

Our children must take precedence

EDITORIAL

By ZENDA NIXON and
TEALIAH CAPPELLER

IN a perfect world there would be no need for foster carers. All children would live with loving family members in peace and safety. Unfortunately, this is not every child's experience.

Sometimes it is necessary for the Department of Community Services to step in and take over the care of children when they can no longer live safely at home. The reasons for this vary.

Children in crisis need somebody to look after them. The good people who take in other people's children are called foster parents. They take children, who are initially strangers, into their own home. The children may need care for a few days, a few weeks or for years.

Australia is currently experiencing the sad situation where there is a shortage of people willing to care for children in need.

Fostering children is a massive responsibility but a gratifying experience. Many people have a lot of love and care to give but no one to share it with. Many foster families have miraculous stories to share where they have positively affected a young person's life. Many people go on to care

permanently for their foster charges and view them as they would any other family member. Foster care can change lives and save lives.

Foster carers are taken for granted and sometimes given unfair criticism.

Often the system is under attack from families leaving this service because of funding cuts and the strict requirements.

Australia needs more people who can give children a roof over their head, food in their belly and clothes on their back.

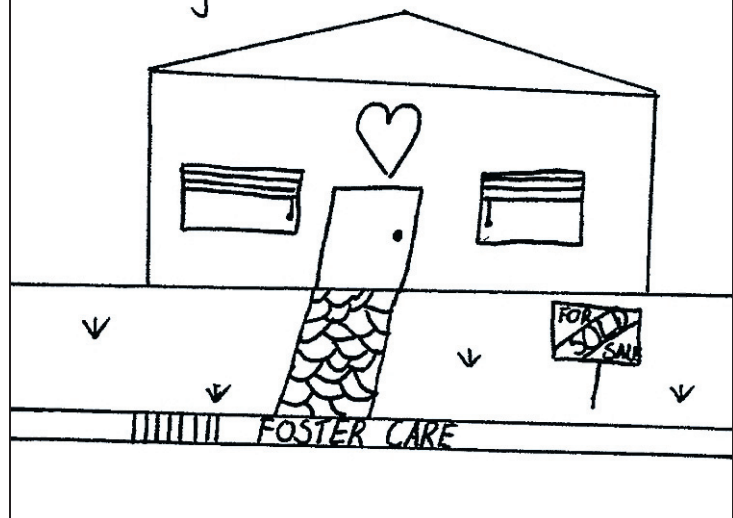
It is heartbreaking to see children in need suffering. We see advertisements urging us to sponsor children overseas. While children in Third World countries need help, Australians need to acknowledge that many children in our own country are also in great need. Is this due to a lack of education or a lack of care?

Some families wait years to adopt children from overseas. But the chance to help and love a young person exists today in our own country.

The only delay will be the time it takes to complete the paperwork and attend the mandatory courses that help prospective foster families enter this endeavour with their eyes open.

These children need you. It is a massive decision to foster children, but it is also a very rewarding, life-changing experience. Could you make a difference?

Turning a house into a home



Cartoon: Lachlan Horn



TIME TO SHINE: Enthusiastic Blackalls Park Public School dancers.

Picture: Jemma Henderson

Dancing into the spotlight

By ASHLEIGH SPRATT and
JEMMA HENDERSON

HUNTER Dance Festival, a creative arts concert, was held at Newcastle Panthers from July 22 to 25.

In an amazing spectacular, almost 700 public school students aged from five to 18 entertained a packed auditorium each night.

The event has been running for many years, and to keep up with the times, the dances reflected a range of dance types, many interlaid with thought-provoking messages.

An event of this size takes 10 to 20 people to bring the experience together, along with teachers from participating schools producing and choreographing individual items.

Annette Blatchford, librarian and dance organiser at Blackalls Park Public School, was one of the teachers involved with the festival.

"Organising costumes for everyone, checking all transport notes and all details with the festival committee is at least five weeks of jobs," she said.

When asked why she entered Blackalls Park in the festival, she said the school "has a strong dance program, so I wanted to give our students an opportunity to see other schools, and for others to see us".

