



Foster care needs more funds

By Jenna Bishop

Foster care provider Berry St has launched a campaign to save the foster care system, with dwindling numbers of foster carers signing up each year.

Berry St Hume director Patrice Jackson said it was an issue that was affecting the Goulburn Valley foster care system.

“What we know is that we are losing more carers each year than we’re recruiting,” she said.

Ms Jackson said the latest child protection report from the Australian Institute of

Health and Welfare said 616 Victorian foster carers left the system last year, while only 442 were recruited.

In association with Foster Care Association of Victoria, Berry St is calling for the Victorian Government to ensure all of a child’s educational, medical and recreational expenses are met by the Department of Human Services in a timely manner.

Ms Jackson said the campaign also aimed to increase the foster and kinship carer reimbursements to meet cost of care, starting with an immediate \$5 per day increase for all carers.

“The current rate is nowhere near the cost of looking after a child on a day-to-day basis,” she said.

“Many families find it difficult to care for foster children due to rising costs.”

Berry St says the gap between the foster care allowance provided by the Victorian Department of Human Services and the actual cost of providing for a child can be as much as \$5356 per year.

Ms Jackson said the government needed to improve carers’ access to training, support and respite.

While many people did not become foster carers for the

money anyway, Ms Jackson said the low rate of reimbursement was encouraging people to turn away from becoming a carer.

Figures from Berry St indicate that as many as 60 per cent of people who inquire about becoming a foster carer are deterred by the financial cost.

“The government has got to address some of these issues to ensure there are not so many barriers to becoming a foster carer,” Ms Jackson said.

Ms Jackson encouraged people to put pressure on their local MPs to address the issue in Parliament.