



# caringlife

CONNECTING THE LIVES OF CHILDREN IN CARE





**CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-HOME OR ALTERNATIVE CARE  
FACE A MAJOR PROBLEM IN HAVING ACCESS TO LIFE  
MOMENTS, MEMORIES, PHOTOS AND VIDEOS, REPORTS,  
AWARDS, AND IDENTITY DOCUMENTS.**

Carers often take a lot of photos of significant moments of the child or young person's life - it could be their 5th birthday party, a trip to the zoo, holidays, sporting achievements, family gatherings, or any of the usual family moments.

These moments are priceless, and form part of the child's identity and life story.

There are also documents such as birth certificates that are critical for the child, and which are often hard to access.

Until now, children and young people in out-of-home or alternative care have not had a central place where they can access these photos, files and other documents in an easy way - they are often given them in hard-copy form or on a USB stick, which are easily lost or damaged, particularly when the children move between carers.

# What is CaringLife?

CaringLife is an award-winning online platform and app that has been designed to provide a private, safe and secure system way for foster agencies, authorities, social workers, carers and children to upload and store photos, videos and important mementos and documents during the child's time in care.

Carers and children each have their own private account created on CaringLife, which are then connected when a child is staying with that carer.

**Carers** - Once connected to a child, carers can upload content to their own account which is then also visible on the child's account. This content will only be visible to the carer, the child and the child's case manager. Multiple carers can be assigned to a child, ie the primary carer and a respite carer, if applicable.

**Children** - Children are able to add their own content to their account to ensure that they feel that they are contributing freely to their own life story and are creating their own memories. All content children load is visible to their case manager/worker and they can choose whether to share it with their carers.

**Social Workers** - Supervising Social Workers and Social Workers are able to monitor all the content that is uploaded by either the child or their carer, and are also able to add content that they may feel is important to the child, including birth certificates and other important documents.

CaringLife is **not** a social media platform - it's designed to be a very secure and private "Dropbox" style system that allows the children to be able to see all their life memories now and into the future.

Even when they leave care, or transition into adulthood, they will have free, on-going access to all their memories.

# Features

- Photos and files are date-stamped and are available to view either by chronological order or most recently added, so children can see their life in the order of sequence, or by most recently added;
- Carers and children can choose to add in Albums, i.e Sarah's 6th Birthday and add photos and videos to events, to provide context to the photos for the child;
- Captions can be added to videos and photos so that the child can remember the names of the people in the images, and information relevant to the photos and videos;
- Ability to add school reports, certificates of achievement and awards, carer letters and notes, birthday cards, drawings, artwork, school work, and other important documents.

# The Specifics

**The software incorporates 4 login interfaces - one for the Authority/Agency and accredited Account Managers; one for Social Workers; one for the Carers; and one for the Child.**

## Authority/Account Manager

### Features include:

- Administrative access to create case manager's account;
- Administrative access to create child's account;
- Administrative access to create carer's account;
- Administrative access to connect child and carer accounts;
- Ability to transfer authorisation to another case manager and/or agency if the child is moved or transferred;
- Ability to decide when the child receives access to their account - for example it may be decided that the child should have access immediately, or they can choose to give the child access at a certain age.

# The Specifics

## Supervising Social Worker/Social Worker

### Features include:

- Administrative access to create child's account in system;
- Administrative access to create carer's account in system;
- Administrative access to connect child and carer accounts;
- Ability to see all photos, videos and other content added to the child's account by both carers and the child.
- Ability to delay approving photos and notes until an age-appropriate time, or for any other reason;
- Ability to delete inappropriate photos, or photos which may be culturally sensitive;
- Ability to transfer authorisation to another case manager if the child is transferred;
- Ability to review all documents in an easily accessible way for Life Story audits and any other audit or review;
- Social Workers are able to see all children that are currently in their care on one screen, to ensure ease of use;
- Ability to decide how often they are alerted to new content to moderate, to ensure work efficiencies. There is also the choice to allow automatic approval of content, and be able to moderate and review at the Authority's social worker's discretion.
- Ability to decide when the child receives access to their account.

