

# MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™

Connecting carers, children and families in community

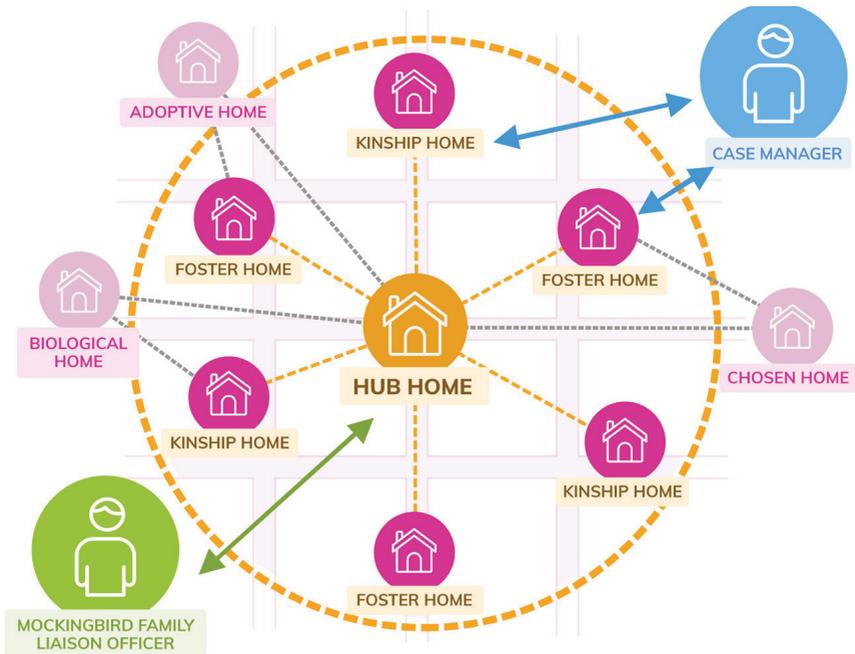


**MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™** is an innovative way to structure the support and supervision provided to foster and kinship carers to create caring homes, inclusive of family, culture and community. Life Without Barriers is partnering with The Mockingbird Society to implement MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ in Australia.

The approach, which was first developed in 2004 in Washington State, USA, has been designed to improve connections and social and emotional well-being of children and their carers. As a result of the positive outcomes experienced in the USA, MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY has been implemented in the UK, Canada, Japan, Netherlands and in NSW & SA of Australia.

Key benefits of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ are:

- Children thrive socially, emotionally and academically
- Children and carers develop supportive peer relationships
- Positive Carer retention
- Carers receive support through respite, peer support, training and information
- Children remain connected to their community and culture
- Increased placement stability
- Alleviate case management workload



# HOW DOES IT WORK?



**MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™** unites 6 to 10 foster and / or kinship carer homes called Satellite Families in a local community called a Constellation, supported by an experienced carer who takes on the role of Hub Home Provider.



**The Hub Home Provider** is an employed team member and supports carers through providing information, training and a range of other supports. The Hub Home Provider is an authorised carer who provides respite for children and young people in the Constellation.



**The Constellation** is like the extended family and the Hub Home is like a grandparents or auntie/uncle's house that is familiar and comfortable.



**Each child** in the Constellation is welcomed by the Hub Home Provider for sleep overs and social events, or if there is difficulty at home and the child/carers could benefit from a break.



**The Hub Home Provider**, supported by the **MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™** Liaison Officer, is responsible for planned and emergency respite, the coordination of monthly Constellation meetings, quarterly social activities and a range of practical and supports to the Constellation families.



**The MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™** Liaison Officer is an employee of the foster care agency and provides the link between the Constellation and the Agency by providing ongoing communication and oversight. The Liaison Officer engages directly with the Hub Home Provider and attends Constellation events.



**The community network** created by **MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™**, focuses on the individual needs of its children and ensures carers are skilled, supported and confident in providing the best care for children.

# Evaluation of MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™

The Rees Centre at Oxford University has completed an evaluation study of foster carers, children and young people involved in MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ across 12 Constellations in the UK. The study evaluated three strands of the model: Impact, Implementation and Cost Benefit Analysis.

The study found that:

- **Engagement:** Foster Carers, children and young people are highly engaged with MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™
- **Support:** Compared to other carers, those in MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ are reported to be more satisfied with the support they receive and have a higher level of wellbeing
- **Connections:** Being part of a Constellation appears to improve relationships between siblings in foster care
- **Retention:** MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ improves Carer retention and peer support is highly beneficial for Carers
- **Impact:** Improved outcomes from implementing MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ did not incur additional cost, generating better value for money across the program.

Other evaluations in the UK show promising results in decreasing placement disruptions and improving the satisfaction and retention of carers. For example, in Washington State, USA MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ delivers a 92% foster family retention rate, compared to a 63% state average. We expect to see similar positive outcomes in Australia.



# MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™

## Principles

MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ is dedicated to meeting children and young people's needs in a way that is age appropriate, culturally relevant and future oriented - inclusive of family, culture and community.

### The core principles are:

- **Unconditional Care:** All children deserve a safe, warm, and nurturing environment where they can live and thrive.
- **Normalisation:** Children in foster and kinship care need to receive the same opportunities, supports, and challenges as their peers to maintain and experience development and growth.
- **Community-based Care:** All children deserve to live in the least restrictive and most appropriate environment possible that can ensure their safety and the safety of the community that is familiar to them and close to their biological family.
- **Continuity of Care:** All children benefit from the presence of continuity in their lives.
- **Biological Family – Future Support:** Educating children in the skills and boundaries necessary to establish and maintain relationships with family.
- **Cultural Relevancy:** Children do best when connected to their family culture and placed in homes that reflect their ethnicity and values.
- **Carer Support:** It is essential to take good care of the people who take good care of children.
- **Active Child Protection:** Children have positive trusting relationships with multiple adults who are invested in the child's safety and well-being.

# Fidelity

MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ is a practice approach built around key elements that are crucial to successful implementation and operation. The implementation requires uniformity across the practice components and maintaining consistency of the approach is a requirement of the license.

Ensuring compliance to the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ approach and licensing arrangements falls into four essential areas:

1. **Structure:** The Replicating Agency maintains the integrity of the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ structure.
2. **Roles:** Essential MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ roles (Host Agency, Hub Home Provider & Satellite Family) are implemented consistently.
3. **Responsibilities:** MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ responsibilities are fulfilled effectively.
4. **Competency:** Replicating Agency ensures that the MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ Hub Home Provider proscribed competencies are met as described in selection criteria.

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Twice now, I've experienced challenging placements that made me question whether to continue fostering. The first time, I was not part of a Constellation and I had to take a break from providing care. The second time, I had the support of the Constellation and it made all the difference. There is nothing more supportive for foster carers and families.

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# Is your organisation interested in MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™?

Organisations that are interested in using MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ to support children and carers are invited to complete a self-assessment prior to becoming a licensed Host Agency.

The purpose of this self-assessment is to evaluate an organisation's capability to implement MOCKINGBIRD FAMILY™ as a practice framework supporting the delivery of foster care, improving carer retention and outcomes for children and young people in care.

The self-assessment highlights an organisation's practice – its values, principles and strategic approach to providing safety, stability, permanency and well-being for dependent children and young people.



