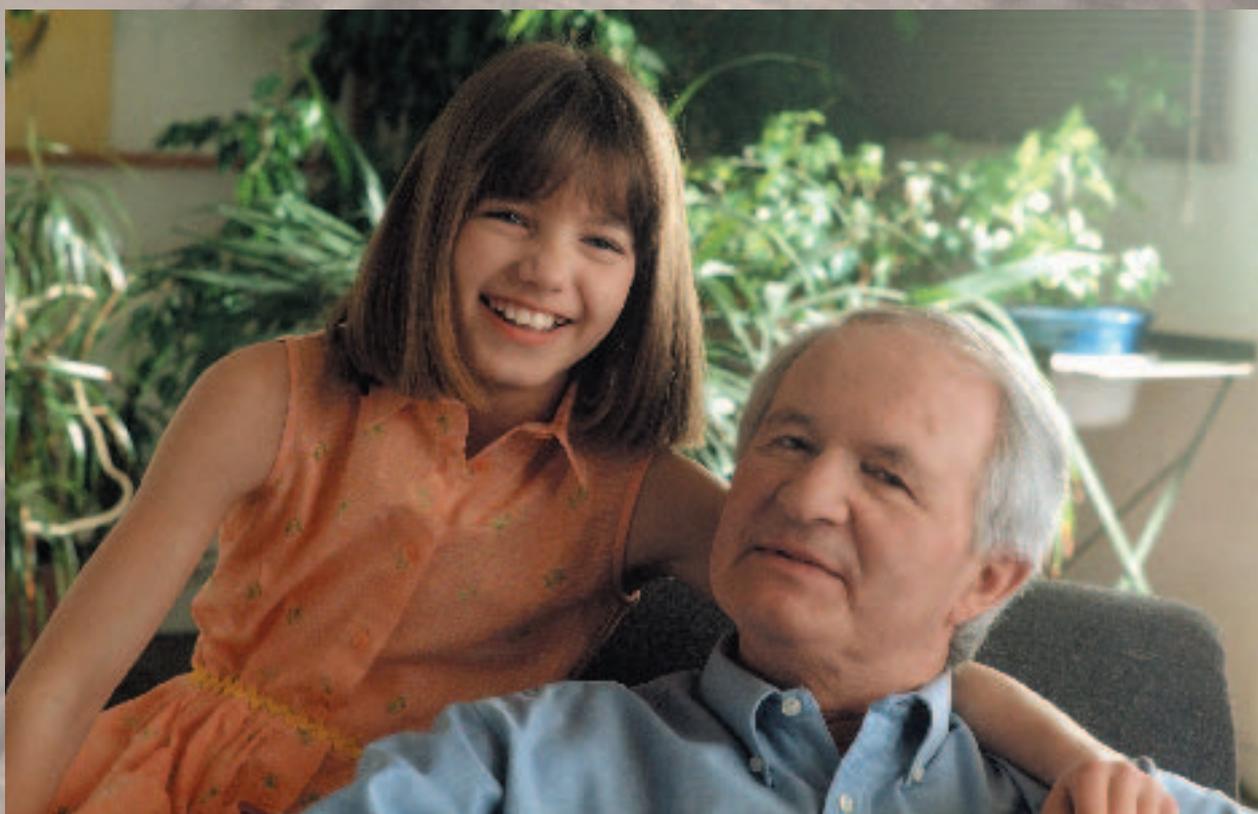




SUPPORTING CARERS OF OTHER PEOPLE'S CHILDREN

**A handbook on support for foster, relative
and kinship carers and the children and young
people in their care**



There are several real-life personal accounts in this publication. The names of the people involved have been changed to preserve their anonymity. The stories have been included to inspire and encourage people involved in foster, relative, or kinship care of children and young people. Thank you to those who have been willing to share their stories and life experiences with us.

Any unidentified photographs accompanying the personal stories are for illustration only and are not of the people in the stories. Photographs of Indigenous people have been used with permission.

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Care has been taken to ensure that the information provided in this publication is accurate. All information and material was correct at the time of printing (September 2006).

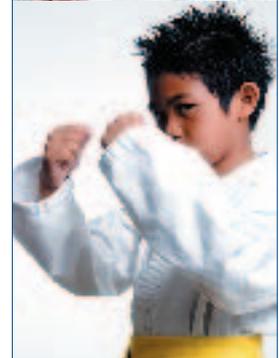


Supporting Carers Of Other People's Children: A handbook on support for foster, relative and kinship carers and the children and young people in their care is an Early Childhood – Invest to Grow initiative, funded by the Australian Government under the Stronger Families and Communities strategy.

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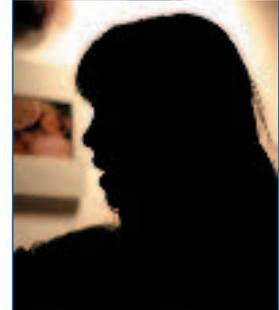
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The production of *Supporting carers of other people's children: A handbook on support for foster, relative and kinship carers and the children and young people in their care* has been managed by Ross Gurney and Bev Orr for the Australian Foster Care Association Inc.

Overall design, layout, research and writing, and project management has been undertaken by Ross Gurney.

Bev Orr has provided invaluable advice from extensive knowledge and experience in the foster care sector as well as publication, research and writing, and editing expertise. She has also liaised extensively with non-government members of the foster care sector and located those whose positive stories and contributions have given a personal touch to this publication.

Staff in the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs have also made significant contributions.





Message from the Minister

Children and young people are Australia's most precious natural resource. Every child deserves the chance to be healthy, happy, confident and secure.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the *Supporting Carers of Other People's Children: A handbook on support for foster, relative and kinship carers and the children and young people in their care*, produced by the Australian Foster Care Association.

The *Supporting Carers of Other People's Children* handbook contains information on the wide range of services, allowances and payments available for carers – as well as for the children and young people in their care – across Australia. It also contains positive, yet realistic, stories about the experiences of foster families.

Carers make an important contribution to improving the lives of children and young people across Australia. They willingly give their time and care to children and young people in need.

The Australian Government recognises the valuable contribution of carers and also understands they need support and information to carry out their roles effectively.

The role of carers is challenging yet, ultimately, rewarding. Through initiatives, such as the *Supporting Carers of Other People's Children* handbook, the Australian Government is continuing its commitment to strengthen families and improve outcomes for children and young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mal Brough". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

The Hon Mal Brough MP
Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Preface

This publication represents a significant milestone for the Australian Foster Care Association Inc. (AFCA). A study conducted in 2000–2001 on AFCA's behalf into the support needs of foster carers has born fruit in a number of ways. Two of these are the events which led up to the creation and acceptance of a National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers, the *National Plan for Foster Children, Young People and their Carers* (the National Plan) and this publication, funded as an initiative under the National Plan, which outlines the payments and allowances available to foster, relative and kinship carers from both the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

The Australian Foster Care Association Inc. believes that this publication, in conjunction with the National Plan and its other outcomes, can only result in better outcomes for the children and young people in care. Along the way they will meet, either directly or through consequential actions and materials, the many needs of carers as they strive to do the best they can for children and young people who have a need for sensitive and exceptional care from people who, out of the goodness of their hearts, have volunteered to care for other people's children.

We thank the Australian Government through the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs for making this publication possible. It does not and can not hold all of the information that would be useful, but it will point you in the right direction to get the kind of help that you may need.

Roles of the Australian Government and state and territory governments

Government responsibilities for supporting families in Australia are split between the Australian Government and the state and territory governments. Generally, the Australian Government is responsible for a variety of family matters, including marriage, divorce, child custody, pensions and allowances. State and territory governments are primarily responsible for child protection.

The Australian Government provides support for families through family assistance payments and income support payments. Family assistance is designed to help low and middle-income families with the costs of raising children. Most of this assistance is targeted to families on low incomes. This support is also available to qualifying foster, relative and kinship carers in their role of caring for children and young people who are unable to live with their parents.

State and territory governments, through their community services or welfare departments, aim to protect children and young people who are at risk of harm, abuse or neglect within their families, or when their families do not have the capacity to care for and protect them. When the child or young person is unable to remain safely in their own home, the state or territory community services or welfare department may place the child or young person with a foster, relative or kinship carer and provide some assistance to support the placement.



Summary of Australian Government support

The Australian Government is committed to supporting and strengthening families and recognises that families today have a diversity of parenting responsibilities and arrangements.

As part of this commitment, the Australian Government makes a substantial contribution to the wellbeing of children and young people in out-of-home care by providing a range of payments and allowances to eligible carers (see table opposite).

