

## Report to the Creswick Foundation about the Australian speaking tour of Ms Kate Bundle, former CEO of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren New Zealand.

### Background

Kinship care is 'family-based care within the child's extended family or with close friends of the family known to the child, whether formal or informal in nature' (UN, 2010). 2011 census data suggested that over 100,000 children were in kinship care at that time. Over 80% of kinship care families were providing care on an 'informal' basis, that is, without recognition or financial support by child protection authorities (Kiraly et al, 2021; Kiraly, 2023). With population increase, the number of children in kinship care in Australia clearly now far exceeds 100,000. These families receive little or no financial or casework support. Australian and international research shows this is the biggest issue for informal kinship care families (Kiraly, 2015).

Kinship Alliance Australia is a national network of kinship care advocates established in 2023 that is working to raise awareness and advocate for policy changes that recognise and address the needs of all kinship carers and the children in their care. Alliance representatives meet regularly with the Federal Parliamentary Friends of Grandparent and Kinship Carers to discuss proposals for legislative and policy change. Co-Directors are Mike Feszczak, CEO of Grandcarers SA, and Dr Meredith Kiraly, kinship care authority and pro bono consultant. Grandcarers SA is auspicing Kinship Alliance Australia until it is ready for independence.

Ms Kate Bundle spent 25 years' experience with Grandparents Raising Grandchildren (GRG), including as Chief Executive Officer from January 2017 to December 2023. Kate was pivotal to the organisation's success in the 2009 achievement of parity of financial support for all New Zealand kinship carers, both informal and formal, a world first. GRG has continued to provide support and advocacy for NZ kinship families in a range of areas. We were delighted to be able to bring Kate to Australia for a speaking tour in June 2024 thanks to a Creswick Foundation grant. Kate's tour was a pivotal moment at the commencement of this new network.

### 2024 Speaking Tour by Kate Bundle, Visiting Expert in Grandparent/Kinship Care

Our aims in bringing Kate to Australia included the following:

- To provide speaking engagements with community services and groups supporting children in kinship care and their caregiving families.
- To meet Australian Parliamentary representatives including the *Parliamentary Friends of Grandparent/Kinship Carers*, and advise on the successful NZ model of kinship financial and social support.
- To advise about strategies to achieve our long-term goal to establish a National Kinship Care Organisation capable of leading advocacy for better financial and social support for all Australian kinship care families into the future.
- To consult to the Board and staff of Grandparents SA about work towards better support for the vast majority of Australia's kinship care families who are 'informal', that is, receiving no support or monitoring from State/Territory child protection authorities.

In the eventuality, it was not possible for Kate Bundle to spend as long as we had anticipated in Australia, as by the time of the visit she had changed jobs. She was fortunately able to take a week's leave to visit for an action-packed week of meetings and presentations. Between 24 and 28 June, Kate visited and spoke in four capital cities of Australia, accompanied by Mike Feszczak and Meredith Kiraly who provided complementary presentations about the Australian context. Two planned conference presentations were provided subsequently.

Kate Bundle Speaking Tour Itinerary		
#	Day	Activities
1	Sunday 23 June <b>Adelaide</b>	Kate Bundle arrived from Auckland. Meredith Kiraly arrived from Melbourne Dinner with stakeholders attending Monday & Tuesday forums
2	Monday 24 June <b>Adelaide</b>	<b>Kate met the staff of Grandcarers SA</b> to share the New Zealand and SA experiences of providing support to kinship families.
		<b>Meeting with SA Minister for Child Protection</b> , Katrine Hildyard MP
		<b>Grandcarers SA stakeholder event</b> Presentations to Grandcarers SA Board members and a wide range of SA carer organisations.
3	Tuesday 25 June <b>Adelaide</b>	<b>Inaugural meeting of formalised Kinship Alliance Australia</b> Key inaugural members from across Australia were in attendance. Presentations by Kate Bundle, and by Meredith Kiraly/Mike Feszczak.
		<b>Luncheon at SA Government House hosted by the Governor</b> The Governor, the Honourable Frances Adamson AC presided over this luncheon at which issues pertaining to improving recognition and support of Australia's kinship care families were discussed.
4	Wednesday 26 June <b>Canberra</b>	<b>Meeting with Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth MP</b>
		<b>Special Parliamentary Forum, Parliament House Canberra</b> The Parliamentary Friends of Grandparent and Kinship Carers hosted a forum to which all Parliamentarians were invited. The session was opened by Senator Dean Smith who spoke about the work of the Parliamentary Friends. Presentations: <b>Achieving national support in policy and legislation for full time grandparents and kin care families</b> Kate Bundle <b>Kinship Alliance Australia: the national perspective and its challenges</b> Meredith Kiraly and Mike Feszczak
5	Thursday 27 June <b>Melbourne</b>	<b>Forum: Achieving national recognition and support for all kinship care families, both informal and formal: Connecting stakeholders, research and advocacy</b> This forum was held at the Mirabel Foundation, a prominent independent support service for kinship families. The session was opened by Janet Rice, recently retired Greens Senator who provided a guide to successful advocacy entitled: <b>Getting the changes we need in Canberra: the role of the Parliamentary Friends of Grandparents &amp; Kinship Carers, and other advocacy.</b> It was attended by prominent Melbourne organisations providing support to kinship families.
6	Friday 28 June <b>Brisbane</b>	<b>Forum: Achieving national recognition &amp; support for all kinship care families</b> This forum was hosted by PeakCare Queensland, a peak body that has been proactive in promoting awareness of the unmet needs for recognition and support of kinship families providing kinship care informally, that is, without child protection involvement. It was very well attended.
7	Saturday 29 June <b>Brisbane</b>	Kate returned to Auckland. Meredith returned to Melbourne and Mike returned to Adelaide.

## Conference presentations

Due to the shortened Speaking Tour, the following conference presentations were made by Mike Feszczak and Meredith Kiraly without Kate Bundle.

1. ***Informal kinship care, poverty, and what to do about it***  
New South Wales Association of Children's Welfare Agencies ACWA Conference 5-7 June  
*Informal kinship care, poverty, and what to do about it*  
AIFS Conference 11-14 June 2024. This paper was not accepted. Instead, we substituted:
2. ***Achieving national recognition and support for all kinship care families – both informal and formal: Invited Keynote Address***  
National Kinship, Permanent and Foster Care Conference, Melbourne 9-11 August.

## Outcomes

Kate Bundle's speaking tour has led to two notable outcomes that will be built upon in the coming years.

1. *Increased awareness of issues and actions that can be taken to improve the life circumstances and wellbeing of Australia's kinship families.*  
  
Members of Parliament and hundreds of people involved in kinship family support heard from Kate Bundle about New Zealand's achievements in recognising and supporting all kinship families. A complementary presentation by Mike Feszczak and Meredith Kiraly outlined proposed ways forward for Australia.
2. *Establishment of Kinship Alliance Australia to provide a vehicle for advocacy for improved recognition and support of Australia's kinship families.*  
  
The first formal meeting of Kinship Alliance Australia took place during Kate's tour. Inaugural members were able to learn from Kate Bundle about the possibilities for improving the wellbeing of kinship families through advocacy by Kinship Alliance Australia.

## Concluding comments

We thank the Creswick Foundation for enabling the Speaking Tour by Kate Bundle and the later conference presentations originally planned to be included in Kate's tour.

We are happy to have our names and the name of Grandcarers SA to be published on the website of The Creswick Foundation.

**Mike Feszczak, CEO Grandcarers SA**  
**Meredith Kiraly, Pro bono consultant**

**18 November 2024**