in a calm, firm manner as to why there are rules and boundaries. M has responded positively. Both children are encouraged to experience their culture and maintain family ties.

Kathleen Wileman - A foster carer for many years, Kathleen has provided a safe loving home to children placed with her full time, respite or emergency placements. An example is the care she provided to a wheelchair bound child who was never expected to walk. Her great care and encouragement as well as providing regular access to her home pool (after the child had left her care) helped contribute towards the child’s rehabilitation. The child is now able to walk. Kathleen has a focus on quality, safe and culturally appropriate care for children and advocates to ensure children placed with her receive the services and support they require.

Sam Cameron and Darrin Whatley – Sam and Darrin care for eight year old E, who was born with multiple intellectual and physical disabilities. Being physically immobile and non-verbal, E requires assistance with all daily care needs. Sam and Darrin live in Tennant Creek and E must attend regular medical appointments at Alice Springs Hospital. The couple do not hesitate to travel the distance. They are both committed to E’s continued care and encourage regular contact with E’s family. As well, Sam and Darrin provide respite care for other children.

Sonya Alfonso and Kevin Haines – Sonya and Kevin care for three year old J who has ongoing heart and hearing medical issues. The couple is committed to J’s medical care and to supporting J’s development. Sonya and Kevin encourage and educate J in culture – they are very respectful of traditional values and regularly take J to the child’s country, teaching J the many aspects of plant, animal and spiritual areas.