



WELCOME TO FOSTER CARE

Information Booklet



Together, We Can Make A Difference

FOSTERING WITH CREATING LINKS

The purpose of this booklet 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 that have impacted upon their safety and protection.

Whatever the reason for the 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 who enter Out of Home Care experience many challenges in their lives. Creating Links aims to facilitate supportive and caring environments that will help children and 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.

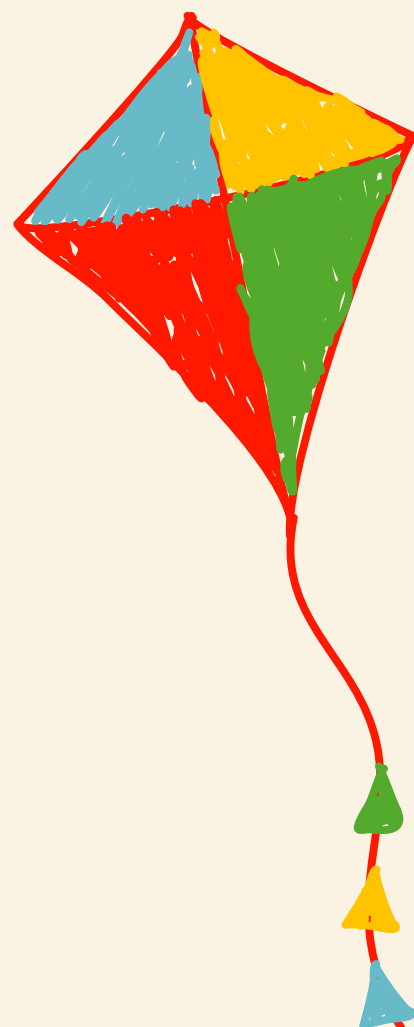
A foster carer may provide long-term, short-term, or restoration care, as well as respite care.



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My Carer...

gave me a home when no one else would. She makes me feel like I matter.





WHO IS CREATING LINKS



Creating Links is a leading non-profit organization committed to empowering vulnerable children and families including those from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities across New South Wales. Through a range of dedicated programs and services, Creating Links works tirelessly to provide support, guidance, and resources to those in need.

In the realm of foster care, Creating Links plays a pivotal role in facilitating safe and nurturing environments for children who cannot live with their biological parents. Our team of experienced professionals work closely with foster families to ensure that children receive the care, attention, and stability they require during challenging and positive times. By offering comprehensive training, ongoing therapeutic support, and access to essential services, Creating Links empowers foster families to provide loving homes where children can thrive and grow.

WHAT IS FOSTER CARE



Foster care is when children in our communities can't live with their own families due to a number of safety reasons and need to enter Out-Of-Home Care (OOHC). The reasons why children and young people enter or need foster care often stem from challenging circumstances:

- Some have faced abuse or neglect, often linked to parental issues with drug abuse, incarceration, mental illness or intellectual disability.
- Some have endured or been exposed to domestic violence or homelessness.
- Some children enter care due to being at risk as a result of their parents not being able to provide protection or safety. These parents may also exhibit risky behaviours towards these children, requiring them to be placed in foster care.

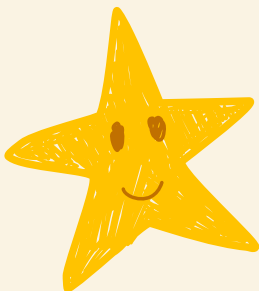
Foster care caters to a wide age range, from newborns to young people up to 18 years old, who may enter out-of-home care alone or with their siblings. These children then stay with families, called foster carers. Foster carers provide children and young people with safe and stable home environments where they care for them, love them and help them grow until they can safely go back to their families or until they find a permanent home (this can be with the family they currently stay with or with a new family).

In some instances, families or parents themselves may decide to voluntarily place their child into foster care, while in others, child protection agencies may deem it necessary for the child's wellbeing. Certain children entering foster care have additional needs, including disabilities, emotional or behavioural challenges, or mental health issues. We understand the importance of finding the right fit for each child and family. This is why our dedicated staff work collaboratively with foster carers to determine the most suitable type of care, ensuring a positive and nurturing environment for all involved.



