



“It changed our lives
for the better...”

Foster Care Information Pack

“Together We Can”

Fostering with Creating Links

The purpose of this pack is to provide you with information about Creating Links' Out of Home Care (OOHC) program which will enable you to make an informed decision regarding becoming a foster carer.

Creating Links' Out of Home Care program provides a service to children and young people who are unable to live with their birth parents or family due to a diverse range of reasons, primarily factors that have impacted upon the safety and protection of the child/young person.

Whatever the reason for separation of children and young people from their parents, it is a traumatic experience, leaving them confused and distressed about being placed in an unknown environment.

Children and young people that enter Out of Home Care experience many challenges in their lives, Creating Links aims to facilitate supportive and caring environments that will help children/young people overcome these challenges and deliver positive experiences and outcomes.

Creating Links recognises the vital role of foster carers in providing children and young people in Out of Home Care with positive outcomes and the development of life skills necessary to equip them for adulthood.

We provide ongoing support and training to our carers to ensure the experience is rewarding and that they have the skills, knowledge and resources to effectively nurture children and young people and address their ever changing needs.

A foster carer may be needed to provide long term, short term, emergency care (care required at a weekend, late at night, early in the morning, at very short notice), respite care or restoration care.

What is the process of becoming a Foster Carer?

Becoming a carer involves a number of steps. You have taken the first step in making your enquiry.

We would like you to read this pack carefully. If you are still interested in applying to be a foster carer, please contact Creating Links to take the next step in arranging a time for the 'Information Exchange Session'.

The Information Exchange Session gives you and the people in your household an opportunity to meet with workers from our agency and discuss what is involved in becoming a foster carer, and answer any questions you or your family may have about the process, role, responsibilities and rewards of fostering.



After this session you can decide whether you wish to continue the process of becoming a foster carer by participating in a 3-day training program and a series of assessment interviews. The assessment interviews are not something you pass or fail, and Creating Links works with you to discover together whether fostering is a suitable option for you at this time.

Once you have been approved as a carer, you will be approached when a child or young person is matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised for you and your household when accepting the placement of that child or young person.

Fostering Stories



Nancy had raised two of her own biological children. As her children were entering high school and becoming more independent Nancy felt she had more time on her hands, which she wanted to put towards "giving kids some new opportunities." Nancy, along with her two children, was committed to becoming an emergency short term foster carer since her initial enquiry. "We chose emergency short term care as we wanted to be able to help a lot of children in the time of uncertainty, this way I also thought I may be able to help the parents as well."

Nancy recalls receiving a call at 3 30pm with a request to care for a 5 year old boy who had just been removed from his parents care. "Billy arrived within the hour, it was a frantic hour but we were ready- or so we thought" Nancy laughed reflecting on what she had originally thought fostering would entail and what she now knows the reality is. "Billy had been severely neglected and although 5 years old it was like caring for an 18month old, he couldn't speak properly, wasn't toilet trained and screamed often. It was a long and at times very testing road however Billy stayed with us for a year and the changes he made were amazing, he became such a happy little boy. And to think we were part of that is wonderful."

Nancy continues as an emergency short term carer and has now cared for numerous children. Some transitioning to long term care and others returning to their parents. "I see our role as assisting the children to understand what has happened and to prepare them for their future - whatever that path may be."

What types of foster care are there?

Permanency Support

Out of home care now works to ensuring permanency for children and young people. The children case plan will be focused on working formulas to find alternative stable and secure options through:

- Restoration
- Guardianship
- Open adoption (unless the child is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander)
- Long term care

The service model has been designed to allow flexibility in service delivery; based on child's individualised needs.

Respite care

This involves care provided for regular short stays (e.g. one weekend a month) or one-off short stays. It gives families a break and provides a positive experience for the child/young person. Respite foster carers are asked to make a commitment of at least 12 months

Emergency or short term care

Emergency or short term care is limited time, usually overnight to twelve months' maximum. At the end of emergency or short term care, the child may return to their birth family or be placed in long term care.

Immediate care may be needed because of:

- An emergency e.g.: illness, or other family crisis
- Intervention by NSW Department of Family and Community Services, where a child is removed from their parents to ensure their safety and wellbeing.

Long term care

This is care for children /young people who cannot live with their families and need a family to grow up in until their family circumstances change or they turn 18 years of age. In October 2014, new legislation was passed which ensures agencies can consider permanency planning principles for children such as Guardianship and Adoption.

Restoration

Carers need to be able to work with birth parents and case managers to help smooth the transition of children back home. These carers promote a safe home and then support the slow process of restoring the child to their family.

What are the criteria for being a Foster Carer?

Age

Applicants must be over the age of 21 years. Long term carers should preferably be no older than 67 years of age when the young person in their care turns 18 years.

Marital Status

Creating Links does not discriminate based upon marital status or gender. The agency welcomes single, married and de facto applicants. Married and de facto applicants must have been in a stable relationship for a minimum of three years prior to applying.