Important: *The information in this handbook is intended as a guide only. It is a good idea to make an appointment with Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office to discuss matters relating to assistance for children and young people entering or leaving your care, as the issues are usually complex.*

Australian Government payments and allowances summary table

<i>Payment or allowance</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>See page</i>
30% Child Care Tax Rebate	The new 30% Child Care Tax Rebate helps families with the cost of approved child care. The rebate is not means tested and may cover up to 30% of your out-of-pocket expenses for approved child care with a maximum rebate per child of \$4,000 (indexed per year).	18
ABSTUDY	ABSTUDY provides a means-tested living allowance and other supplementary benefits to eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary and tertiary students and New Apprentices. Primary school students living at home and aged 14 years or more on 1 January in the year of study may also be eligible for assistance.	39
Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme	If you care for a student who normally lives in an isolated area, the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme is available for families with primary, secondary and tertiary students. The tertiary student needs to be either under the minimum age that the state or territory requires for him or her to participate in education or training, or under 16 years of age (whichever is the greater).	32
Carer Allowance	If you care for someone who has a disability or a severe medical condition, you may be able to receive Carer Allowance. Carer Allowance is not taxed, and income and assets tests do not apply.	9
Carer Payment	If you care for someone who has a disability or a severe medical condition and you are unable to support yourself because of the demands of your full-time caring role, you may be able to receive Carer Payment. Carer Payment is taxed and income and assets tests apply.	9
Child Care Benefit	As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you may be eligible to receive Child Care Benefit, which helps families with the cost of child care for long day care, family day care, occasional care, outside school hours care, vacation care and registered care.	17
Concession cards (including Health Care Cards)	Concession card coverage for a child or young person in your care is available in a number of ways — for example, by inclusion on your card (if you have one) or by applying for a Health Care Card specifically in the name of your child or young person in care.	34
Double Orphan Pension	Double Orphan Pension helps you to meet the costs of caring for children and young people who are double orphans. It is not income or assets tested.	18
Family Tax Benefit Part A	As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you may be eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A, which is designed to help families with the costs of children and is assessed on the combined family income.	20
Family Tax Benefit Part B	As a foster, relative or kinship carer you may also be eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part B, which gives extra assistance to families with one main income, including single parents.	20
Grandparent Child Care Benefit	If you are the primary carer of your grandchildren and receive an income support payment, such as the Age Pension, then you may be entitled to Grandparent Child Care Benefit. It covers the total cost of approved child care for up to 50 hours per child per week.	17
Large Family Supplement	Large Family Supplement is paid to families with three or more children. If as a foster, relative or kinship carer you are in this position, the Large Family Supplement may help you. It is paid in addition to Family Tax Benefit Part A.	32
Maternity Immunisation Allowance	Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a one-off payment for children who have been fully immunised at 18 months, or after 18 months, but before their second birthday. It is not income or assets tested.	24
Maternity Payment	Maternity Payment is paid to families following the birth (including stillbirth) or adoption of a baby, and recognises the extra costs associated with the birth or adoption of a baby. It is not income or assets tested.	24
Multiple Birth Allowance	Multiple Birth Allowance is paid to families with triplets or more until the children are six years old. It is paid in addition to Family Tax Benefit Part A.	24

Newstart Allowance	Newstart Allowance is the main income support payment for unemployed people aged 21 years or over and below Age Pension age. To qualify for Newstart Allowance, you must be looking for work and participating in activities designed to help you take on paid employment.	35
Parenting Payment	As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you may be eligible for Parenting Payment, which is an income support payment designed specifically for people – either single or partnered – who have principal care of a child. At the same time, you may also be able to receive Family Tax Benefit.	35
Transition to Independent Living Allowance	A young person leaving care and moving to independent living may be eligible for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance. This is a one-off support payment up to the value of \$1,000. It is intended to help meet some of the young person’s transition costs.	42
Youth Allowance	Youth Allowance is available to young people aged between 16 and 24 years (15 if independent) who are studying full-time or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship, and to young people aged 16 to 20 years (15 if independent) who are looking for work. Youth Allowance ensures young people receive support while studying or looking for paid employment. It encourages young people to choose further education or training to improve their qualifications for work.	44

Centrelink

Centrelink delivers a range of Australian Government services and payments and allowances to the Australian community. As well as the payments and allowances delivered by the Family Assistance Office, Centrelink services, payments and allowances that may assist you include:

- ABSTUDY
- Advice from Financial Information Service Officers
- Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme
- Carer Allowance
- Carer Payment
- Concession Cards
- Newstart Allowance
- Parenting Payment
- Social work services
- Youth Allowance.

A range of helpful publications about payments and allowances, including current rates, is on the Centrelink website or can be requested direct from Centrelink (see below for details).

Family Assistance Office

The Family Assistance Office is located in Medicare Offices, Centrelink Customer Service Centres and Tax Office Shopfronts and provides access to the following payments and allowances:

- Child Care Benefit
- Double Orphan Pension
- Family Tax Benefit
- Grandparent Child Care Benefit
- Large Family Supplement
- Maternity Immunisation Allowance
- Maternity Payment
- Multiple Birth Allowance.

A range of helpful publications about payments and allowances, including current rates, is on the Family Assistance Office website or can be requested direct from the Family Assistance Office (see below for details).

Centrelink

Phone 13 1021, 8 am to 8 pm
Monday-Friday
TTY 1800 810 586
Multilingual services 12 1202
www.centrelink.gov.au

Family Assistance Office

Phone 13 6150, 8 am to 8 pm
Monday-Friday
TTY 1800 810 586
Multilingual services 12 1202
www.familyassist.gov.au

To find out more about Australian Government payments and allowances, contact Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office. Information is also available from your foster care agency and state or territory foster care association (see state and territory pages at the end of this publication for contact details).

Carer Payment

Carer Payment provides income support to people who, because of the demands of their caring role, are unable to support themselves through paid employment. It can be paid to a carer in respect of a child who is profoundly disabled or to an adult who has a disability or severe medical condition or who is frail aged. From 1 July 2006 Carer Payment (child) eligibility was extended to carers of children with severe intellectual, psychiatric or behavioural disabilities who need constant supervision.

Carer Payment is income and assets tested. As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you may do paid or voluntary work, study or train for up to 25 hours a week without losing eligibility for Carer Payment. As well, you can take a break from caring for up to 63 days in a calendar year, and the child or young person in your care can be hospitalised for up to 63 days in a calendar year without you losing eligibility for Carer Payment. You may also get both Carer Payment and Carer Allowance, but you cannot get Carer Payment and any other Centrelink or Veterans' Affairs pension at the same time.

Carer Allowance

Carer Allowance is a supplementary payment to people who provide daily care and attention at home for a person with a disability or chronic medical condition. To be eligible for this payment for a child aged under 16 years, the child must be a dependent on you as their carer, and must live with you in a private home. As well, the child must have a disability that is permanent or likely to last for at least 12 months. You can take a break from caring for up to 63 days in a calendar year, and the child that you are caring for can be hospitalised for up to 63 days in a calendar year without you losing eligibility for Carer Allowance. The allowance is not income or assets tested and can be paid in addition to a social security income support payment.

If you are a foster, relative or kinship carer of a child aged under 16 years and do not qualify for Carer Allowance, you can still qualify for a Health Care Card if the child requires at least 14 hours per week of additional care and attention.



For more information about either of the above, phone Centrelink on 13 1021
TTY 1800 810 586
Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at www.centrelink.gov.au

They have helped over 250 children. They have big hearts. If you need someone to talk to, R--- and C--- are the ones to talk to. Where I came from, home wasn't really a home, so this is the home I know.
B--- (24 yrs)

Through the eyes of former children in care

When my parents split up it was very distraught time for me and when I had nowhere to go Aunty J--- took me in and though she had a large family, she made room for us so we had somewhere where we were safe.
K---

Welfare to Work – Information for foster carers on income support payments

The Australian Government announced a series of changes in the 2005–06 Budget to increase the participation of parents on income support in employment. Called 'Welfare to Work', the package of measures includes a requirement for principal carer parents on income support payments — such as Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance, with a youngest child aged six or over — to look for, or undertake, part-time work of at least 15 hours a week. Principal carer parents with a youngest child aged under six years do not have to look for or undertake any paid work.

Note: *If you are a parent who is also a foster carer, either on Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance, automatic exemptions from participation requirements are available if you are 'registered and active' — for more information see the section on 'Welfare to Work participation requirements and foster carers'.*

For Welfare to Work purposes, 'registered and active' relative and kinship carers are treated the same as foster carers and included under the single title.

Welfare to Work arrangements for people on Parenting Payment

On Parenting Payment before 1 July 2006

Principal carers who were on Parenting Payment (Single or Partnered) before 1 July 2006 can stay on their payment until their youngest child turns 16 years as long as they continue to meet the payment's eligibility requirements.

However, these parents are required to look for, or undertake, part-time work of at least 15 hours a week, as part of their participation requirements from 1 July 2007, or when their youngest child turns seven (whichever is later).

New claimants of income support on or after 1 July 2006

From 1 July 2006, single parents can claim Parenting Payment (Single) if their youngest child is aged under eight years.

When their youngest child turns six, these single parents have a participation requirement to look for part-time work of at least 15 hours but are able to stay on Parenting Payment until their youngest child turns eight. When their youngest child turns eight, they will have to move to another payment, usually Newstart

Allowance, but will continue to have the same participation requirements.

Single parents whose youngest child is eight years or older are not eligible for Parenting Payment (Single) and will generally need to apply for Newstart Allowance and will have participation requirements.

However, single principal carer parents on Newstart Allowance will still get the:

- Pensioner Concession Card
- Pharmaceutical Allowance, and
- Telephone Allowance.

Parents who claim Parenting Payment (Partnered) will generally move on to Newstart Allowance and be required to look for part-time work of at least 15 hours per week once their youngest child turns six. As Newstart

Allowance is the same amount as Parenting Payment (Partnered), the maximum rate of income support for these carers will not change.

Partnered parents whose youngest

child is six years or older are not eligible for Parenting Payment (Partnered) and will generally need to apply for Newstart Allowance and will have participation requirements.

Welfare to Work measures only affect parents who are on an income support payment, such as Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance. The changes do not affect their Family Tax Benefit payments. Principal carer parents who do not receive income support payments do not have a participation requirement such as job search and will continue to receive Family Tax Benefit payments.

