

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## WHY DO CHILDREN NEED FOSTER CARE?

Children and young people may need foster care when they are unable to live with their birth parents. This may be due to a number of reasons including abuse or neglect, drug or alcohol use, depression, or family breakdown.

## HOW LONG DO CHILDREN STAY IN FOSTER CARE?

The length of a placement varies for each child based on their situation. Some children are in foster care for a short time; some need to be fostered on a long term basis until they are 18 years old. Some children need respite care which is usually for one weekend a month or fortnight on an ongoing basis.

## WHO CAN BE A FOSTER CARER?

Foster carers come from all walks of life and choose to foster for different reasons. Foster carers need to be over the age of 21 and can be single or in a relationship; gay or straight; rent or own their home; have children or not.

## DO I NEED A BIG HOUSE?

You don't need a big or 'perfect' house to be a foster carer. You can rent or own your home, and live in a city unit or on a rural property. If available, a separate room gives foster children much-needed privacy.

## CAN I BECOME A FOSTER CARER IF I WORK?

There are many factors to consider, such as the age and needs of children, the type of care provided, and the flexibility of working arrangements. Many foster carers work full-time or part-time. Pre-school children can be in child-care for up to 3 days a week. School age children can attend before or after school care for up to 10 hours a week.

## CAN I APPLY TO BE A FOSTER CARER IF I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD OR HAVE HAD INVOLVEMENT WITH COMMUNITY SERVICES?

Having a criminal record or having been the subject of an investigation by Community Services does not stop you from applying to become a foster carer. Each application is assessed on a case-by-case basis and eligibility will depend on the type of offence, substantiation, when it was committed and your current capacity to care for children. However, there are certain serious crimes and child-related offences which will automatically disqualify applicants.

## CAN I BE A FOSTER CARER IF MY CHILDREN LIVE AT HOME?

Yes, you can. It is important to talk to them about why you are considering becoming a foster carer and ask them how they feel about it. Your youngest child must be at least 3, and foster children must be the youngest in the household.

## CAN I CHOOSE THE AGE OF THE CHILD?

You can choose the age range of foster children but they must be younger than any other children in your household. We will also talk with you about your lifestyle to discuss the most appropriate match for you and your family.

## CAN I ADOPT A FOSTER CHILD?

In some cases where children have been with you for 2 years, you can apply to be assessed for adoption.

## HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER CARER WITH THE BENEVOLENT SOCIETY?

After your initial enquiry and attendance at an information session, prospective foster carers need to complete an application form. We will obtain your permission to undertake a number of checks, including a Working With Children Check, a housing safety check, and a criminal record check. We will contact personal references and also ask you to contact your doctor for a health check. Our staff will visit your home to undertake an in depth assessment that will involve all members of your household, and you will need to complete carer training.

## HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A FOSTER CARER? HOW LONG DO I NEED TO COMMIT FOR?

It usually takes around 6 months from initial enquiry to being authorised as a foster carer with us. The length of a placement depends on the type of care you want to provide, however, we ask for a minimum commitment of 2 years for all types of care placements.

## WHAT SUPPORT WILL I GET?

All our foster carers receive support and regular home visits from their Case Manager, and telephone support is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Foster carers also receive ongoing training opportunities, access to specialist support services, regular carer support groups and an allowance during placements.

## ARE FOSTER CARERS PAID?

An allowance is paid directly to all foster carers during placements to help meet daily expenses arising from caring for children. These expenses include clothing, food, activities, and education. The allowance does not affect any other government benefits you already receive.

## CAN I TAKE A FOSTER CHILD ON HOLIDAY?

We encourage taking foster children on holiday. If you are going interstate, overseas or away for longer than 5 days you will need to consult us in advance.

## DO FOSTER CHILDREN HAVE CONTACT WITH THEIR BIRTH PARENTS?

Children in care benefit from ongoing contact with their birth parents, unless there are risks involved. A decision about the frequency and type of contact is made based on the best interests of the children.

## WILL BIRTH PARENTS BE GIVEN MY NAME AND ADDRESS?

Birth parents are provided with information about their children's placement unless there is a risk to the children, foster carer, or members of their household. This risk is assessed on a case-by-case basis and foster carers are involved in making this decision.

## DO FOSTER CARERS MEET THE CHILDREN'S BIRTH PARENTS?

Foster carers usually meet the birth parents of children placed with them during the children's first contact visit with their parents. This visit is attended by our staff and is an important step in helping children feel comfortable with their foster carers.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CHILD AND I DON'T GET ALONG?

Foster carers and children are supported throughout the placement to work through issues as they arise. Additional specialist support services are available when required.



