

reviews

Finding the way home

Children's Welfare Association of Victoria

Video (17 minutes), 2001

Finding the Way Home is an entertaining and informative introduction to foster care in country Victoria. In this short documentary we enter the homes of three foster carers and see how ordinary Australians can provide a loving and secure environment for troubled children who are unable to remain at home.

Produced by the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, and made possible by grants from The Ian Potter Foundation and the R.E Ross Trust, the video presents the foster care experience from the carer's perspective. The carers talk about what they are doing whilst going about their day to day activities. It is clear that all of them see fostering simply as an extension of their ordinary lives.

The first couple, Niall and Georgina, are retirees with no children of their own. They have embraced the notion of an 'extended family', and knew their farm would be an ideal haven for children but weren't sure if they were up to it. The biggest surprise has been their enjoyment from having young people about – 'Nobody told us kids were such fun.'

Not every rural carer can offer paddock bombs, fishing holes and acres of bush for kids to roam, certainly not the single mother of four living in a regional town. She admits to financial and emotional struggles but with the support of her family, friends and the local indigenous family reunification organisation, she has developed the confidence and self-esteem to cope with the needs of children damaged by traumatic upbringings. 'You can never know enough', she says, but the rewards are obvious: 'these kids have so much to offer.'

A couple with three children of their own refer to their bush-block as a sanctuary. It's hard to disagree as the kids pan for gold and shoot pool in the shed. Conversation covers issues important to all potential carers, such as the difficulties of accepting strangers into your home, individual preferences, family safety and financial remuneration. For one daughter these aren't as important as the number of friends foster care provides. She sometimes thinks her family incomplete without

'cousins' staying over. Her parents see nothing special in what they do and say they learn just as much as the kids.

The tales of these carers are balanced by the story of a young man who has grown up in foster care. Robbie discusses the difference his foster family made to his life and the feelings of belonging and love that he discovered.

Finding the Way Home covers many universal issues in relation to fostering. The central theme of community will resonate strongly with those who see fostering as a way of giving something back to society. Foster carers are as diverse a group of people as any in society, and it would be impossible to identify three carers who absolutely typify the role and the important work they undertake. In fact, if it were, we would also have to categorise the children who need care in watertight boxes. Potential foster carers may identify with the lives and concerns of at least one of the families depicted. More importantly, they might realise that homeless children are not confined to the metropolitan area and that there are kids in their district who desperately need a home, however temporary.

As the credits roll you reflect on the compassionate nature of carers, the urgent needs of hundreds of country children and the feeling that maybe you too can be doing a bit more.

Victorian foster care programs (rural and metropolitan) are using the video as a recruitment and training resource with positive results. Feedback received at CWAV has confirmed the judgment that the best people to promote foster care are those who are doing it now, and this is the great strength of the video.

Reviewed by:

Jennifer and John Donohue
with added comments from out-of-home care organisations represented at a May, 2001 workshop held at CWAV.

Available from CWAV, tel: 03 9614 1577, fax: 03 9614 1774
(\$60 / \$40 CWAV members)

Gifted young children: A guide for teachers and parents

Louise Porter

Allen & Unwin, Australia, 1999

Special provision for gifted children in the context of the education system is subject to considerable debate. Louise Porter's *Gifted Young Children - A guide for teachers and parents* provides an outline and analysis of the debate and

offers practical advice for the identification and education of children of advanced intellectual ability.

In this text, Porter includes the position of detractors, who speculate over notions of democracy (segregated programs