Welfare to Work participation requirements and foster carers

The Australian Government recognises the very great value of the work done by parents who are also foster, relative and kinship carers. Because of this, you can get an automatic exemption from participation requirements which apply to principal carer parents on Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance when you are 'registered and active' carers. To be eligible for an exemption, you need to be 'registered' with your relevant state or territory authority and prove that you are 'actively' involved in providing care (see section on *What is a 'registered and active' foster carer?* below).

To be eligible for an exemption, you need to be 'registered' with your relevant state or territory authority and prove that you are 'actively' involved in providing foster care.

Initial exemptions are for up to 12 months and are then reviewed.

If you are a single principal carer parent on Newstart Allowance — including if you have moved from Parenting Payment (Single) to Newstart Allowance when your youngest child turns eight, and you have an automatic exemption from participation requirements because of caring responsibilities — you will be paid a higher rate of Newstart Allowance equivalent to the Parenting Payment (Single) rate.

This higher rate recognises that 'foster carer' single parents take on a greater role than parents caring for their own children, and the likely extra costs involved. This higher rate of Newstart Allowance is only paid if you are a foster carer single parent who has an automatic exemption.

Note: Any extra income you earn is subject to the Newstart Allowance income test.

If you have an exemption, but you chose to look for paid work, the Government will provide you with assistance — that is, you will have the same access to government-funded employment services as other parents on income support.

What is a 'registered and active' foster carer?

Registered and active foster carers are defined as:

- a person who meets the requirements of the law of the state or territory in which the person resides in order to be permitted to provide foster care in that state or territory, and
- the person is actively involved in providing foster care in that state or territory.

To be eligible for an automatic exemption from participation requirements, you must also have a child which qualifies you as a 'principal carer parent' for income support purposes. Principal carer parents are recognised as the principal carer of a dependent child under the

age of 16 years and are eligible to receive income support payments in relation to the care of that child. If you are a 'registered and active' foster carer but not considered a principal carer parent and do not receive income support in relation to a child, you are not eligible for an automatic exemption from participation requirements.

'Registered and active' foster carer includes principal carer parents who are kinship or relative carers, as well as emergency and respite carers who care for children intermittently or irregularly. You need to have formal documents to give to Centrelink from an authorised foster care agency in your state or territory (this can be both government or non-government agencies) confirming that you are 'registered and active'.

Note: Centrelink will use documents from the relevant state or territory authority to decide if you are a 'registered and active' foster carer.

What happens to carers who are not considered registered and active?

Automatic exemptions from participation requirements should apply to you once your status as a 'registered and active' foster carer is verified.

If as a principal carer parent, you have had a child placed in your care with the knowledge of the relevant government authority in your state or territory, but you are not considered to be a 'registered and active' foster carer in your state or territory, you are not eligible for an automatic exemption. However, when caring for a foster child affects your ability to work or look for work, and a relevant state or territory government department can provide evidence (such as a formal letter) to substantiate your claim, then you may be eligible for a short term, case-by-case exemption from participation requirements. Depending on the circumstances, these exemptions can be renewed.

Note: If you are a single parent in this category, you are not eligible for the higher



rate of Newstart Allowance.

If you are a parent on income support who provides informal care of a foster child in a private arrangement, you are not regarded as a 'registered and active' foster carer and you are not eligible for an automatic exemption from participation requirements.

For how long can I get exemptions from participation requirements?

While the maximum period of exemption from participation requirements is up to 12 months, it is not always appropriate to grant a 12-month exemption to all parents who are 'registered and active' foster carers. Discretion is used to ensure that an exemption only applies to the period that the foster carer is likely to provide care — for example, if the state or territory documents indicate that as a foster carer you are only likely to be actively involved in providing care for the next four months, an automatic exemption from participation requirements is usually granted for those four months.

Are exemptions renewable?

Yes. When you continue in your foster caring role, the relevant authority verifies or renews your status as 'registered and active'. The

authority writes to you about the decision to renew your 'registered and active' status for a particular period (usually another six to 12 months). To renew your exemption as a foster carer, you should submit your letter to Centrelink.

Note: Some states and territories have different review periods, although all reviews occur at least once every 12 months.

Are there rules for foster carers who move, or live, interstate?

Yes. If this applies to you, contact Centrelink for more information.

What documents are needed by Centrelink in my state or territory to register as an active foster carer?

Depending on which state or territory you live in, you may get the documents you need for Centrelink automatically (whether or not you are on income support), or you may have to contact the relevant government or non-government foster care authority and get them to send the documents to you.

The table on the next page outlines the required documentation for each state and territory.

For more information, phone Centrelink on 13 1021

TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at

www.centrelink.gov.au

I was a very shy and emotional little girl. I guess I was afraid. My memories before entering care were not exactly good ones. I needed a lot of encouragement and reassurance. I remember always crying and it wasn't just for a few minutes, I'd cry for ages. I was scared of other kids because I had been beaten up. We all had out fair share of ups and downs but the consistency and perseverance from J--- and M--- helped me to deal with my emotions. I worked, I turned out OK and it has given me the grounding for bringing up my own family. D---

Documents that Centrelink in each state and territory will look for from foster carers for Welfare to Work exemptions

State	Documentation Required	Relevant Authorities
ACT	Letter, on official letterhead, issued by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.
NSW	Letter, on official letterhead, issued by one of NSW's relevant authorities stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Community Services; or Approved non-government foster care agencies in NSW (available at the Office of the Children's Guardian website www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au).
NT	Letter, on official letterhead, issued by the Department of Health and Community Services stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health and Community Services.
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificate of Approval as a Foster Carer, or Certificate of Approval as a Kinship Carer, or Certificate of Approval as a Provisionally Approved Carer, and Letter, on official letterhead, issued by the Department of Child Safety stating that you are considered 'registered and active'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Child Safety.
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Certificate of registration; and Letter, on official letterhead, issued by one of SA's relevant authorities stating that you are considered 'registered and active'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Families and Communities; or Approved non-government foster care agencies in South Australia. Centrelink will have a list of approved agencies.
TAS	Letter, on official letterhead, issued by one of Tasmania's relevant authorities stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Health and Human Services; The following non-government foster care agencies in Tasmania: Kennerley Children's Home Inc – Claremont; Glenhaven Family Care Inc – Devonport; Placement and Support Services – Hobart.
VIC	Letter, on official letterhead, issued by one of Victoria's relevant authorities stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Human Services; or Approved non-government foster care agencies in Victoria. Centrelink has a list of approved agencies.
WA	Letter issued by the Department for Community Development stating that you are considered 'registered and active'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department for Community Development.

For contact information relating to the departments named in the table above see the state and territory pages at the back of this publication

Jennie

birth child of foster carers

Jennie says there was one big drawback in sharing her teenage years with four young foster children. 'I tell people I was put through torture having to play with Barbie dolls when I was 16!'

Other than that, Jennie, now 24, is hard pressed to recall any regrets. She was 12 years old when her parents, in the course of exploring their own Aboriginality, were asked to foster four Aboriginal siblings, aged from two to seven.

'It wasn't just a thing where my parents said "We are doing this". It was "How would you feel about having more kids in the house?" It was a group decision.'

Jennie was the youngest of three. She had a sister two years older, and a brother who had already left home.

'At that young age it was exciting. I was the baby, and I thought "I can have someone younger than me, who I can teach things to". I'd always had people saying I couldn't do things because I was the baby, but now I could prove that I was getting older.'

There was another imperative. 'I remember sitting down and talking with my sister about what it would be like if we didn't have a Mum and Dad, or a family, to look after us.'

'All through school, if there were kids suffering in Rwanda or wherever, I was the one who came home and raided the cupboard for things to put under the Christmas Giving Tree.'

There were still some big adjustments. The new family members - three boys and a girl - all suffered from Foetal Alcohol Syndrome, and had varying degrees of developmental delay. 'In many ways they were like babies, so I went from being a kid just mucking around, to changing nappies. It was all hands on deck.'

Jennie says she pretty much sacrificed the usual teenage pursuits. 'My friends were going out and being really stupid and I thought "Nuh, I've got these little brothers and sister and they've missed out on what I've had so far."'

'The two youngest boys didn't have much speech. I became their speech therapist, and did lots of work with them, trying to get them to make the right sounds. It was kind of like a pet project. It was good because you see them now, reading and talking, and knowing you had a hand in that...'

Jennie is still at home, still helping, and also at university studying law. 'I want to do family law. People at the foster care association say they want me to represent foster carers! But I'm also interested in youth justice.'

'I don't want the big law firms. I'd rather deal with people that don't have money, and the cases that everyone won't touch. They're the ones that are forgotten and need to be helped.'

From time to time Jennie gets teased about not having a boyfriend. She's keen to have her own children, but says she'll need to find the right guy. 'Whoever I end up with, they'll get to take on my younger brothers and sister.'

'Ben, who's turning 15 this year, keeps telling me that Mum and Dad will eventually not be able to look after him, so he's going to come and live in my garage, wherever I am.'





Laurel

Jennie's Mum

None of the family knew just how hard raising these four children would be. Laurel, Jennie's mother, says she was not told by the Family Services Department how high their needs were. The middle boy, Toby, has cerebral palsy, epilepsy and a mental illness, although his age precludes a proper diagnosis.

The youngest, Charlie, is now 12, not fully toilet-trained, and 'masturbates constantly'. 'It makes it really difficult if you want to go out for coffee,' says Laurel.

