

7 July 2011

Foster carers to receive more support through charitable grants

Foster carers in Victoria will receive much-needed support following an agreement by the Grosvenor Foundation and the Jack Brockhoff Foundation to support Berry Street's foster care work, through a grant of \$150,000 over three years.

Brothers Alan Brockhoff and Jack Brockhoff, partners in the family firm Brockhoff's Biscuits Pty Ltd, were well known for their philanthropy, both establishing philanthropic foundations in their lifetimes. (For more information on the Foundations, see below.)

The Berry Street project being funded by the two Foundations will develop much-needed systems of peer support and mediation for foster carers who are otherwise struggling to cope.

Berry Street CEO Sandie de Wolf said that the project was vital because of the critical shortage of foster carers.

"Foster care is usually the preferred option when children cannot live safely with their families. However, the number of people prepared to take responsibility for these children continues to decline.

"Unless there are radical changes by 2013 there will be a shortage of over 1,000 place for children in Victoria who have been removed from their families.

"To fix this, the model of foster care needs to be radically improved and the government needs to provide a major increase in the support, training, supervision, financial assistance and respite available to foster and kinship carers.

"Overseas research undertaken by Anita Bell, Berry Street's Statewide Senior Manager of Foster Care, who received the Sir Jack Brockhoff – Churchill Fellowship in 2008, showed that one of the main reasons foster carers in the UK and US were able to get through the tough times was the existence of peer support activities provided by agencies.

"These foster carers are able to access independent mediation when there is conflict between agency staff and the carers, or if a carer wants an independent view on particular agency policy or procedures.

"Foster care agencies in the US and UK have also developed initiatives such as safe web-based forums for carers; on-line bulletins; on-line resource electronic libraries; and activities and support groups for the sons and daughters of carers.

"Each of these initiatives would be adaptable for Australian carers but currently we do not have a similar model of support for foster carers. Berry Street hopes to remedy this, thanks to the support of organisations such as the Grosvenor Foundation and the Jack Brockhoff Foundation.

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"We believe that such a system will be a significant first step in encouraging carers to remain in the care system," she said.

Mr Robert Symons, the Chairman of the Jack Brockhoff Foundation said: "The Jack Brockhoff Foundation is delighted to join with the Grosvenor Foundation in supporting the outcomes of foster care research undertaken by Ms Pell. Peer support for foster carers appears to respond to a deeply felt need of foster carers."

** Ombudsman Victoria's Report 2010*

Berry Street

Established in 1877, today Berry Street's greatest challenge is to help children and young people recover from the devastating impact of family violence, abuse and neglect. Berry Street never gives up doing whatever it takes for the kids in our care because we believe that all children should have a good childhood, growing up feeling safe, nurtured and with hope for the future.

For more information please contact Leah Kemp, Manager Media & Communications – lkemp@berrystreet.org.au or 03 9429 9266

The Grosvenor Foundation

Established by Alan and Nyon Brockhoff in 1963, the Grosvenor Foundation helps the socially disadvantaged living in Victoria through annual grants to appropriate charitable organisations.

For more information about the Grosvenor Foundation, which is administered by Equity Trustees, visit www.eqt.com.au/not-for-profit-organisations/grants.

The Jack Brockhoff Foundation

The Jack Brockhoff Foundation was established in 1979 by the late Sir Jack Brockhoff. Its purpose is to provide philanthropic support to Victorian organisations whose activities are designed to have a positive and enduring impact on the health and well-being of communities. The Foundation has been committed to Berry Street over many years and the present grant to assist foster carers sits well with the Brockhoff Foundation's overall outlook.

For more information on the Jack Brockhoff Foundation, visit www.brockhoff.info or call 03 96705686.

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