MO & SAMAR'S FOSTERING JOURNEY

Mo and Samar have been foster carers with Creating Links for eight years. In that time, they have fostered 15 children, adopted a son, and are in the process of adopting another child. Originally, Mo and Samar became foster carers because they found out that there was a need for Muslim foster carers in their community. However, as time went on, they could see that there were so many children of different cultures and religions needing homes, and therefore began welcoming other children into their family. Mo and Samar share a commitment to providing a safe home to vulnerable children.



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Scan the QR
code to hear
Mo and
Samar's full
story.





TYPES OF FOSTER CARE

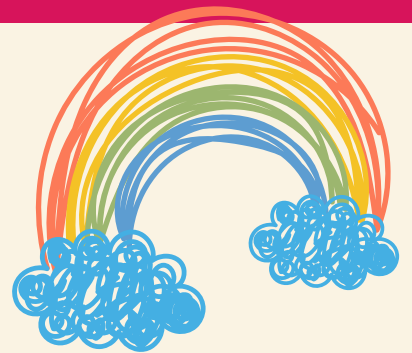
PERMANENCY SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and Creating Links work in collaboration in the best interest of children, young people and their families. This means that Creating Links will undertake all necessary measures to support children to remain in the care of their birth families, where deemed safe and appropriate.

When children have been temporarily removed from their birth families and can be safely restored, these children may only need to be placed with foster carers for short periods of time, whilst we work in supporting parents, families and children to return home.

When this is not possible, children may remain in out-of-home care for varying amounts of time. In this case, more permanent options can be considered, such as Adoption or Guardianship. These options will be explained further during the assessment part of your fostering journey.

Foster care comes in various forms to meet the diverse needs of children and families:





RESPITE CARE

This involves care being provided to children and young people for short periods of time - one weekend a month or one-off short stays. Respite carers may be asked to provide care for a range of reasons, such as when another carer has an event, is in hospital or requires medical treatment, or to provide the carer an opportunity to have some time out for themselves.



RESTORATION OR SHORT TERM CARE

Restoration or Short-term care is providing care for a limited time. This can be anywhere between one month, 6 months or up to 3 years. This type of care may be provided to children who have just entered OOHC as there is usually a plan in place for the child to be reunified with their birth family or parents, who are being supported to improve their capacity to care for the child. Restoration or short-term care is suited for applicants that would like to support children in OOHC but are currently unable to commit to providing care for longer periods of time.

LONG TERM CARE

Long-term care is providing care for children and young people where the Children's Court has determined that they are unable to return to the care of their birth parents. Long-term care refers to care for a child or young person possibly until they turn 18 years of age. In this case, Creating Links will support you and the child or young person throughout theirs and your entire out-of-home care experience.



Remember, you have the freedom to choose the type of care that suits you best. Our team will collaborate with you to find the perfect fit and we are happy to have a discussion with you if you have any concerns around this.



My Carer...

helped me learn about my
love for soccer.





THE ROLE OF A FOSTER CARER

“SAFE, SECURE, HOME”

The role of a foster carer is to provide day to day care, support and advocacy for the child or young person in their care. To ensure that the out-of-home care program 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 identity 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 case manager 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 fulfill their role.
- 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 visits. However, Creating Links acknowledges that there may be times when this is not possible in which case, a discussion can be had on how best to support you and the child/young person.

“Our family is a wonderful, respectful, emotional and tight-knit family. The girls know that we have their backs”



Rod & Velia's Story



“Our Wonderful Family”

Rod & Velia have been foster carers for approximately 12 years. Rod and Velia had tried multiple options to complete their family, among those being IVF, surrogacy, and overseas adoption. Eventually, they decided to explore foster care as a chance to help somebody by becoming foster carers. They were determined and completed all the necessary work to become authorised and now have two beautiful little girls in their care.



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Scan the QR code to hear Rod and Velia's full story.



WHO CAN BE A FOSTER CARER



We welcome carers from all walks of life, cultural and religious backgrounds, married couples, single people, and same-sex couples. Our carers all have the same goal and belief, and that is every child and young person deserves a nurturing, secure and stable family, and home.