The relationship with the eldest, Julie, has all but broken down. She has left home and is in and out of the juvenile justice system. 'I know that Jennie still worries about her.'

Laurel says she would not have taken the children on if they'd been the same ages as her own children. 'It would have been really hard with my girls, to treat them as equal with kids who are disadvantaged and have got disabilities.'

Instead, her two daughters have been able to ease the burden. 'Jennie just threw herself into it. She's receptive to anyone, and she likes to mother, nurture and teach. She's always teaching them painting or something or other.'

'Kristie, my older daughter, is not so child-focussed. But even now when she's playing softball, for instance, she'll take the youngest fellow with her to the games.'

Both girls, as young teens, received the same intensive training that their parents had, for three weeks before the children arrived. Ever since, Jennie has been attending meetings and doctors' appointments with her parents, listening and taking notes. Her advocacy has led to roles in youth policy and job selection panels.

Her sister Kristie worked in Centrelink for some years, and was a source of information for the foster care community. Laurel believes her daughters' fostering experience has given them important life skills, knowledge of systems, and an awareness of the problems faced by a sector of the population they might not have otherwise encountered.

Was there ever resentment? Laurel doesn't think so. She says that her daughters' lives improved because she stopped working and was there when they came home from school. Occasional holidays and 'adult time', for the original family, are still possible during respite care.

'Fostering has made the kids stronger, and more tolerant. And all three of them talk about "my brothers and sister".'

The inside journey through foster care

Jennifer McIntosh, Ph.D.

(Extracts from the paper: 'The inside journey through care', Children Australia, vol. 28, no.3.)

There are countless reasons for children being on the road of alternative care, and equally countless departure points, routes and destinations. Journeys in care may span a few days or weeks and be relatively uncomplicated. Conversely, they may be long, arduous and lonely journeys, spanning years, with no fixed address.

Along the way, some children manage well to carry their own emotional baggage, despite its bulk. For other children, their baggage is too heavy, and the weight of the load wreaks havoc with their development. Sometimes, by the time they meet with good enough care, it can take a while before these children can relax and make use of it.

How can a child recover from a journey like that? Well the good news is that they can and do: through the right type of foster care relationships. And it's attachment that makes the difference.

The attachment relationship: what it feels like and how it grows

Attachment is a bond, different from liking someone, loving someone or even trusting someone. In it's healthiest form, it is all of these things, but first and foremost, it is a bond of psychological dependence. Infants and children need to feel securely attached in their placements, even in short term care.

In longer term placements, the recovery that children can make through a good attachment relationship is astounding, and it's this change that makes it all worthwhile, for everyone.

Over time, in stable, good quality placements, foster children begin to feel attached to their carer, usually at a personally challenging time, when they want and need comfort. Even though the child often can't indicate clearly that they need comfort, the carer reads the signals, and responds in a timely, empathic manner.

For the foster child, that often feels like a new experience, and as it is repeated time and again, these children come to feel linked with the foster parent in a manner which stands out completely from their prior journey. Before that placement, when they were in need, the child expected disappointment. In their secure foster placement, children are often surprised and relieved that their needs are understood, and responded to. The foster parent becomes a caring presence in the face of an anticipated absence.

The journey toward attachment from the perspective of carers is often not straightforward. These children can be passive or confused or angry about how to get the care they need. In successful placements, attachment is forged by the foster parent being able to share an emotional space with the child. The carer gently persists with the child, and 'gets through' to them, partnering the child in their experience. These children don't just feel cared for, they feel cared about. The child begins to know that they matter, that they are a significant and irreplaceable part of the foster parent's life. In this, the foster child begins to feel 'normal' and 'real', and finally, some of their fears about being a 'foster kid' are dismantled. The result for the child is a renewal in energy, the feeling of being unburdened and an ability and desire to go on. Now that's worth it!

*Jennifer McIntosh is a child clinical psychologist. She directs the Family Transitions Attachment Clinic in Melbourne. She is an Adjunct Associate Professor at La Trobe University and Associate Senior Lecturer at the University of Melbourne.
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Dr Jennifer McIntosh



Child Support Scheme

The Australian Government's Child Support Scheme aims to ensure that the children of separated parents are adequately supported according to their parents' capacity to do so. The Child Support Agency administers the scheme by:

- registering cases
- assessing child support payable
- collecting payments where requested
- providing information on child support matters.

If you are a non-parent carer (such as a grandparent) you may be eligible to receive child support payments from either or both of the child's parents if you care for the child for at least 110 nights in the 12 months following an application for a child support assessment.

It may be possible for you to receive child support even if the child's parents or legal guardians don't consent to the child being in your care — for example, it may be unreasonable for the child to live at home. This could be because there has been an extreme family breakdown or there is a serious risk to the child's physical or mental well-being from violence or sexual abuse in the home of the parent or legal guardian.

The Australian Government recently announced reforms to the Child Support Scheme. As part of the reforms, a new formula for assessing child support will be introduced in July 2008. Non-parent carers who have at least 35 per cent care of a child may be entitled to receive child support under the new formula.

Based on its assessment of the circumstances, the Child Support Agency makes the decision about whether you as a non-parent carer can receive child support. Some states and territories have different rules that may affect whether you are eligible.

For more information about the Child Support Scheme, phone the Child Support Agency on 13 1272, TTY 1800 631 187, Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450 or visit the website at www.csa.gov.au

Child Care Benefit

Child Care Benefit assists families with their child care costs. It helps families to balance work and family life and also provides opportunities for children's learning and development. As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you may be eligible for Child Care Benefit when you use approved child care or registered child care and meet the necessary immunisation and residency qualification criteria.

Your entitlement to Child Care Benefit will depend on your family income, the type and amount of care you use and whether you use the care for work or for other reasons. Foster care subsidies and allowances paid by state and territory governments are not counted as income for the purposes of Child Care Benefit. Your state or territory government may also provide financial assistance for child care. Check with your local state or territory government or foster care organisation.

Phone the Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305 to find out about:

- child care services in your area
- the various types of child care available such as long day care, family day care, in-home care, outside school hours care and occasional care
- Australian Government help with the cost of child care
- any quality of care issues.

Additional help for grandparents with child care costs

Grandparents who have the primary responsibility for raising and caring for a grandchild (or children) can receive additional help through Child Care Benefit with the costs of approved child care. This assistance recognises the significant contribution grandparent carers make by caring for two generations.

If you are a grandparent who has the primary care of your grandchild (or children), the Child Care Benefit work/training/study test will be waived so you can access up to 50 hours of Child Care Benefit for each child in approved child care per week.

In addition, if you are an eligible grandparent carer who receives an income support payment from Centrelink or the Department of Veterans' Affairs, then you may be able to receive Grandparent Child Care Benefit, which covers the full cost of approved child care for up to 50 hours per child per week.

For information about Australian Government approved child care services and vacancies in your area, phone the Child Care Access Hotline on 1800 670 305, TTY 1800 639 327

For information about eligibility for Child Care Benefit and Grandparent Child Care Benefit phone Family Assistance Office on 13 6150, TTY 1800 810 586, Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au

30% Child Care Tax Rebate

The Child Care Tax Rebate is 30% of your out-of-pocket child care expenses for approved child care. The rebate is up to \$4,000 per child per year, and it is indexed each year. Out-of-pocket expenses are child care fees not already covered by the Child Care Benefit or any other financial assistance for child care provided to you.

The rebate is not a 'cash in hand' refund. It is a tax offset that reduces your tax in the year it is claimed.

To be eligible to claim the rebate in the 2005-06 income tax return, for example, you must have:

- used approved child care in 2004-05, and
- received Child Care Benefit, and
- passed the Child Care Benefit work/training/study test.

For more information about Child Care Benefit or the Child Care Benefit work/training/study test, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au.

When you claim the rebate on your tax return, you can confirm your Child Care Benefit entitlement and child care fee information by visiting the Family Assistance Office website at www.familyassist.gov.au. You can also use 'e-tax' to download your 30% Child Care Tax Rebate information from the Family Assistance Office into your tax return. If you agree, your registered tax agent can also have access to the same information. If you use your own records, keep your child care fee receipts and similar details, as well as your end-of-financial year Child Care Benefit letter sent to you by the Family Assistance Office.

If you are not required to lodge a tax return you can transfer your rebate to your spouse. To do this, use the 30% Child Care Tax Rebate transfer advice in e-tax. Or you can get a printed copy of the 30% child care tax rebate instructions and transfer advice 2006 (NAT 14719-6.2006) by phoning the Tax Office (see details below).

For more information about the 30% Child Care Tax Rebate, phone the Australian Taxation Office on 13 2861, TTY 13 3677 or Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450, or visit its website at www.ato.gov.au

Double Orphan Pension

Double Orphan Pension provides assistance to people caring for children who are double orphans. To qualify for Double Orphan Pension, both the parents of the child in your care must no longer be living, or one of the child's parents must no longer be living and the other must be unable to assume caring responsibilities. This might be because of long term imprisonment, residential or psychiatric care, or because the parent's whereabouts is unknown. Some refugee children may also be considered as double orphans. This payment is not income or assets tested.

