



# **SHEPPARTON** **News**

## **Foster carers truly valuable**

Recent figures suggest that on any night of the week, up to 3500 Victorian children are living with families other than their own.

Most of these children will be living in what is called "out-of-home" care and many of these will be part of the foster care program. It's a staggering number and a reminder of the incidence of family breakdown, child neglect and the collapse of relationships.

Some of the children may suffer from mental conditions or may be the victims of trauma caused by sexual, physical or emotional abuse.

Standing in the breach are dedicated foster families

who try to provide a stable family life and enable the child to experience the natural love of caring adults, and sometimes the experience of being part of a bigger family, with brothers and sisters.

Maybe not all foster relationships work out (we can't expect a superhuman outcome in all cases), but a considerable number do, and it's not too hard to find some excellent accounts on foster care websites.

In the Goulburn Valley we have our own tales of triumph, where troubled teens have responded to caring family relationships, but the need for privacy and the desire of ex-foster chil-

dren to move ahead without looking back sometimes mean these tales are never told in public.

Demand for foster carers is constant, as carers age and have to relinquish their responsibilities, and as new children come to the attention of welfare services.

In the Goulburn Valley, the agency responsible received 88 promising inquiries from potential carers in a 12-month period, but only a small number followed through.

The reasons so many people are cautious are natural. The responsibility of someone else's child, the unknown length of the

commitment and the potential complexity of new relationships can be daunting.

However, carers say the returns can be so remarkable they cannot be compared to other forms of human endeavour.

Berry Street, the agency responsible for foster carers in this region, has told *The News* the best outcomes occur with younger children able to be fostered long-term.

*The News* hopes there may be more people in the Goulburn Valley prepared to take a step out of their comfort zone and consider how they could help change a life.