Health

Applicants must have a reasonable standard of physical and mental health to ensure they have the ability to undertake the task of caring for children/young people. Applicants must undertake a health assessment as part of the assessment process.

Fertility (where infertility is an issue)

To be eligible to provide long term care, applicants must have completed their involvement in a fertility program at least twelve months before commencing the application process. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of their infertility and an understanding of the impact of infertility upon each applicant.

Religious & Cultural Beliefs

Potential carers must demonstrate their understanding of the importance of the diverse religious and cultural needs of children/young people in out of home care, and must agree to respect and adhere to these needs for children/young people who are in their care.

Financial Resources

Long term foster carer applicants should have adequate financial resources to enable them to stay at home permanently or part-time (no less than three days per week) for the first twelve months of a placement to facilitate the development of a positive and secure connection between the carer and child/young person. Emergency/Short-term foster carers may be employed full or part time if they are able to provide adequate time to the child or young person in their care. It may be possible to work part-time and still care for a school aged child, but this may not be possible if the child is of preschool age or has needs that require intensive levels of support.

Accommodation

While applicants do not need to own their own home, they must be able to provide accommodation that is safe, adequate to the needs of children/young people, and has a bedroom available for a foster child/young person.

Applications to other agencies

Applicants must declare any former application to become a foster carer either in Australia or overseas, and the outcome of these applications. Applicants must consent to Creating Links contacting other agencies to whom they have previously applied.

Child protection

Foster carer applicants have a valid Working with Children Check (WWCC) and undergo Criminal Record Check (CRC) screening. This applies to all household members over the age of 18 (WWCC) and over the age of 16 (CRC) Applicants must be able to demonstrate the ability to assume the responsibilities that come with the foster caring role. They must be able to provide a safe environment that is free from abuse, work effectively as part of a team, promote the culture of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and have personal experiences from which they can draw upon to meet the tasks of fostering.

Foster Carer Role

The role of the foster carer is to provide day to day care, support and advocacy for the child or young person in their care. To ensure that out of home care meets the needs of the child or young person, the foster carer must:

- Provide a safe, secure and nurturing environment for the child or young person
- Provide a private space for the child or young person that he/she is able to personalise to develop a sense of self identify and belonging. Foster carers must encourage and support a child or young person to put their “own stamp” on their care environment
- Ensure that the child/young person receives medical attention as required, and attends regular health and dental check-ups
- Meet with their allocated caseworker and other support staff on a regular basis, and have productive and open communication with Creating Links
- Interact in a respectful and professional manner, and adhere to the Carers Code of Conduct
- Be open and honest about their ability to care for, and support a child or young person
- Participate in training to develop a clear understanding of legislation and compliance issues that relate to their responsibilities and activities in caring for a child or young person in out of home care. Creating Links will provide training and support to ensure that all foster carers have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their role.

Birth family contact

Children and young people in out of home care will most likely have a court ordered contact arrangement with their birth family. Any contact between the foster carer and the birth family is dependent upon an assessment of any potential risk factors to the foster carer and child/young person. The foster carer’s wishes in relation to contact with the birth family are also taken into consideration. All contact arrangements are identified and documented in the child/young person’s case plan.

Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of Creating Links’ commitment to ongoing contact between the child/ young person and his/her birth family as well as a willingness to facilitate such contact. In order to facilitate a sense of belonging with you as a carer and their parents, carers are asked to assist in transporting children to and from contact. This will be discussed with you further when a child is placed with you.

Children’s Charter of Rights

1. You have the right to have contact with your family and community.
2. You have the right to be told why you are in care and to keep a record of your time in care.
3. You have a right to ask for any information that is being kept about you, to read your file and to add information to your file.
4. You have the right to be treated fairly
5. You have the right to be treated with respect
6. You have the right to feel safe and not be abused.
7. You have the right to complain
8. You have the right to services that promote your health and wellbeing
9. You have the right to ask for extra help with your education.
10. If you have to go to court, you have the right to be helped and supported.
11. You have the right to do things you enjoy
12. You have the right to your own beliefs and way of life
13. You have the right to make choices about everyday matters
14. You have the right to say what you are thinking and feeling
15. You have the right to take part in making important decisions affecting your life.
16. Before leaving care, you have the right to be involved in planning the kind of support and assistance you may need after leaving care.

Living Arrangements

Carers must provide the child or young person with a private space to do homework or have some alone time if desired. It is preferred that the child or young person has their own bedroom. However, if this is not possible, all care must be taken to ensure that the child/young person has some space he/she can call private, and that others sharing their bedroom respect the child/young person's belongings and privacy.

Involvement with the agency

Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to work with Creating Links' OOHC team in order to meet the changing needs of a child or young person. This will involve a willingness and ability to communicate with the agency and participate in planning and reviewing of the child/young person's care and their work with Creating Links.

Care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Creating Links has a commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with carers who share their cultural background.

Carers who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may be asked to provide details of the community to which they belong, if they wish to provide foster care for a child/young person from their own cultural background.

