

fostering
young lives



WHAT IS FOSTER CARE?

Foster care is the care of a child or young person who is not able to live with their own family.

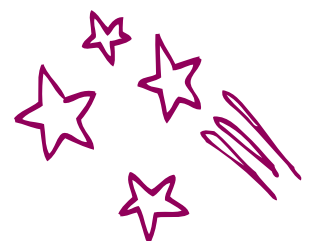
The reasons children and young people need foster care are varied and may be due to a parent's drug or alcohol use, a mental or physical illness or disability, family breakdown or other reasons that affect the relationship between a child and their parent.

Foster carers provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and young people in care.

Children and young people come into care at all ages from birth to 17 years of age and from many cultural backgrounds. Every child has unique needs, so different types of care are required.

Children and young people can be in care for just a few nights, a few months or many years depending on their situation. Some children return to their families after living with a foster carer and others need to be fostered in a family that can look after them on a permanent basis until they become independent.

Some children and young people receive respite care, which is regular care for one weekend a month or a fortnight, to give their parents or foster carer a break.





WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF FOSTER CARE?

The Benevolent Society's Fostering Young Lives program provides foster care to children and young people from birth to 17 years of age.

There are many types of foster care placements to support the different needs and circumstances of each child and young person in care.

EMERGENCY

Some children require care for only a few nights or weeks in an emergency or while a long term placement is being sought.

SHORT TERM

A child or young person could be in a foster care placement for six months to a year before returning home. Support is always given to the family of a child who is placed in short term care to help resolve issues to enable the child to return home.

Foster carers for children in short term care help maintain a child's relationship with their birth family. This may include supporting contact between a child and their birth family and being supportive of them living together again.

LONG TERM

If a child cannot return to live with their family they will be placed in long term or permanent care until they can live independently, usually once they have reached 18 years of age.

RESPIRE

Some children and young people are supported through respite care, usually one weekend a month or every fortnight, as a way of giving families or full time carers a regular break.

Respite care can help keep families together and support foster carer placements as well as giving children and young people an opportunity to experience a different family environment on a regular basis.

"I MISSED BEING AROUND MY NEPHEWS AND NIECES WHEN I MOVED TO SYDNEY SO I BECAME A RESPITE CARER. I WORK FULL TIME SO LOOKING AFTER BRODY ON A WEEKEND ONCE A MONTH IS NO TROUBLE AT ALL. WE GO TO THE FOOTY OR JUST HANG OUT. HE'S A GOOD KID."

Michael, aged 38,
respite foster carer of Brody, aged 9.

"I LOVE HAVING THE LITTLE ONES COME AND STAY WHILE THINGS ARE GETTING SORTED OUT FOR THEM. I DO MISS THEM WHEN THEY GO BACK HOME, BUT IT'S WONDERFUL TO SEE CHILDREN BACK WITH THEIR MUMS AND DADS."

Christine, aged 63,
emergency and short term foster carer.



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WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A FOSTER CARER?

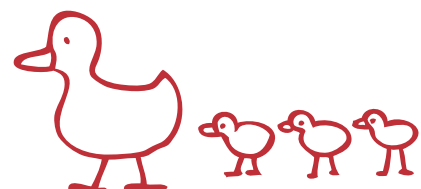
Foster carers provide a loving, supportive and stable home for children and young people in their care. They nurture them, take responsibility for their daily needs and requirements, and help them to feel safe and secure in the foster care family.

Foster carers provide safe boundaries for children and young people to help encourage positive behaviour. They also give them the chance to have some fun and be free from worry.

All children come into care with strong family ties. Maintaining contact with birth parents and extended families is vital for a child's emotional and social wellbeing and development. Foster carers play an important role in supporting these relationships. They also support a child or young person's cultural and religious background and beliefs.

Foster carers are a key part of our team. We involve them in making decisions about the children in their care and work closely with them to develop a care plan to best support the child.

Foster carers are also responsible for respecting the confidentiality of the child and their birth families and for showing them understanding, respect and empathy.





WHAT DO CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE NEED?

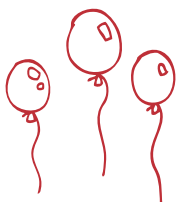
Children and young people in care need foster carers who can provide them with a safe, loving and stable home.

Children and young people need to be participating in education and other activities and having fun. They need foster carers to listen to them and they need to feel that they are making decisions about their own life.

Children and young people need foster carers to understand and support their connections to their families and community. They also need to be given the opportunity to develop their sense of identity, particularly in relation to their cultural and religious background and to feel that they belong within their foster family.

“BEING IN FOSTER CARE SHOULDN’T FEEL LIKE YOU’RE LIVING IN SOMEONE ELSE’S HOME – IT SHOULD FEEL LIKE IT’S YOUR HOME TOO.”