# The Specifics

## Carers

### Features include:

- Ability to post photos, videos and documents that they feel are important for the child;
- Ability to add captions, notes and other personalised information for the child to provide memories and context to the photos, videos and documents;
- Access to view photos, videos and documents that they have uploaded for all the children they have cared for;
- Can see memories that have been shared with them by the Social Workers or Child.

## Child

### Features include:

- Access to view all approved photos, videos and documents;
- Ability to add photos, videos, and documents and to add captions and personalised information - this allows for them to feel as though they have an interactive role in their life story;
- Can see content from all carers;
- Can hide photos they don't like or want to see;
- Continued access to the photos, videos and documents once they leave care or reach adulthood;
- Ability to download the documents for printing etc.

# Therapeutic Benefits

As well as providing carers and children with an easy place to load and store photos, videos and other content, CaringLife has been recognised by Janise Mitchell, Deputy CEO of the Australian Childhood Foundation, and Adjunct Professor Richard Rose from Child Trauma Intervention Services for the therapeutic benefits the app provides (please see supporting statements).

Particular benefits they have identified for children using CaringLife are:

- CaringLife helps children to form a continuous life narrative, autobiographical memory, and a sense of identity - all of which is often missing in children in out-of-home care - which has a direct relationship with mental health outcomes as they reach adolescence and adulthood. It can also provide a key tool for therapeutic life story work.
- CaringLife enables children to passively share feelings with their carers that they may not be able to verbalise.
- CaringLife gives therapists a tool to work with children to learn how to identify and express emotions in a safe way.





# Therapeutic Benefits

Access to positive autobiographical memories also has a positive impact on mental health and depression in vulnerable children, as shown by a recent study by researchers at Cambridge University.<sup>1</sup>

The study found that positive memory specificity was associated with lower morning cortisol and fewer negative self-cognitions during low mood over the course of one year.

Moderated mediation analyses demonstrated that positive memory specificity was related to lower depressive symptoms through fewer negative self-cognitions in response to negative life events reported in the one-year interval.

These findings indicate that recalling specific positive life experiences may be a resilience factor that helps in lowering depressive vulnerability in adolescents with a history of early life stress.

Other studies have also demonstrated that recalling positive memories resulted in reduced cortisol, and engagement of corticostriatal circuits implicated in emotional regulation.<sup>2</sup>

Further, studies have shown that being able to recall individual memories, which is often difficult for children who have suffered from trauma, rather than summarizing generalised categories of events (overgeneral memory), is critical for emotional regulation, mental health, and vulnerability to depression.<sup>3</sup>

The level of self-esteem may be related to the manifestation of depression through memory biases.<sup>4</sup>

Many studies have reported that overall autobiographical memory predicts the onset or course of depression and thus is considered to be a risk factor for depression.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>. Askelund, A. D. et al. *Positive memory specificity is associated with reduced vulnerability to depression. Nature Human Behaviour*; (2019); DOI: 10.1038/s41562-018-0504-3)

<sup>2</sup>. Speer, M and Delgado, M. *Reminiscing about positive memories buffers acute stress responses. Nature Human Behaviour* 1, 0093 (2017).

