



# Foster carer enjoys rewards role brings

By Alexandra Bolkas

Tracy Blake says the most rewarding part of being a foster carer is seeing the children grow up, graduate VCE, buy houses and become independent. With her husband Peter, she has provided a home and family for about 25 children across 10 years. The couple started out as kinship carers for a family member through Berry Street before realising how many other children needed a home in the region. Mrs Blake said most of their foster children were long-term and stayed until they were adults. She said bringing foster children into their home before having her own — Emily, 4, and Zoe, 3 — was different to the path usually

taken by carers. “We did it a bit differently, usually their families grow up and move out before they have foster kids,” she said. “Because our kids are long-term, we get to see them grow up, pass VCE and get jobs.” She said foster carers often hit the ground running, but were not equipped to deal with problems that arose when raising someone else’s child. “Kids present with challenging behaviours and some of the biggest challenges are getting them the services they need to help them,” she said. She said unless children were able to get access to a

therapeutic program, many foster carers had to pay for mental health support workers out of their own pocket. “In a perfect world it would be great if every kid that came into foster care got a mental health worker all the way through . . . unless they’re lucky to go into a therapeutic program it can be hard to find services to help them with some of the trauma they’ve had,” she said. She said a general carer reimbursement of less than \$1 an hour was a catch 22. “No-one goes into it to make money out of it, but (the money issue) might prohibit people who would like to do it,” she

said. “(The wage) is not quite enough for extra services, say with a psychologist, as you only get so many funded sessions and you pay the rest.” Mrs Blake said a good sense of humour was necessary for any would-be foster carers. “There’s never a dull moment; it can be a real roller-coaster, some days it’s rewarding, other days you want to pull your hair out.” she said. Tracy and her husband Peter won a Berry Street 10-year carer recognition award at last month’s Berry Street Carer Award and Recognition Day.



**Foster family:** Foster child Kodie Booth with foster carer Tracy Blake and Tracy’s children Emily, 4, and Zoe, 3.

Picture: Julie Mercer