REQUIREMENTS FOR BECOMING A FOSTER CARER:

- Applicants must be Australian Citizens or Permanent Residents
- Applicants will need to have a spare bedroom available for a foster child
- Applicants will need to undergo and pass probity checks (Police Check, Community Service Check, Working with Children Check, health check by your GP)
- Applicants will be required to attend and participate in ongoing training specific to providing care for children in foster care
- Applicants will need to be open to working with the child's birth family. This includes supporting the child's family relationships by nourishing connections & contact with their family. (This only occurs if it is deemed safe for you to do so)
- Applicants must be willing to attend and engage in appointments for the child (e.g., Dentist or GP appointments)
- Applicants must be in good physical and mental health.
- Applicants have to not have been actively trying for a child within the last 12 months. If they have young children, they must be over 2 years old.
- Applicants will need to be open to working with agency staff, as they are a part of the child's care team
- Applicants must have housing and financial stability (You do not have to own your own home).
- Applicants are required to abide by Creating Links' Code of Conduct.

RIGHTS OF CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE

We all have rights, and as members of the community, we need to respect each other's rights. 'The Charter of Rights for children in out-of-home' is no exception and has been especially prepared for children who are in out-of-home care. It lists what vulnerable children in Out of Home Care can expect from all the people who look after them and work with them.

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



Children in out of home care should expect they will be kept safe and well by all the people who provide them with care.

STEPS TO BECOMING A FOSTER CARER



STEP 1: ENQUIRY

Once we receive your enquiry, you'll receive a thank you and acknowledgement email letting you know we'll be in touch soon. During the call, we'll chat about your interest in fostering and go through a few questions to understand your interest & suitability. We'll also invite you to an information session to learn more.



STEP 2: INFORMATION SESSION

We will then send you a formal invite to attend your chosen date for an information session. These sessions are held as a way to provide you with further information about fostering. These sessions are held online and in person, in groups and one on one. Once you've attended an information session with us, you will receive a phone call the following day to discuss the content shared with you and ensure all your questions are answered. This phone call is also an opportunity for us to understand whether you'd like to move forward in the process.



STEP 3: APPLICATION

Once you've made your decision to move forward, our carer recruitment officer will organise a home visit with you and support you to complete an 'Application to Become a Foster Carer' and a 'Health Checklist'. All other required documents/forms will be left with you, to later be completed and provided to us.

We will make every effort to complete this step, in person, however, there may be times when a home visit is not possible, and in this case, we can provide the application pack to you electronically or via Post.



STEP 4: CHECKS & TRAINING

Upon receiving your application, we'll conduct thorough probity checks. These checks include Police Checks, Community Service Checks and Working with Children Checks. In addition to the 'Health Checklist' you complete, you will also need to provide a Medical Questionnaire completed by your GP to ensure you are of good physical and psychological health to undertake the task of fostering.

While we work with you to complete & collect all documentation, we will also invite you to complete 'Shared Lives Training' with a qualified facilitator. This training is mandatory and is a part of the assessment process. It provides you with current information about providing care for children in Out-Of-Home Care.



STEP 5: ASSESSMENT

This step is all about getting to know you, your family and your motivations to foster, on a deeper level. Through thoughtful conversations and tasks, your assigned assessor will explore yours and your family members past life experiences, your understanding of trauma informed care, your relationships, strengths, beliefs & values, as well as your readiness to welcome a foster child in your home.



STEP 6: AUTHORISATION

After all required documents have been collected, all checks have been passed, you've attended the mandatory training, and completed your assessment conversations with your allocated assessor, a decision will be made about whether to authorise you as a foster carer with Creating Links. Once authorised, you will be notified immediately through a formal 'Letter of Authorisation'. Once authorised, we take care to match you with a child and provide ongoing support and training. While most applicants who meet the requirements/criteria are approved and authorised, there is a possibility that authorisation may not proceed if any major barriers are identified. The assessor or our agency may make this decision based on a number of factors, specific to you and your family. If this happens, we will provide feedback and discuss options moving forward.

FLOWCHART OF ASSESSMENT ACTIVITY

Pre-assesment activities

Enquiry, pre-screening phone call & information session.

Carer Application

You complete an 'Application to become a foster carer' form during home visit with Carer Recruitment Officer.

Entry to Carers Register

Your details are entered into the Carers Register*.

Pre-authorisation Training

You complete Shared Lives pre-authorisation training & submit any outstanding documents.

Background safety checks

Background checks, which must be completed prior to approval are commenced.