<sup>3</sup>. Williams, J. M. G., Barnhofer, T., Crane, C., Herman, D., Raes, F., Watkins, E., & Dalgleish, T. (2007). *Autobiographical memory specificity and emotional disorder. Psychological Bulletin*, 133(1), 122-148. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.133.1.122

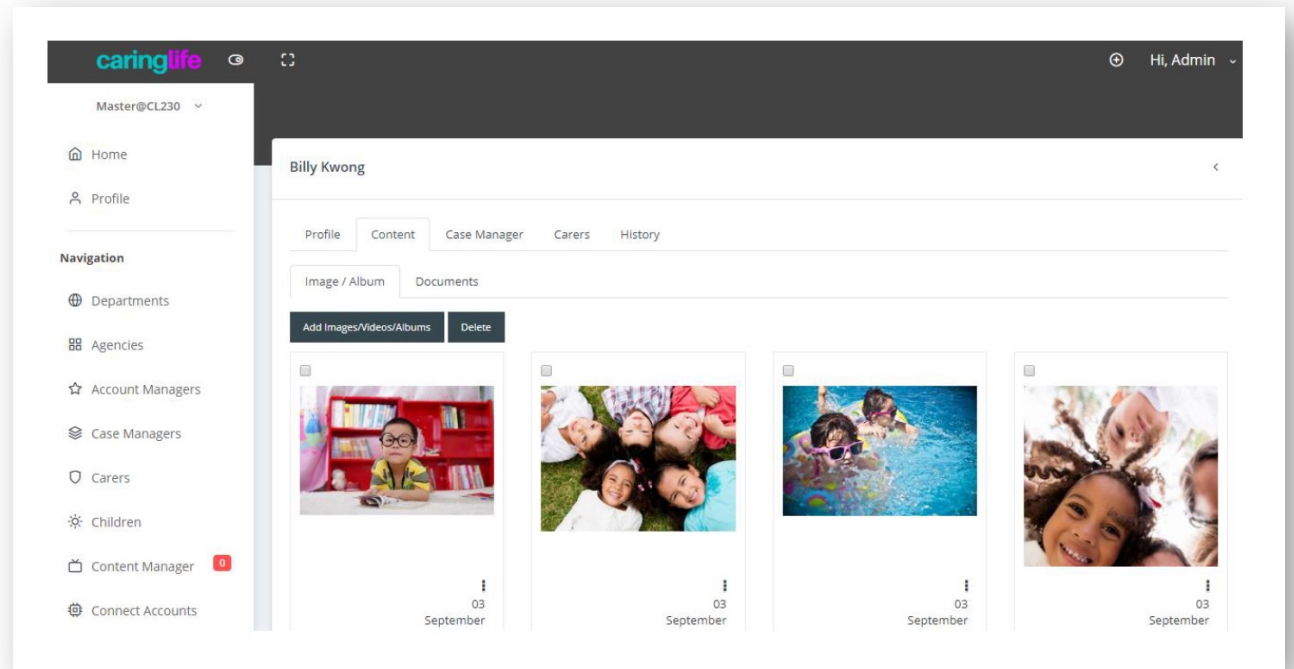
<sup>4</sup>. Romero N, Sanchez A, Vázquez C, Valiente C. *Explicit self-esteem mediates the relationship between implicit self-esteem and memory biases in major depression. Psychiatry Research*. (2016); 242: 336-344. pmid:27341330

<sup>5</sup>. Rawal A, Rice F. *Examining overgeneral autobiographical memory as a risk factor for adolescent depression. Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (2012); 51(5): 518-527. pmid:22525958

# What does it look like?



**Child and Carer View  
(App)**



**Case Manager/Worker View**

# Security

Security and privacy is at the heart of CaringLife, and it is built utilising the latest security protocols to ensure complete data privacy and protection for the children, and Graph databases which allow for handling of large volumes of data and files.

All data is stored on London AWS servers for authorities and children in the UK.

The protocols for storage of data are aligned with international security and quality best practices standards, including:

- SOC 1/SSAE 16/ISAE 3402 (formerly SAS 70)
- SOC 2
- SOC 3
- FISMA, DIACAP, and FedRAMP
- DOD CSM Levels 1-5
- PCI DSS Level 1
- ISO 9001 / ISO 27001
- ITAR
- FIPS 140-2
- MTCS Level 3.