Mark, aged 13,
in foster care for six years.



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COULD I BE A FOSTER CARER?

There are many reasons why people become foster carers, but it is usually for a love of children and a belief they can give a child or young person a nurturing and supportive home environment and help make a difference in their lives.

Foster carers come from all walks of life. They are single, married, in a same-sex or de facto relationship, male or female, renting or buying a home, employed, studying or retired, and come from many cultural backgrounds. They may have children living at home, adult children who have moved out of home, or have no children of their own.

Children and young people in care come from a range of different backgrounds so there needs to be a diverse range of foster carers to look after them. People who are over 21 years of age and want to provide a loving home to look after children and young people can apply to be a foster carer.

Caring for children and young people who have experienced loss or other trauma in their lives can be challenging at times, but foster carers say that the rewards of helping a child feel loved and valued is greater than the challenges faced.

Foster carers need to be tolerant, patient and adaptable. They need to be able to listen to children and young people, respect them, and show them genuine affection and kindness.

Foster carers must be willing to complete specific training and develop an understanding of the experiences of children and young people prior to coming into care. They need to be prepared to undergo a personal assessment process and, once authorised as a foster carer, be committed to attending ongoing training and working closely with The Benevolent Society.

“BEING A FOSTER CARER IS THE BEST THING I’VE DONE IN MY LIFE. IT’S FUN. IT’S GOOD FOR YOUR SOUL. EVERYONE SHOULD DO IT.”

Michelle, aged 51,
foster carer for 13 years.



HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER CARER?

There are a number of steps involved in becoming a foster carer. These include information exchange sessions, assessment interviews, specialised foster carer training, and necessary checks.

You will gain a deeper understanding of foster care through undergoing this process and it will help you decide whether becoming a foster carer is right for you. You can decide to discontinue the process at any time.

It can take between three and six months from your initial enquiry to being authorised to care for a child in your home.

STEP 1: INITIAL ENQUIRY AND RESPONSE

You call us or complete an online registration of interest form. We provide you with information about becoming a foster carer.

STEP 2: INFORMATION PACK AND INFORMATION EXCHANGE SESSION

You receive a foster carer information pack which outlines the roles and expectations of a foster carer. You attend an information exchange session with our staff, either in a small group or a one-on-one session (depending on location and dates), giving you an opportunity to ask questions and increase your understanding of foster care.

Following the information exchange session, we visit you in your home and meet the members of your household.

STEP 3: COMPLETE AN APPLICATION FORM

You receive a detailed application form to complete. Once we receive your completed application, we contact you to arrange your first assessment session and foster carer training.

STEP 4: FOSTER CARER ASSESSMENT, CHECKS AND TRAINING

You and all members of your household undergo the foster carer assessment. This includes a criminal record check, Working With Children Check, a reference check, a health check from your doctor, and a housing safety check. Your application form is discussed during the first assessment interview session.

You are given feedback at each stage of the assessment process and will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that arise which may impact on your application.

During the assessment process you complete specialised foster carer training (free of charge) to build upon your understanding of foster care and further develop your fostering skills.

STEP 5: CARER AUTHORISATION

An assessment report is prepared by staff. You have an opportunity to read the report and provide comments. The report is then considered for authorisation by The Benevolent Society's foster carer assessment panel, which includes members of staff and the community.

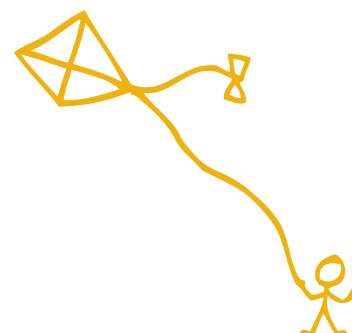
If your application is approved, you sign a Foster Carer Code of Conduct agreement. You are then authorised by The Benevolent Society to foster a child, or children, of a specified age and placement type.

If your application is not approved you are able to appeal the decision.

STEP 6: PLACEMENT AND MATCHING

We contact you when a child or young person needing care is matched with you and your family. You decide whether or not to accept the placement. Once a child or young person is placed with you, a case manager is allocated to support you throughout the placement.

It may take a while for a child or children to be placed with you. Making a good match between a child and a foster carer is essential for a successful fostering placement.



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WHAT SUPPORT DO FOSTER CARERS RECEIVE?

Foster carers are valued members of our team and are given ongoing support and training when they are caring for a child.

SUPPORT

Foster carers receive regular visits from their case manager for one-on-one support. Our case managers aim to develop strong and trusting relationships with foster carers and work together to provide the best possible care for the child. Case managers provide foster carers with additional assistance they may need to support the child, such as counselling and medical services.

Foster carers have access to support and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from an on-call worker. Regular

support groups are available to help them develop networks and friendships with other foster carers.