Assessment conversations

Conversations with you, Conversations with your children, Conversation with members of your support network. An assessment report is prepared by our assessor.

Decision

A decision is made about whether fostering is a suitable option for you and your household at this time.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

What should my personal 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 and your personal character. We may also speak to other people who have contact with you.

What background and criminal checks will Creating Links do?

When you have completed a written application to become a foster carer, you need to provide current Working with Children Check number for all members of your household 18 years and above. We will provide you with information about how to obtain this, if you do not already have one. Identity checks will be conducted on all members of your household aged 16 and above. Our agency will also check the criminal record of all people in your household 16 years or above. Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you. However, any criminal convictions that affect your ability to care safely for a child will mean your application is not able to proceed.

What does the medical check involve?

During the assessment, you will be asked to complete a health checklist and your doctor will be asked to complete a medical check form. The purpose of these checks is to determine if you have the physical and psychological health to undertake the task of fostering. There are questions asked about your physical health, emotional health, current and past illnesses and medical problems, use of drugs (prescribed and unprescribed) and smoking.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

What does the home and environment check involve?

This is a check to ensure you are able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable, with enough additional space for a child.

What is involved in the 'Shared Lives' pre authorisation training?

The training covers the following topics: the process of children coming into care, the role of a foster carer, the importance of family inclusion, therapeutic parenting, the importance of children staying connected to their culture, the impact of caring on a carer's life and family and the need for a carer to be supported and to work within a team.

Does the assessment process involve doing tests?

No, the assessment process is designed to enable our agency and you to make an informed decision together. At each stage in the process, you will be given feedback. This may include identifying issues that may impact on your ability to provide foster care.

What will the assessment conversations cover?

Because being a carer is such an important task, you will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to being a carer. This will include your family and other relationships, past life experiences, your beliefs and values, as well as your experience of caring for children.

HOW WE SUPPORT OUR AUTHORISED CARERS



A DEDICATED CARE TEAM

There will be an allocated case manager, who works closely with you and the child or young person. We also have a dedicated carer support team, who support you as an authorised carer.



CLINICAL SUPPORT

We have a dedicated therapeutic team within our agency that supports you and the child in your care with any clinical interventions.



FORTNIGHTLY CARER ALLOWANCE

All carers receive a tax-free allowance that allows carers to meet the daily needs of the child or young person.



RESPITE SERVICES

At times, carers need a break as well. Respite carers look after the child or young person in your care for short periods, so you get some time with your family or some time to yourself.



ONGOING TRAINING

Ongoing training, including trauma-informed care, behaviour support, and therapeutic parenting will be available to you to support in caring for your young person.

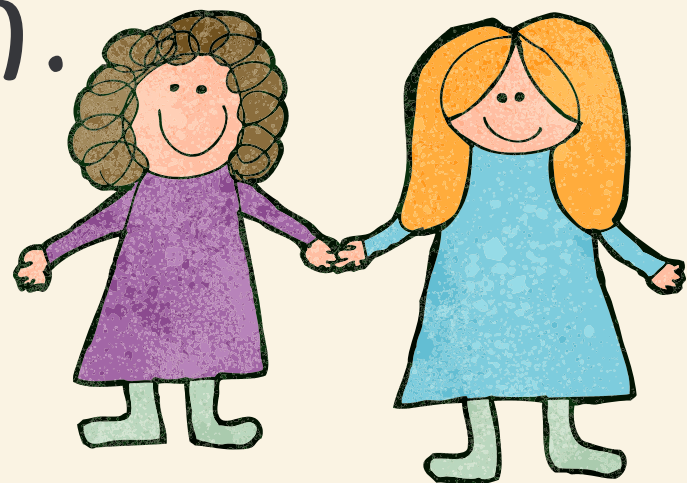


24/7 AFTER HOURS SUPPORT

Our foster carers have access to on-call support at any time of the day or night for advice, support, and direction in stressful situations.



My Carers...
are the best! They
helped me go back
home to mum.



BEFORE TAKING THE NEXT STEP, CONSIDER...

PERSONAL & EMOTIONAL READINESS

Parenting can be tough for any parent, but foster carers often face unique challenges, including feelings of isolation and frustration. Reflect on your emotional, physical and mental readiness to provide care and support to children who may have experienced complex trauma or challenging circumstances.