For more information, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150, TTY 1800 810 586, Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit its website at www.familyassist.gov.au

A tribute to my carer, D---

I can barely begin to tell you how much having D---- in my life means to me because even now I have tears surfacing around my eyes. The most beautiful lesson D--- taught me is that 'failure' is disguised as opportunity to begin again with more intelligence. D--- NEVER gave up on me but most importantly she NEVER let me give up. Everything she has shared with me has aided me in growth and helped me gain an all-important sense of perspective, understanding and acceptance. R--- (22 yrs)



Professor Ros Thorpe

Defining features of Australian foster carers: child-centred altruism, commitment, persistence and empathy

Ros Thorpe, Professor of Social Work and Community Welfare, James Cook University and Chief Investigator, Mackay/Whitsunday Foster Care Research Project

For well over a decade foster care, including care by relatives, has been the dominant form of care for Australian children unable to live with a natural parent. Furthermore, in recent years a rapidly increasing number of children has entered out-of-home care. In consequence, foster care has

come to be regarded as a major human service, to be treasured and nurtured, especially since there is a dwindling number of people willing to become foster carers, and the fostering role has become complex and challenging.

Gone are the days when fostering could be conflated with 'mothering' and 'ordinary parenting' (Boddy, Cameron and Moss 2006). What is needed now are abilities to provide sophisticated care for children with complex needs, including the need to retain connections with family, kin and culture.

Such are the demands of current day fostering that two thirds of foster carers interviewed in a recent research study (Thorpe 2004) considered that fostering should be regarded as a professional role requiring education and training, respect as equal members of the child welfare team, professional supervision, and support for the valuable job that they do. As one foster carer eloquently put it, 'we should be considered experts in foster care; as social workers are experts in social work'.

Regardless of any personal needs that drew them to fostering, child-centred altruism, strong commitment to the children in their care, and persistence in 'walking the distance with these kids' were found to be the defining features of the vast majority of foster carers (Thorpe 2004). Additionally, some foster carers expressed outstanding empathy with natural parents of the children in their care and recognised a place for much greater support for families with complicated lives, in order to prevent the need for out-of-home care or to facilitate the restoration of children home to their families (Thorpe, Klease and Westerhuis 2005).

Plainly, the current situation of increasing numbers of children entering care, and reliance on foster care as the major mode of care, is unsustainable. A greater diversity of services needs to be developed. Far more attention should be given to preventive family support. In this regard, foster carers have much to offer, not only in terms of good quality out-of-home care for children and young people, but also through extending the professional role of empathic foster carers to include family support 'care work' (Boddy et al 2006, Lovatt 2004).

Boddy J, Cameron C. and Moss P. (2006) *Care Work: Present and Future*. London: Routledge.

Lovatt H. (2005) Foster Carer Support: What it is, what it is not, and what it could be. Paper presented at the Centre for Research on Community and Children's Services (CROCCS) 3rd International Child and Family Services Conference, *Challenging Practices*, Mackay, 6-8th August. www.croccs.org.au

Thorpe R. (2004) 'You Have To Be Crackers.' Carer experiences in the foster care system. Paper presented at the Australian Foster Care Association Inc. National Conference, *Walking Together: People, Policy and Practice*, Canberra, 29-31 October.

Thorpe R. and Klease C. with Westerhuis D. (2005) Challenging Practice in Foster care: Foster Carers' Reflections on Working with a Child's Natural Family. Paper presented at the Centre for Research on Community and Children's Services (CROCCS) 3rd International Child and Family Services Conference, *Challenging Practices*, Mackay, 6-8th August. www.croccs.org.au

Family Tax Benefit

Family Tax Benefit Part A

The Australian Government's Family Tax Benefit Part A helps families with the cost of raising children. Families who are entitled to Family Tax Benefit Part A may also receive extra assistance through the Large Family Supplement, Multiple Birth Allowance and Rent Assistance. Family Tax Benefit Part A may be paid to families who have a dependent child aged under 21 years or a qualifying dependent full-time student aged 21 to 24 years.

The amount of Family Tax Benefit Part A you can get depends on your family's income. For the 2006-07 financial year, to get the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A, your family income must be \$40,000 or less. Payments are reduced by 20 cents for each dollar above \$40,000 until the base rate is reached. It is paid at this level until your family income reaches \$88,622 (plus an extra \$3,504 for each dependent child after the first child). If your family includes one child aged under 18 years you can earn up to \$94,718 before your yearly entitlement ends entirely.

To be eligible for Part A, your dependent child must be aged under 21 years, or a qualifying full-time student aged 21 to 24 years. The child or student must not:

- receive a pension, or labour market related payment or allowance such as Youth Allowance, or
- be aged five to 15 years and not studying full-time, and their yearly income is more than \$11,548 (for the 2006-07 financial year), or
- be aged 16 to 24 years and their yearly income is more than \$11,548 (for the 2006-07 financial year), or they are receiving a Prescribed Education Scheme payment such as ABSTUDY.

Family Tax Benefit Part B

Family Tax Benefit Part B provides extra assistance to single parent families and two parent families with one main income where one parent chooses to stay at home or balance some paid work with caring for children. A higher rate of Family Tax Benefit Part B is paid if your youngest child is aged under 5. Family Tax Benefit Part B may be paid for a dependent child aged under 16 years or a qualifying dependent student up to the age of 18 years who doesn't get Youth Allowance or a similar payment.

For the 2006-07 financial year, to receive the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part B, your family's lower income earner can earn \$4,234 before payments are affected. Earnings above \$4,234 reduce your entitlement by 20 cents for each dollar earned over this amount. You still get some Family Tax Benefit Part B if your earnings are no more than \$21,572 and your youngest child is aged under five years. If

your youngest child is aged between five and 18 years (who doesn't get Youth Allowance or a similar payment) you can earn up to \$16,790 and still get some Family Tax Benefit Part B.

Single parent families always get the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part B, according to the age of their child.

Entitlement of foster carers to Family Tax Benefit

As a carer, your entitlement to Family Tax Benefit Part A and Part B depends on a number of factors, including your family's income and whether the care is considered 'formal' or 'informal'.

Foster care subsidies and allowances paid by state or territory governments are not counted in the income test for Family Tax Benefit. As well, the Australian Taxation Office does not consider these allowances as assessable income for tax purposes.

For more information about Family Tax Benefit, income and taxation, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150, or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au.

Important: *It is a good idea to contact the Family Assistance Office before you claim Family Tax Benefit to make sure that the circumstances relating to each case are taken into account when decisions are made about paying Family Tax Benefit in foster, relative or kinship care situations.*

Family Tax Benefit and formal care

'Formal care' is where the change of care is legally approved and involves a change in legal responsibility for a child in care (whether day-to-day and/or long term). As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you need to confirm with Centrelink your responsibility for a child by providing documents from a state or territory child welfare authority or a court, for example, the Family Law Court. These documents from the state and territory authority, or the court order, set out your legal right or responsibility to care for the child.

In formal care situations, Family Tax Benefit is paid from the date the child first enters into your care for the relevant dates provided in supporting documentation. If the child moves from your care to another carer, the Family Tax Benefit 'follows' the child and is paid to the new carer from then on.

Documents that the Family Assistance Office needs from you may include:

- an original letter on the official letterhead of the state or territory child welfare authority, which provides details of the child's placement with you and the approved dates of placement, or

- the relevant court orders, if available. If the court orders do not name you as the carer, a separate letter from the child welfare authority may be needed linking you with the child.

Example 1: Simon is removed from the care of his mother, Denise, by a state authority and is placed in temporary foster care with Tracey. The next day, the Children's Court orders that Simon remain in the care (legal responsibility) of the state welfare authority for two months. Tracey provides a letter from the authority stating Simon is to remain in her care for those two months. Tracey is therefore eligible for Family Tax Benefit from the date the court makes its order.

Example 2: Brianna, aged 15, entered the care of a state welfare department on 1 October. On 3 October the Children's Court made the following orders:

- that legal responsibility for Brianna be allocated to the Minister (that is the state or territory government Minister responsible for children's welfare issues) until Brianna turns 18
- that the Minister be responsible for residence, financial and contact arrangements, and
- that Brianna's mother be responsible for religious matters and that she take shared responsibility with the Minister for medical, educational and training arrangements.

Based on the court orders, the Minister gained legal responsibility for Brianna and her care is 'delegated' to a foster carer. Family Tax Benefit for Brianna is paid to the carer from 3 October. If, later on, Brianna moves into the care of another foster carer, Family Tax Benefit is paid to the second carer from the date the care arrangements change. In this situation, Brianna's mother cannot get Family Tax Benefit.

Family Tax Benefit and informal care

'Informal care' is a private arrangement between the parent and another party, where there is no change to any form of legal responsibility.

Informal carers are usually grandparents, other relatives, or family friends. Under these arrangements, whether Family Tax Benefit can be paid to the new carer depends on whether the care is temporary and short term, or ongoing.

When it is clear that the child will be in ongoing care with you as the new carer, Family Tax Benefit is paid from the date the child enters your care. However, in informal, but temporary and short term care situations, the question of who gets paid Family Tax Benefit depends on the care arrangements and how long the child spends out of the parent's care.

Care that is temporary and short term

Where possible, Family Tax Benefit should be paid to the person who has the actual care of a child. However, in some cases, a parent who does not have the care for a child will continue to get Family Tax Benefit — for example, when the change of care is temporary and short term AND the intention is that the child will return to the parent within a short time. However, in all but very special circumstances, the total temporary and short term absence should not be more than four weeks. After this, the actual carer should get the Family Tax Benefit.

If a state or territory agency organises a child's placement but does not have legal responsibility for the child, it is considered informal care. This occurs when parents have respite or place the child in respite or short term care, and may include placements in the care of grandparents or relatives.

Example 1: Belinda has two young children. One of the children has a severe disability. The state government helps to arrange two weeks of respite care for that child so that Belinda can have a break. Belinda continues to get Family Tax Benefit for both children as she has legal responsibility for the children.