Discipline of children or young people

Foster carers are expected to work closely with Creating Links' OOHC team in developing appropriate discipline strategies for the particular child or young person in their care. Foster carers are not allowed to use any physical punishments e.g. hitting, or emotionally damaging strategies to discipline the children and young people in their care.

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to effectively manage children's behaviour without the use of physical punishments. It is very important that children and young people in out of home care understand that they are in an environment free of physical punishment due to the abuse they have experienced. They need to understand there will be consequences for their actions, but that they will continue to receive care and support in a respectful manner despite the challenges they face.

Creating Links has a behaviour management policy which guides carers on how they can appropriately discipline children.

Health and hygiene standards

Carers are expected to follow the guidelines designed to ensure that children/young people are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include practicing universal infection control and ensuring that there is no smoking within the home. Training is provided to carers about health and hygiene standards.

How long does it take to become a Foster Carer?

It can take up to five months from an applicant's initial contact with Creating Links to achieving Carer Authorisation. The process is dependent upon when the assessment process begins, how long it takes for the applicant to complete training, and when relevant checks are cleared. The assessment process includes all members of the applicant's household, so may take more time in larger households, however the average assessment and training period is approximately three months.

Once you have submitted a formal application, Creating Links will need to add your information to the NSW Carers Register.



The assessment process

Because being a foster carer is such an important task, you will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to being a foster carer. In particular, we will look at your ability to:

- Draw from and apply your own personal experiences to the tasks of fostering
- Provide good quality day to day care for children and young people
- Provide a safe and nurturing environment
- Work with other people, particularly staff from our agency, other professionals and birth parents.

What does the medical check involve?

During the assessment:

- You will be asked to complete a Health checklist
- Your doctor will be asked to complete a Medical Questionnaire.

The purpose of these checks is to determine if you have the physical and psychological health to undertake the task of fostering. Questions are asked in relation to:

- Physical health
- Emotional health
- Current and past illnesses and medical problems
- Use of drugs (prescribed and unprescribed)
- Smoking

If any medical issue arises that may affect your suitability to foster, it will be discussed with you fully to help us work out together its potential impact on children or young people in your care.

What does the accommodation check involve?

This is a check to ensure that you are able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable. The check is carried out by a member of the OOHC Creating Links team.

What should your references cover?

You will be asked to provide the name of two unrelated people who have known you for at least two years and can comment on your experience and ability to care for children/young people as well as your personal character. We may also speak to other people who have contact with you.

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What does the criminal check involve?

When you have completed a formal application to become a foster carer (not just registered your interest) and with your permission, our agency checks the criminal record of all household members over 16 years. Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you or a family member from being a carer. However, any criminal convictions that affect your ability to care safely for a child or young person will mean your application is not able to proceed.

Legal Considerations

Foster carers need to be aware that children in their care may be able to leave claim to their will. It is recommended that this be discussed with your worker if concerned.

Support Provided

Once you are authorised as a carer you will be provided with support which includes but not limited to:

- A case manager to assist the (?) the child's needs
- Training - as a carer, your continued authorisation is to complete 3 training per year.
- Clinical support where needed
- Respite
- Supports as needed
- Financial support

Can I appeal if my application to be a foster carer is not approved by the agency?

Yes. You are entitled to be given reasons why your application has been rejected and have the decision reviewed. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except for personal references which may be treated as confidential.

Fostering Stories

Jada and Ahmad had been thinking about becoming foster carers for many years. They wanted to have children however this had not happened for them naturally. For Jada being a caring and patient person, she was drawn to the idea of fostering. They felt they had a lot to offer foster children and wanted to provide a permanent home for them. Jada and Ahmad spent a long time during the assessment and training period reflecting, in relation to the information provided from the agency.



“It took a lot of careful thought, we weren’t going to give up on the little ones once they were with us so we needed to be 100% ready for anything.”

“Waiting for a placement was difficult but because of our background, being Muslim, we knew they were waiting for the right match”. Jada and Ahmad were matched with two children, 10 years and 12 years in September

2010. “We were so excited and although we had been waiting it felt like it happened overnight, our home of two suddenly became a family life with 4. The first 12 months were very difficult; we needed to commit so much time to them in order to create a sense of belonging. Thankfully we had fantastic support from my (Jada) family and our friends which was invaluable.”

“The children had, and continue to have a very strong connection with their birth family, including their other siblings in care. It was so important to for us to work on establishing a relationship with their birth family so the children felt they could belong with both. I think the parents were relieved the children were going to continue to be brought up Muslim which we have continued. It was also important to the parents that the children study the Quran, so we all go to Islamic studies every week”

The children have now been living with Jada and Ahmad for over two years and are both now in high school. “It’s taken a long time but the children are now settled and happy. We see how far they have come and for some that may not be far but we continue to see the small achievements in their progress every day. It is wonderful to hear them talk about their future in a positive way and what they hope for themselves.”