"The Australian Childhood Foundation is very pleased to support the CaringLife app. Its intent is to support carers and children in out of home care to be able to keep the records, mementoes and memories so often lost to children and young people in out of home care due to multiple moves. These are the things we take for granted in our own lives and the lives of our children. We all know how important and special these things are. They speak to who we are, our sense of identity and belonging.

Children and young people in out of home care have most often experienced the trauma that results from abuse, violence and neglect. They find it difficult to trust, to accept the care and support of carers and other adults and to develop a sense of identity.

The CaringLife app has utility as a therapeutic tool through which children and young people can connect with their carers using the non-threatening, safe and private media platform in the app.

Using this aspect of the CaringLife App children and young people are able to share thoughts and feelings with carers in ways, and at times that feel comfortable to them. Equally the app provides opportunities for carers to share thoughts and feelings with children and young people. I believe this app can make an important contribution to the lives of children and young people in out of home care."

**Janise Mitchell**  
**Deputy CEO, Australian Childhood Foundation**

# Foundation Supporters



"CaringLife has been embraced by the carers and social workers who have uploaded thousands of memories for children, which they can access forever."

**Ishara Tewary, Strategic Lead for Children in Care and Care Leavers, The Royal Borough of Greenwich**



"CaringLife allows young people to physically view the narrative of their childhood and understand the impact of specific events in their life."

**Kevin Williams, CEO, The Fostering Network**

# Foundation Supporters



"A fragmented, damaged, discontinuous personal narrative puts an individual child at risk.

CaringLife provides a terrific way for children to be able to access their life moments in an easy and continuous way, and I support the use of CaringLife for children in out-of-home care."

**Richard Rose, Director, Therapeutic Life Story Work International**



"Historically it was not uncommon for photos and memorabilia to be lost through a child or young person's journey in care.

CaringLife is a welcomed resource for children and young people in care, it provides a secure forum to share stories and keep memories that would otherwise be lost in the creation of a child and young person's identity into their adulthood."

**Cathy Carnovale, Coordinator, CREATE Foundation**

# Foundation Supporters



# Agency Feedback

Life Without Barriers (VIC) staff, carers and young people have been working with CaringLife since September 2020. All involved have responded positively to the platform, recording happy moments, new experiences, and achievements. Content from the app is often used to stimulate valuable discussion between Life Without Barriers staff and carers and young people, deepening these connections and relationships. CaringLife offers a great overview of a child's journey.

The fact that CaringLife provides an online space for young people to securely store their memories means that children moving from one placement to another (including those engaged in respite care), or even children leaving care, will have ongoing access to their stories. They can access these stories anywhere, anytime, further supporting and validating their experiences. Children who are not yet of an age or stage of development to navigate the CaringLife app will have their memories collected and stored by staff and carers and these will be available to the young people as they grow and develop. CaringLife provides young people with immediate access to significant moments and achievements in their lives.

CaringLife has become a part of Life Without Barriers' reporting requirements and is also included in a Cultural Support Plan for one of our young people (evidence of cultural activities and family meetings stored in CaringLife being particularly helpful in writing these plans).

CaringLife has also become a part of the onboarding process for new carers and young people at Life Without Barriers (VIC). New carers are first introduced to CaringLife during Shared Lives training when we begin discussing life story work. All new carers and young people are provided with log-in details and Case Managers discuss the app with them shortly after joining the team.

From an administrative point of view, CaringLife is simple to use and navigate without requiring a large investment of time to complete required tasks.

Anthony and Emma are incredibly responsive, making themselves available very quickly for any questions or issues, and following up on these effectively in a short space of time.

**Michael Ainsworth, State Director, Life Without Barriers**



# Agency Feedback

OzChild has used CaringLife as part of our regular and ongoing life story reporting requirements for five years, including through our regular audits. This has simplified our reporting requirements considerably. Historically life story books were kept by carers and when audits occurred, we have to retrieve these books for them to be cited by auditors. CaringLife enables us to access these life stories virtually. It also gives a true reflection of when activity occurs and how current and relevant it is, providing a more genuine reflection of our life story activity.