TRAINING

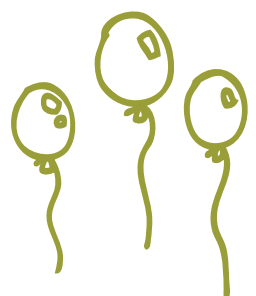
Ongoing training is available for all our foster carers who want to develop their skills caring for children in foster care. Training sessions also provide foster carers with an opportunity to come together and share their experiences.

FOSTER CARE PAYMENT

Foster carers receive a fortnightly allowance to reimburse the day-to-day costs incurred when caring for a child or young person. The allowance is based on the age and needs of the child and is tax-free. The payments do not affect any other government allowances that the carer may already receive.

“FOSTER CARERS REALLY DO CHANGE CHILDREN’S LIVES. WE COULDN’T DO WITHOUT THEM.”

Case Manager,
The Benevolent Society.





OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

At The Benevolent Society we put the child at the centre of our service and provide a single point of contact for our foster carers and children. We offer ongoing and coordinated support services to best meet the needs of children and their carers.

The Benevolent Society is a non-religious and not-for-profit organisation with nearly 200 years experience of working to bring about positive social change.

We want all children and young people in our Fostering Young Lives program to be achieving to their full potential, actively participating in their lives and feeling optimistic about their futures.

We are committed to ensuring that children and young people are safe, healthy, learning and have a sense of belonging.

We want our foster carers to know they are valued and respected members of our care team and feel supported in the work they are doing in providing the best possible care for children and young people.

We'll hold your hand while you hold theirs.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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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 parent's drug or alcohol use, depression, family breakdown or other reasons that affect the relationship between the child and their parent.

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 and some need to be fostered in a family that can look after them on a permanent basis until they are 18 years of age. Some children are in respite care which is regular care usually for one weekend a month or fortnight.

WHO CAN BE A FOSTER CARER?

Foster carers come from all walks of life and choose to foster a child or young person for different reasons. Foster carers need to be at least 21 years of age and can be single, married, in a same-sex couple, living in a city or on a rural property, have children or not, be working, studying, or retired.

CAN I BECOME A FOSTER CARER IF I WORK?

Many foster carers work full-time or part-time and care for a foster child depending on the needs of the child or young person, the type of care provided, and the flexibility of working arrangements.

CAN I CHOSE THE AGE OF THE CHILD I'D LIKE TO FOSTER?

You can chose the age range and the gender of the child you would like to foster. Case managers will talk with you about your preferences and your lifestyle to help match the needs of a child to you and your family.

DO I NEED TO HAVE A BIG HOUSE TO BE A FOSTER CARER?

You don't need a big or 'perfect' house to foster a child or young person. You may own your own home or rent a unit. You will need to have a separate bedroom for a foster child or foster sibling group depending on the age and gender of the children. A separate room gives foster children much-needed privacy and space.

CAN I BE A FOSTER CARER IF MY CHILDREN ARE LIVING AT HOME?

You can foster a child when your own children are living at home, but it is important to talk to them about why you are considering becoming a foster carer and ask them how they feel about it.

CAN I APPLY TO BE A FOSTER CARER IF I HAVE A CRIMINAL RECORD?

Having a criminal record does not stop you from applying to become a foster carer. Each application is assessed on a case-by-case basis and your eligibility to apply will depend on the type of offence and when it was committed. There are certain child-related offences and other serious crimes which will automatically disqualify applicants from becoming foster carers.

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

After your initial enquiry you will be invited to attend an information exchange session and complete a foster carer application form. Case managers visit you at your home and seek your permission to undertake a number of checks, including the Working With Children Check, personal references, a housing safety check, and criminal record check. They will also ask you to contact your doctor for a health check.

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO BECOME A FOSTER CARER?

It usually takes between three and six months from your initial enquiry to being authorised as a foster carer with The Benevolent Society.

WHAT SUPPORT WILL I GET IF I BECOME A FOSTER CARER?

All authorised foster carers at The Benevolent Society receive assistance, support and regular home visits from their case manager. Support is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Foster carers benefit from ongoing training, access to specialist services, regular support groups and a regular allowance.

ARE FOSTER CARERS PAID?

An allowance is paid directly to all foster carers to help meet daily expenses arising from caring for a child. These expenses can include clothing, food, activities, and education. The allowance is not considered as income and does not affect any government benefits already received by a foster carer.

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. The frequency and type of contact between a child and their parents is determined by what is in the best interests of the child.

DO FOSTER CARERS MEET THE CHILD'S BIRTH PARENTS?

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

WILL THE CHILD'S PARENTS BE GIVEN MY NAME AND ADDRESS?

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

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

Foster carers and children in care are supported throughout the placement to help them adjust to each other and the new living arrangements and work through issues as they arise. Additional specialist support and services are available when required.