Example 2: Terri is a single parent of her 12-year old son Jack. Terri has to go into



hospital and will not be able to care for Jack. She makes arrangements for a friend of the family to look after Jack for three weeks while she receives treatment for her illness. Terri continues to get Family Tax Benefit for Jack.

In some situations, when the care is temporary and short term or the period of care is unknown, AND the parent does not want to get Family Tax Benefit, the new carer may be eligible for Family Tax Benefit.

Ongoing care

When it is clear that a child will be in ongoing care with you, then as the carer, you will be eligible for Family Tax Benefit from the date the child enters your care. When care was temporary and short term, but later you have ongoing care, the 'change of care' applies from the date when the care becomes ongoing and Family Tax Benefit is paid to you as the carer.

Example 1: Sean is a single parent caring for his 14-year old son, Zack. Sean has to go into rehabilitation for three months. While he is in

rehabilitation, Zack is cared for by his aunt. In this case, his aunt is eligible for Family Tax Benefit from the date Zack enters her care.

Example 2: Following an abusive relationship, Sharon is unable to care for her three children and she agrees to leave them in the care of their paternal grandparents. Although no time frame has been set, it is considered an ongoing arrangement. The grandparents become eligible for Family Tax Benefit from the date the children enter their care.

Important: Make sure that you give the Family Assistance Office full details, so they can decide whether the care is temporary and short term, or ongoing.

In cases where the care arrangements are in dispute, a quick determination by the Family Assistance Office about who is eligible for Family Tax Benefit lessens the possibility that previous carers will have to pay back large overpayments.

For more information, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150, TTY 1800 810 586, Multilingual services 12 1202, or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au



'Weaving history' by Katie Pring (young Aboriginal carer and artist)

This painting represents different aspects of culture and learning, and the different paths and obstacles that one may come across in the journey to achieving goals and dreams.

Caring for Indigenous kids

More foster carers is perhaps the biggest challenge facing a dynamic Aboriginal leader of a not-for-profit agency which recruits, manages and supports Aboriginal foster carers. With a professional background in South Australian Government jobs, mainly in policy and strategy, Sharron Williams has been the CEO of Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS) for eight years.

'We have about 100 active foster carers at any one time. We need double that,' Sharron said.

Her organisation's services include youth accommodation, parent education, support for disenfranchised men and foster care.

The South Australian Department for Families and Communities attempts to place Aboriginal children with relatives first. If that is not possible, they are referred to AFSS.

'Generally, Aboriginal kids are six or seven times more likely to come into foster care than other kids. But our capacity to recruit carers is far less, because we're a small community and fragmented in many ways.'

The agency has helped develop a new culturally specific assessment tool for prospective carers, called a 'Yarning Journey'. Instead of a 'severe questionnaire' where the interviewer writes down the answers, the interviewer now sits and listens, then comes back a couple of days later and says 'This is what I believe you were saying to me about your experiences growing up as a child'. It is a more personal approach, she says, and less threatening.

Once appointed, a carer will receive cultural orientation training through the agency, and will later be guided through any reunification of children with their birth parents – and they, too, are supported. 'Quite often there's shared care between the birth family and foster carer. Then the pendulum shifts, so the birth parent takes more of a role, but the foster carer stays on as a respite carer.'

Sharron Williams says a key challenge is reconciling cultural differences. 'In recruitment of foster carers, you have to meet Department standards. In the Aboriginal community it's about the capacity to nurture, and sharing and caring. With white society it's more material – are there enough bedrooms, enough space in the wardrobe for this child's clothes.'

'Quite often we, or the foster parents, know the children coming into care. There are often relationships, through skin or kin. When the placement is ordered by the state, as opposed to a voluntary order, the hostility can be quite horrific.'

'I always advise foster parents not to get themselves into awkward situations. I say "remember your first responsibility is to the children". When there's a community function, and the birth family is likely to be there and there's hostility, we say to the carer: "Be there early in the day, not late, when there may be some drinking going on."'

It is also important to bring some joy and frivolity to the lives of both the carers and the children. There are Family Fun Days and other events which help siblings stay in contact and lift everybody's spirits. 'If children are more content, it's easier for the carers.'

Getting together through the agency's networks gives a sense of belonging and identity to children, which Sharron believes too many are missing out on. Her family comes from a small coastal community on the Yorke Peninsular, and on childhood visits there her connections and ancestry were explained to her. 'I know where I fit in back there, how I'm related to people. You feel proud of that.'

Her goal, and motivation, is clear. 'Aboriginal children deserve the best parenting.'

There is a growing number of Aboriginal family care services around Australia. Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS), is a not-for-profit agency in Adelaide.

For other contact details see page 39.



Sharron Williams has been Chief Executive Officer of Aboriginal Family Support Services, South Australia for 8 years



Maternity Payment

Maternity Payment recognises the extra costs associated with the birth or adoption of a baby. It is a non income tested lump sum payment. Maternity Payment is intended to benefit the primary carer. A natural parent, or an adoptive parent, or you as a long term foster, relative or kinship carer — or in some cases more than one of these — could qualify for Maternity Payment for a baby.

Maternity Payment is payable to:

- a parent of the baby, or
- families who have care of a newborn baby within 13 weeks of the baby's birth, and are likely to continue to have care of the baby for no less than 13 weeks, or
- families who have a child entrusted to their care for adoption before the child is two years of age and, in the case of an overseas adoption, the child must enter Australia before the child's second birthday.

The claim must be made within 26 weeks of the baby's birth, or, in the case of a local adoption, within 26 weeks of the baby coming into the care of the adoptive family. For an overseas adoption, the claim must be made within 26 weeks of the child entering Australia.

In deciding whether Maternity Payment should be paid to an individual other than the parent, consideration is specifically given to:

- who has legal responsibility
- whether the child is being considered for adoption.

When a child is being considered for adoption, the child can be placed in pre-adoptive foster care. If you are a carer in this situation, you would not normally be eligible for Maternity Payment. This type of care involves a temporary change of care while adoption arrangements are established. Maternity Payment is actually intended for the primary carer, whether this is the natural parent, or the adoptive parent, or a longer term foster, relative or kinship carer, or in some cases more than one of these.

'I had yet to experience so many of the things that eight-year olds take for granted'

Maternity Immunisation Allowance

Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a non income tested, one-off payment to encourage immunisation in children. As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you are eligible for Maternity Immunisation Allowance if:

- the child has turned 18 months and is fully immunised
- you make a claim for the child before the child in your care turns two years of age.

Only one carer can qualify for Maternity Immunisation Allowance, except in shared care situations where the payment can be split according to the percentage of care each person provides.

Multiple Birth Allowance

As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you are eligible for Multiple Birth Allowance if you have three or more children born during the same birth who are aged under six. This is paid in addition to any Family Tax Benefit Part A that you may be entitled to.

For more information about any of the support schemes on this page, phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150 TTY 1800 810 586 Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au

I first went in to care as a shy eight-year old, joining two other boys who were already in care. During those very early days it was hard for me. I had never really been to school. I had never spent a night away from my mother, and had yet to experience so many of the things that eight-year olds take for granted. Reflecting back now I see how C--- recognized the difficulties I was experiencing, provided as much support as I needed but was careful not to smother me, to maintain respect for my birth mother, and to guide me as I entered into an unknown and scary world of school, psychologists and social workers.
J--- (27yrs)

Elizabeth

veteran carer of babies

'I don't know when foster carers retire – when you're too old to pick the baby up out of the cot, or get the pram out of the boot?'

Elizabeth is 68, and this year she clocks up forty years of caring for babies. 'It feels like I've never not done it! I started fostering when my own last child was nearly four.'

Her enthusiasm for the role has not diminished. 'Newborns are my favourites. I love to get them straight from hospital. I don't know why. When I was young I was the kid in the street that had everyone playing in my front yard while I pushed next door's baby in the pram. Before marrying I trained as a nurse at the Children's Hospital. Some people are just here for that reason – caring for children – and I'm one of those people. This is what I'm good at.'

Elizabeth can also laugh at how this lifetime of baby care has affected her. 'I can't walk past a baby wear shop. My wardrobe of baby clothes is bigger than my own wardrobe! And I'm always knitting for them.'

'One day I was standing alone in the line at the supermarket with a cabbage under my arm. I heard a baby crying in one of the aisles and started rocking the cabbage.'

'Another day, before air conditioning in cars, I was on my own in my car with the windows down on a hot day, stopped at a railway crossing. As the train went past I said "Toot toot!", because I was so used to having a little one in the back seat. The bloke in the car opposite went "Toot toot" back at me!'

Elizabeth's fostering career covers the full history of care. She began through a major women's hospital in the 1960s, when adoption prevailed. The law in her state had changed, so that mothers of newborns considering adoption had 28 days to be sure. 'All these little babies were lying in wards of the hospital, not progressing. A doctor noticed that the newborns taken home by their mothers, and brought back at 6 weeks for a check-up, were much more advanced than the ones left at the hospital by Mums putting them up for adoption. They weren't connecting with anybody. He said we need mums who can take them home and bring them back after 28 days.'

This was called "pre-adopt" fostering, and Elizabeth became one of 70 women in the state doing it. 'Several of us are still good friends, and we're still fostering.'

She requests babies only, and one at a time. And she has embraced the current philosophy of fostering with the aim of re-integration with the birth parents. 'I have a little three month old chappie with me at the moment, who's been with me since he was five days old. His parents aren't able to care for him, but they are going through



the court system and it would be wonderful if they were able to work it out, and he could be returned to them.'

