

Barnardos launches new training video on adoption

Barnardos Australia is one of Australia's leading children's charities and operates across New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. Barnardos provides services which help prevent and reverse the effects of child abuse, neglect and homelessness on children and young people. In order to achieve this aim, Barnardos operates a range of services including children's family centres, permanency programs for out-of-home care and adolescent services.

Tn July 2003, Barnardos Australia launched a powerful and moving new training video which examines the adoption of older-age children after a lifetime of abuse. The video, *Jumping at Opportunities*, was produced in partnership with State Street and the Ian Potter Foundation.

In the film, six young adults explore the long-term effects of their early years, the impact of abuse, rejection and separation from their birth families, and their feelings about their adoptions, which had been arranged by Barnardos' Find-a-Family program. They tell their stories with honesty, courage and dignity.

In launching the video, the New South Wales Minister for Community Services, Ms Tebbutt said: "Stability is critical in a child's life, and adopting an older child in need of a stable and secure home can provide the first step in helping them overcome a legacy of neglect, abuse and rejection."

She said: "I congratulate all the children and families in this video for telling their stories. The Department of Community Services provides funding for services to Find-a-Family children, but we are glad for corporate support for initiatives such as this video."

The Barnardos Find-a-Family program was established in 1984 to provide specialist adoption and long-term fostering options to severely abused children within the substitute care system. Since then, Find-

a-Family has cared for 274 children, over 31 per cent of whom have been adopted. Barnardos holds an incredible 90 per cent success rate in arranging and supporting adoptions of children aged, on average, between six and twelve years.

Barnardos attributes this success to the careful recruitment and matching of caring families to their adopted children, along with strong subsequent support. However, the agency identified a lack of effective resources and suitable training materials on adoption, both here and overseas. Using the useful medium of video, *Jumping at Opportunities* aims to promote the adoption of older-age children "under the parental



Damian Fitzpatrick and his adoptive mum, Debra Tipper.

responsibility of the Minister” (as state wards are now known). It will also be used to prepare potential caring families for the realities of adopting children who may have severely challenging behaviours and emotional problems.

These children have been identified as “at risk” and removed from their birth families by the Court because of severe forms of abuse and neglect. Tragically, further trauma often awaits these children in the form of multiple foster placements, often perceived by a child as rejection, and this can cause immense damage to their ability to form attachments. Overwhelming international evidence shows conclusively that adoption offers the best chance of providing long-term stability for children in out-of-home care.

Barnardos’ “permanency planning” model was devised to give security and continuity to these bewildered and wounded children. Barnardos’ approach is simple: find a family who is able to provide a permanent, stable, nurturing environment for a child – a “Forever Family”.

“At Barnardos we believe that every child deserves a caring family,” says Lynne Moggach, Principle Adoption Officer and Deputy Senior Manager of Barnardos’ Find-a-Family. “One of the worst things you could do to a confused and traumatised child is to allow them to drift within the care system. They desperately need routine, security and a long-term committed relationship with the caring family if they are to have productive and fulfilled adult lives.” She said that the average age of adoption in Barnardos’ program is nine years and these are children who typically have challenging behaviours.

Ms Moggach admits that it is a long, difficult and costly process to locate such families, who must undergo intensive interviews, criminal checks, and preparation and training, along with placement monitoring and support. Barnardos is constantly seeking suitable families who feel they could offer a permanent adoptive home to an abused child. “With carers the emphasis is on patience and not having too many expectations,” said Ms Moggach. “These children are all individuals and they all start to heal in their own way and in their own time.”

In talking about their experiences of abuse and rejection, the six children in *Jumping at Opportunities* reveal the painful emotional scars that are only partially healed by time. But there is no doubt that even though it is no magical cure, adoptions for them have proved “life-changing” by providing the security they craved. “You realise that you are in a family forever – they are always going to be there even when I’m in trouble,” states Zoe simply, while Sharon marvels that “just a bit of paper” could make a child feel safe.

Other adoption and permanent care agencies have also expressed considerable interest in *Jumping at Opportunities* and the documentary will be available to them and to government departments as a training medium, both on DVD and video.

State Street and the Ian Potter Foundation provided financial support for the project. State Street Global Advisor’s Managing Director, Bernard Reilly stated: “State Street is delighted to support such a groundbreaking initiative as Barnardos’ documentary and training video for older-age adoption. These initiatives have a positive impact on the whole community through relieving and preventing child abuse and neglect, now and for the future.”



Left to right: Louise Voigt, CEO, Barnardos Australia; Angela Crammond, Chair, Barnardos Australia, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt MLC, NSW Minister for Community Services; Matt Lever, Senior Associate, State Street, and the Hon. John Ryan, Shadow Minister for Community Services.

To enquire about obtaining copies of *Jumping at Opportunities*, or becoming a Forever Family, phone Barnardos Find-a-Family on (02) 9281 5510.