A child or young person in foster care might exhibit challenging behaviours and may struggle with trust, expressing their emotions, feeling a sense of belonging, or feeling safe. While managing these behaviours can be tough at times, we are here to offer you training and support to navigate these challenges.

COMMITMENT

Understand the commitment involved in fostering, including potential challenges and rewards, and ensure you are prepared to dedicate time, energy, and resources to the children in your care.

LIFESTYLE & FLEXIBILITY

Fostering will involve your whole family. Consider how fostering may impact your lifestyle, including your schedule, routines, and the people you live with as this will inform your ability to accommodate the needs of a foster child.



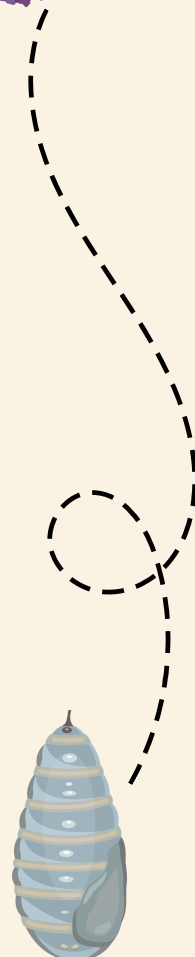
THE CHILD IN YOUR CARE MAY RETURN TO FAMILY

Whenever possible, children and young people in foster care are reunited with their birth families. As a foster carer, it's natural to feel a sense of loss when this happens. Recognising how this may impact you and your family is an important part of the journey.



THE CHILD IN YOUR CARE WILL MAINTAIN ONGOING CONTACT WITH THEIR BIRTH FAMILY

It is essential for children and young people in foster care to stay connected with their biological families whenever possible. The strength and frequency of this connection are key factors in determining their well-being, sense of identity, cultural connection and future outcomes. As a foster carer, you will play a crucial role in supporting these important relationships. However, facilitating this contact can sometimes be challenging or emotionally difficult for you.





FINANCIALS

Foster carers receive a care allowance, which is paid every two weeks to help cover the basic expenses of caring for a child or young person. The amount of this allowance varies depending on the child's age. This allowance is not a salary for being a foster carer. Instead, it helps with expenses like:

- food,
- clothing,
- household items,
- gifts,
- pocket money,
- and entertainment.

It's not considered taxable income, so it won't affect your tax situation or your eligibility for government benefits or loans. Even with the care allowance, the costs of raising a child, especially one with special needs, can still be challenging. It's important to carefully consider these financial commitments before becoming a foster carer, particularly if they impact your personal finances or future plans.



ESTABLISHMENT PAYMENTS

In addition to this fortnightly payment, you are also entitled to establishment payments to help cover the cost of buying essential items for the children when they first come to live you such as:

- school uniforms
- bedroom furniture
- bed linen
- baby capsules
- car booster seats
- clothing and footwear
- nappies and formula



Establishment payments are not automatic, so you will need to talk to your caseworker before you make a purchase. Any item bought with an establishment payment belongs to the child and should go with them, where practical, if they leave your care. It's helpful to keep a record of what things belong to the child and what belongs to you.



CONTINGENCY PAYMENTS

Sometimes the children may need services or items that cost more than the Care Allowance covers. You may be able to get help with these expenses through 'contingency' payments. This extra financial help can cover the cost of things such as:

- family contact
- childcare
- tutoring
- ongoing dental services
- optical services
- professional therapy
- additional travel
- maintain culture and identity

Before spending any money that you would like to have reimbursed, talk to your caseworker and get approval.





My Carer...

makes me feel safe when I
have bad dreams.



TAKE THE NEXT STEP

While fostering can be challenging, at times, it is also incredibly rewarding. It offers the opportunity to make a positive difference in the life of a child, providing them with stability, love, and a sense of belonging when they need it most. Fostering is not only about providing a home, it's about building relationships, creating memories, and empowering children to reach their full potential.

Whether you're seeking more information, eager to enquire with us, or ready to submit an application, please feel free to reach out to us using the contact details below. We are here to listen, support, and guide you through every step of the way. Let's start this conversation and explore how we can make a positive difference, together.

Contact us

 1300 254 657

 www.creatinglinks.org.au

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