'The aim is for one part of the system to care for the child while another part of the system works with the parents to get them right. Unfortunately in some cases it doesn't work, but it's very important for a child to keep in touch with birth families.'

She struggles with some aspects of the system. 'You get a "partial reimbursement" of a little over \$100 a week. It's \$18 for a can of formula, and then there's nappies. Agencies are supposed to help with equipment but they often don't have a lot of money either.'

'So you've always got your hand in your own pocket – even for petrol, taking them to access. Especially for country and rural people. I live just outside a city, and this little fellow has been seeing his mum three times a week in the city. I'm doing 60 kilometres a week.'

She would not consider other people taking him on these trips. 'The less people the baby has to face, the better it is for the baby. If he has someone come to the door he's never seen, they pick him up and take him away, he sees his mum, and a worker who watches, then someone else brings him home...'

Elizabeth feels legal decisions are still made 'through the eyes of the parent, not the child. My concern is for how the baby manages, not how the mother manages. It's my duty to speak up for this child, and be the voice for it.'

She is, undoubtedly, an expert. 'Everyone asks if I mind getting up in the night. And no, I don't! I don't even need lights on. I know it all so well. You get everything set up before you go to bed. You even put the numbers on the microwave so when you come out in the night to heat the bottle, you just turn it on.'

'I always use the same sort of perfume for each baby, because their sense of smell is strong. When they leave, I make sure they have their bunnyrugs

and lambswool from the bassinet or cot, because of the smell.'

'I had a baby with me for three or four months, who left when she was about 15 months old to go into permanent care. She'd play with the tins of cat food in the pantry, use them like building blocks.'

'When she went to her placement, I sent some cans of cat food over with her when she went. Every night for a month she'd put the cat food near the front door, waiting to come back. The day she didn't, the new parents knew she was theirs.'

Letting go can still be hard. 'Many times there's a lump in your throat, and you hope that he or she is going to be all right. But you have the support of other carer friends. You usually ring them and say "Oh well, another one hit the dust". You go and get your haircut, clean out your cupboards, all the things you haven't had time for. Then you wait for the phone to ring! I've never said no to a

placement. The workers get to know what you're capable of and what you want.'

Elizabeth's rewards include being invited to 21sts and weddings of children she cared for as toddlers. And particularly since the death of her husband eight years ago, she values having young children in her life. 'Other people play tennis and golf. I do this.'

Her son and daughter-in-law live on the same small rural property, and recently had a five year old boy, who Elizabeth had cared for, placed into their permanent care. 'They fell in love with him.' They also have a two year old daughter of their own. Most days, Elizabeth is minding those children while their parents work, as well as a temporary care baby.

'There's a very old saying that it takes a village to bring up a child. I'm just part of that village.'

Grandparents as carers

An increasing number of grandparents are now caring for their grandchildren. Due to family circumstances involving death, poor health, or substance abuse many grandparents are struggling with children who have a range of issues. They also need to manage their own aging issues.

As well as the 22,500 Australian families reported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics where grandparents were the guardians of their grandchildren (in 2003), it is estimated that many thousands more grandparents are caring for their grandchildren under informal arrangements.

This publication has endeavoured to include references to assistance that grandparents may obtain in the formal and informal care of their grandchildren. There are references to grandparents on pages 21 and 23 in the context of Family Tax Benefit, and a mention in Shane's story on page 38. But particularly there is information for grandparents in relation to Child Care Benefit on page 17.

Foster care associations in all states and territories welcome inquiries from grandparents and are able to offer advice and assistance wherever there is need.



Grandparents who need more information may phone either Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office

Contact details for both are on page 8

Organising foster children's passports

Children's passports are issued to a minor who is aged under 18 years and has never been married. Each child's application for a passport starts anew. Unlike an adult application, there is no automatic 'renewal' for a child's passport.

For children and young people in out-of-home care, processing a passport application is more complex and can take a minimum of five to six weeks to be finalised. The Australian Passport Office does not accept a priority fee when you lodge an application for a passport for a child in your care unless the consent of all persons with a parental responsibility has been obtained prior to lodgment. Usually, paying a priority fee guarantees that an eligible applicant's passport will be ready for collection or despatch within two working days of a Passport Office receiving everything it needs.

However, once approval is given to issue a child's passport, you can then pay a priority fee to speed up the application.

What forms need to be filled in?

There is a range of forms that you may need to fill in for a passport application for a child in your care. The forms are available from post offices throughout Australia or from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Passports website at www.passports.gov.au.

You should submit your foster child's passport applications on the form PC4 (the purple Child's Application). Extra forms may also be required, for example:

- B7 — No further court orders (to be filled in when a court order already exists)
- B8 (two pages) — Mother's name only on a birth certificate. (Where there is a father's name only on the birth certificate, contact the Passport Office for guidance)
- B9 — Child without full parental consent.

Children under the care and protection of a state or territory department also require a letter on official departmental letterhead permitting the child to be issued with a travel document.

Consent requirements

The written consent of every person with a 'parental responsibility' for a child must be submitted before a passport is issued. For a child in your care, getting written consent could include consent from:

- a state or territory welfare department and all persons with a parental responsibility for the child

- both birth parents (even if they no longer have a parental role under the child protection laws of the state or territory)
- any other persons included in a contact or court order for example, foster, relative or kinship carers and the state or territory welfare department.

Consent under Australian Government and state and territory government laws

Because of differences between Australian Government and state and territory government legislation, it may be necessary to consult the parent or parents of the child about the application for the child's passport, despite the existence of a state or territory care and protection order that removes parental responsibility from the parent or parents. (The passport policy concerning care and protection orders is currently under review.)

If the required consents cannot be obtained:

- a state or territory welfare department may seek a court order to permit the child to leave Australia
- when a care and protection order is made by way of a court order, a state or territory welfare department may include a clause in the order permitting the child to leave Australia at the discretion of, and with the sole consent of, the relevant Minister
- when a care and protection order removes a parent's parental responsibility, the state or territory welfare department may register the order with the Family Court with authority to remove the requirement to obtain parental consent.

When full consent is not given, or there is no court order that permits a child to leave Australia, you can make an application to the Passport Office Approved Senior Officer to have the requirement for consent waived on the basis that special circumstances exist.

The normal timeframe for an application under special circumstances is three to four weeks, on top of the normal 10-day processing time.

The process may also include contacting the person(s) whose consent has not been provided to seek their consent or reasons for non-consent. An application to the Approved Senior Officer does not guarantee that a passport will be issued, and it may still be necessary to obtain a court order permitting the child to leave Australia.

For more information about foster children's passports, phone Australian Passport Information Service on 13 1232, TTY 13 3677, Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450 or visit the website www.passports.gov.au/Web/index.asp



Bianca

former child in care

When Bianca was 11, two social workers came to her school and asked her to talk about what was going on at home. Her two older sisters had left home, so there was just Bianca and her mother, and someone had reported her mother for abuse. A picture of neglect and cruelty emerged.

'I'd be left by myself for long hours. I didn't know what my Mum was doing. I'd have to fend for myself. Once she made me watch while she beat my dog to death with a stick. She'd hit me, or hurt things I loved.'

'By that stage I felt I was never going to get what I wanted or needed from her, so I cut my losses. I was pretty emotionally detached before I was even removed from her.'

'I still don't know what was going on with her, or why she was like that. But I knew back then that what was happening wasn't right, and that hasn't changed.'

Over the next five years, Bianca had a multitude of foster care placements – none lasting more than eight months. The main problem, particularly in the first few years, was that her mother kept fighting to get her back, contesting Bianca's removal through the courts, and in any other way she could think of.

Bianca felt voiceless while all these processes surged around her. 'Most of the families, I'd have liked to stay with them. I was a good kid, stayed out of trouble, good at school, pretty quiet, compared to the average foster kid. You don't usually get a compliant young person who wants to fit in. So I was a rarity, and families wanted me.'

She also says she was not listened to for a long time about access visits, either. 'My mother was always really involved, but I was always wanting the access visits to stop, because I didn't want to have anything to do with her. Eventually I got that choice, but I had to really fight for it.'

Bianca has one message for all parties in fostering: 'Listen to the child'.

Bianca puts all that down to a combination of inexperienced young social workers who she suspects were easily manipulated by her mother, and the state government policy focus on re-integration with birth parents.

She has good memories of most of her many foster parents. 'For me it was having people I could count on. Even though sometimes they made mistakes and didn't always give me what I needed.'

This, she says, was due simply to misunderstandings. 'I couldn't always communicate what I was thinking. But at the end of the day they really loved me and cared about me. Some I stayed in contact with after I left. I'd give them a call, send them a Christmas card, tell them how I was going.'

The carers helped her in ways that she was not aware of at the time. 'I felt completely unlovable for a long time. I couldn't believe someone could genuinely care for me. Some of the carers helped me with that, and I don't feel that way now.'

Bianca also has some tips for carers. 'Kids can tell when you're not being straight with them. If you're a foster carer but your heart's not in it, kids can tell. And it's important to treat all kids in the house the same. Obviously it's different with your own kids, but do your best to treat everyone fairly. If one's not allowed to watch TV, the other shouldn't either, otherwise you're left with that feeling "It's because I'm a foster kid."'

Eventually she was assigned to a 'fantastic social worker' from another region, who she says properly understood her needs. When a placement broke down when she was 16, she was given the opportunity to live in a flat, with some support.