Renae Youman, director of Lollipops Performing Arts, said: "The dance festival's purpose is to showcase the talents of local school performers."

Becoming the future of football

By TAMARA FENTON and
EMILY TURTON

NICK Cowburn, 18, has been selected for coach Paul Okon's Future Young Socceroos 19-man squad. The group took part in a European tour, ahead of the World Titles in Spain. The Blackalls Park talent attended training camps in Sydney before jetting to Spain.

Nick is following in the footsteps of his family – his grandfather, father and brother have all played soccer at a professional level.

Nick is in his second season playing for the Newcastle Jets Youth team. They finished second in the National Youth League this season.

"Playing soccer is amazing. Getting paid for something I love doing... it's the best job in the world!" he said. Nick trains five days a week alongside team-mates and the Jets senior team. He is currently playing in the NBN State League.

"I have met some long-term friends and personalities while playing soccer. The biggest name I've played against was [Alessandro] Del Piero. He is extremely well-drilled and positioned himself well all through the match. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

"Soccer is a sport for all ages, boys and girls; it is no wonder it is the world's most popular sport in over 200 countries with 250 million players."

Canteen superstar wins award for efforts

By SCOTT FENTON,
SAMUEL ANDREWS and
DEEKON MAHONEY-
ARGUETA

THE Blackalls Park Public School canteen is luckier than most, with an enthusiastic band of volunteers, one of whom was recently singled out for special recognition.

Mother of five and canteen worker Melissa Fenton travelled to Sydney in March as a state finalist in the Healthy Kids Association School Canteen Recognition Awards.

She was named NSW volunteer canteen staff member of the year and received a cash prize.

"I was excited and it made me feel happy about the hard work we all do," Melissa said.

She started volunteering eight years ago when her eldest son started school.

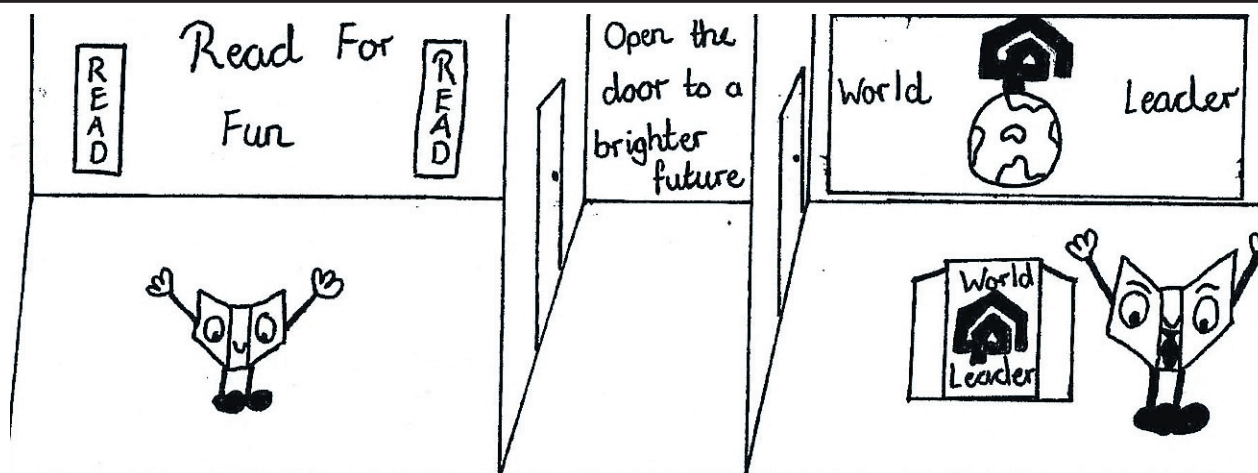
Mrs Fenton starts her canteen day at 5.30am and works solidly for seven hours.

She said a good canteen has "happy children, happy parents and lots of healthy food."



THERE TO HELP: Melissa Fenton in Blackalls Park Public canteen. Picture: Deekon Mahoney-Argueta

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