C&YP in out of home care have all experienced varying degrees of trauma. The impact of this can be considerable and often causes C&YP to struggle to piece together the events of their lives. Our experience historically has been that physical life story books often got lost or didn't transfer from one agency or placement to another. Not having immediate access to these life stories means that a child or young person does not have the tools available to them to make sense of their life.

OzChild case managers have found CaringLife gives them a much greater understanding of placements. Having an overview of the things a child or young person are doing in placements gives them so much more information than they would have previously got. Historically case managers may have looked at life story books a few times a year, however CaringLife gives them real time data. This then better informs their assessments of children e.g. through LAC. It also gives them an amazing engagement tool for rapport building with C&YP.

CaringLife has been integrated into our onboarding processes for carers and C&YP. Carers are told about caring life at the start of their caring journey in training and are then supported to access the platform once they take their first child. When a child comes into placement CaringLife is part of the welcome to placement.

**Jonathan Finch - Director, OzChild**

# Carer Feedback

**"This is wonderful - I've always done scrapbooking albums to give to each child that comes under our roof. The hard thing is it's soooo time consuming and takes hours and hours to do. But I would do it so that when kids leave they have those memories to look at. The tricky thing is that it could end up ripped or in the bin. This is absolutely, incredibly wonderful!" - Joanne M**

**"What a great idea! Love how easy it is to use. I often find the kids sitting together on their iPad flicking through their photos." - David O**

**"I absolutely love it! It's a very easy way to share photos and videos of our time together." - Kerryn H**

**"It's so nice to be able to have everything in the one place. I don't have to worry about losing anything important." - Emily M**

**"We love using CaringLife - it's really easy to use, and the kids love having a space to upload their memories." - Rebecca C**

**"Every single photo, video and document is special to upload! Can you imagine being able to see your life in pictures, videos and treasured memories as an adult from care? Game changer!" - Chris D**

# Social Worker Feedback

**"CaringLife is an invaluable tool for the collection of life memories. It's something that we have needed for a very long time!" - Sarah M**

**"I have had great feedback from carers about how easy CaringLife is, and it's life changing for the children to have an active record of their life story." - Sally B**

**"The carers have been very happy to adapt to using CaringLife - it's been a very simple process." - Dana S**

**"It has been a long-standing difficulty for Social Workers to gather and maintain photos etc that show the positive experiences that children have during their time in care due to capacity and frequent moves. CaringLife makes this much more consistent and benefits both social workers, children, young people and families." - Kelly M**

**"I strongly believe all children and young people in OOHC should be given the opportunity to have their memories and life story captured in an innovative and long-lasting, sustainable way such as CaringLife. This would be highly helpful across the OOHC sector, particularly in situations of multiple placement moves where memories and parts of children's and young people's life stories are not being captured or misplaced. It seeks to normalise the journey for children and young people throughout the most important milestones in their lives." - Mark K**

# Price?

The price is £2.99 per case-managed child account per month.

For more than 500 actively case-managed child accounts, the price is £2.49.

There are no set up or training costs, and there are no costs for accounts for Account Managers, Social Workers, or Carers.

Once a child or young person leaves care, they have ongoing free access to their account and can continue to upload, view and download their memories and important documents.

Once a child leaves care, there are no costs for the Authority/Agency.



# About Us

CaringLife is operated in the UK by CaringLife UK Ltd, 128 City Road, London, EC1V 2NX.

## **Directors**

Emma Stirling and Anthony Denahy.

Emma and Anthony are a husband and wife team and foster parents to 2 young children who are now with us permanently.

Through the foster training process and discussions with our agency and peak welfare organisations, we have identified a need for the CaringLife system to ensure that children in out-of-home care have access to all their life memories and mementos. We believe that every child has a right to a strong identity and access to their life story.