She did that, and managed to get through school. She is now at university on a scholarship, studying psychology and politics, although she has deferred to do some travel.

Bianca is not sure what career she will pursue, only that she wants to be self-sufficient. 'I want to be able to look after my own kids – knowing there's food on the table, shoes on their feet. I didn't have those things when I was a kid.'

Accessing Legal Aid

People seeking legal aid apply through the legal aid commissions in their state or territory. The commissions provide a range of services for criminal, family and civil law matters, including providing information and advice, primary dispute resolution, and granting aid for legal representation. Legal aid can be sought for various matters arising under Australian Government (Commonwealth) and state or territory government laws. Providing legal aid for matters arising under Commonwealth law is funded by the Australian Government under agreements with the legal aid commissions and state and territory governments. Each state and territory government funds legal aid services for matters arising under its own laws.

Access to some legal aid services is subject to means (income and assets) and merits tests, and not all applicants are eligible for a grant of aid. Successful applicants may be required to pay a contribution (based on an applicant's financial situation and the area of law) to the cost of resolving their matter.

Legal services funded by legal aid are provided using both lawyers employed by the legal aid commissions and private legal practitioners.

For more information about legal aid, contact the legal aid commission in your state or territory.

Australian Capital Territory Phone 1300 654 314 www.legalaid.canberra.net.au	South Australia Phone 1800 188 126 www.lsc.sa.gov.au
New South Wales Phone 1300 888 529 (LawAccess NSW) www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au	Tasmania Phone 1300 366 611 www.legalaid.tas.gov.au
Northern Territory Phone 1800 019 343 www.ntlac.nt.gov.au	Victoria Phone 1800 677 402 or 03 9269 0234 www.legalaid.vic.gov.au
Queensland Phone 1300 651 188 www.legalaid.qld.gov.au	Western Australia Phone 1300 650 579 www.legalaid.wa.gov.au

Not eligible for Legal Aid for a child care and protection matter?

If you are not eligible to receive Legal Aid for a child care and protection matter, you may be able to access a pro bono assistance scheme operated by your state or territory law society, the Courts, Bar Association or a community legal centre.

Pro bono assistance is work undertaken by a legal practitioner at significantly reduced or no cost, and may include providing legal advice, assistance with preparing legal documents, mediation of disputes, checking agreements and representation in court.

Pro bono schemes usually operate under guidelines, which set out who may be eligible to receive assistance and what types of matters may be considered. If you are applying for legal aid, the schemes usually require that:

- you have a genuine legal problem
- you are unable to obtain Legal Aid (Legal Aid can provide a letter to say this)
- you clearly do not have the ability to pay for legal services (often determined by a means test)
- the matter falls within the areas of law assisted by the pro bono scheme (child care and protection matters are often covered), and
- the matter has a reasonable prospect of success.

Applications usually take a minimum of two weeks to be determined, so you should lodge your application as early as possible.

If your application is eligible for pro bono assistance, every effort will be made to try to match your matter with an appropriate legal representative. However, there is no guarantee that assistance can always be given.

Even if your application is unsuccessful, many law societies and community legal centres are still able to provide you with advice about obtaining a free initial consultation from an appropriate legal source.

For more information or assistance, phone your state or territory law society or phone your foster care association.

Tamara

my foster Mum was amazing

'My name is Tamara and I was nearly twelve when I was fostered into the home and family of Nancy. I was very fearful and unsure whether I had done the right thing. I had just endured a court case to charge my biological mother with neglect and was made a "ward of the state" – not a comforting label.'

'I went into this family being four years older than their eldest child (a daughter). I did expect for there to be issues relating to being the "eldest" now in the family but, it was the opposite. I was accepted and soon respected as the big sister in the house. My foster sister and I developed a strong bond from the beginning and to this day are very close. I also have a great relationship with all the other siblings of this family.'

'My time growing up in this family has some great memories for me, coming from an abused/neglected childhood. I feel very lucky to be able to say my life in a "normal" family was great. I had the opportunity to go on some great family holidays, go on school camps and wear nice clothes. Most of all I had a great sense of belonging.'

'Nancy is the reason for all of this. She is the one who keeps the wheel turning in the family. Nothing is ever too much for her. She has taken on the role of mother to so many children from all sorts of situations and treated them all as her own. She has the quality of making everyone feel special.'

'In the first few years with this family there were lots of short term foster children and Nancy would always cry when they left even if they were only with us for a couple of weeks. She got attached to each and every one of them.'

'Nancy and I have celebrated our 30th year together this year and, being her first foster child, I have been there to welcome the many more who have been coming into the family ever since.'

'It is difficult to put into words the love and support this wonderful woman has shown to so many needy children over the years – she is amazing.'



I feel very lucky to be able to say my life in a "normal" family was great. I had the opportunity to go on some great family holidays, go on school camps and wear nice clothes. Most of all I had a great sense of belonging.

Claire

former child in care

It took almost her whole childhood before Claire finally got to experience the best of what family life had to offer.

Born in Scotland, she was in and out of care until she was adopted at the age of six. But her adoptive mother abused her physically and emotionally – ‘horrible things were said on a daily basis’– and her adoptive father began sexually molesting her when she was nine.

The family emigrated to Australia when Claire was eleven, and settled on a small property. ‘They put me in a shed out the back. I was not allowed in the house, and had to do all the jobs, so my school work fell behind.’

Finally, at 15, underfed and covered in bruises and other injuries, she told her best friend what was happening. Her friend’s family took her in for a while. ‘They were wonderful, and were going to adopt me, but then they realised I was very messed up. They just didn’t have the tools to help me through it.’

But her next family did. Foster carers for seven years at that stage, they committed themselves to Claire, and made it clear they were in for the long haul.

But she needed a lot of convincing. ‘There were continuous compliments – “You’re doing well”, “We love you”. But I didn’t believe them.’

‘Even with who I call Dad now, I couldn’t be alone with him, not in the car or anywhere. He had to stay out of the way in his own home. It was a lot to put up with.’

The darkness of her adoptive family had not ended. When she was 18, her adoptive father came to her workplace and raped her. She became pregnant, and had a termination.

Her outraged foster parents were more supportive than ever, but she was defiant. ‘I just did what I pleased, and didn’t care about anybody.’

‘I’d be grounded. They had rules, and there was no leniency. But there was no name-calling, and they were always consistent. And they gave me time. Every Friday night they would sit up with me and I would argue, until 3am, about wanting to go out. Their kids would be wanting to go to sleep and yelling out “Would you just shut up.”’

‘I remember for my end of Year 11 dance, plotting an after-party with my friends. We’d all worked out different things to tell our parents about where we’d be. It was my foster parents who blew all that. I really resented it at the time, but they kept on showing me love and affection, and were also doing things like helping me find my birth brother in Scotland.’

‘I was a ward of the state, so they had that responsibility, and they just weren’t prepared to let me be anywhere where there wasn’t someone to look after me. And they were great with my friends - 15 kids for a sleep-over, that sort of thing. So they weren’t drill sergeants.’

Claire, now 30, remembers there was a moment where she thought, ‘hang on, I’ve got to do something with my

...but then they realised I was very messed up. They just didn’t have the tools to help me through it.



life, to pay them back.'

They are now 'Mum and Dad', and 'Nan and Pop' to Claire's three children. Claire enjoys a good relationship with her foster siblings - 'We can all laugh about it now' - and extended family birthday and Christmas celebrations.

'My Mum says "I remember the first time you initiated affection, and the first time you came out with a positive comment about yourself."'

'They're very proud of me. They tell me that all the time. I remember when I was pregnant with my first child, sitting around at their place crying, scared that I'd abuse my child. Because you hear about the cycle of abuse. They said "You'll be wonderful. You'll take the exact opposite approach." And they were right.'

'They're very proud of me. They tell me that all the time'.

'I have a job, I have children who are excelling at school, I'm in a long term relationship, I can hold jobs and friendships. I wouldn't have been able to do these things without them.'

Claire is in awe of this couple and the fostering they continue to do.

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

If you care for primary, secondary or tertiary students (certain rules apply) who are unable to attend an 'appropriate' government school on a daily basis, primarily because of geographic isolation, the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme may help your family.

An appropriate government school is one that offers your child's or young person's level of study. It can also be the school that provides access to the facilities, programmes and/or environment required if your child has special health-related or educational needs. 'Geographic isolation' is based on the student's principal family home.

The Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme's allowances include:

- Boarding Allowance
- Additional Boarding Allowance
- Distance Education Allowance
- Second Home Allowance
- Pensioner Education Supplement for primary students on certain pensions.

Apart from the Additional Boarding Allowance, all allowances under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme are free of income and assets tests.

Note: *Additional Boarding Allowance is affected if you are receiving a foster care allowance from a state or territory government.*

If you think that you may be eligible for an Assistance for Isolated Children allowance, more information can be obtained by phoning Centrelink on 13 2318

TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at www.centrelink.gov.au

Large Family Supplement

If you receive Family Tax Benefit for three or more children, you will automatically receive an extra amount for each child after the second child. This Large Family Supplement is on top of your Family Tax Benefit Part A. For the 2006-07 financial year, it is an additional amount of \$255.50 per year for a family's third and each subsequent child.

For more information phone the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150
TTY 1800 810 586, Multilingual services 12 1202 or visit the website at www.familyassist.gov.au

Foster children and Medicare cards

To get a Medicare card for a child placed in your care, the relevant government agency needs to submit a Medicare enrolment application form, a copy of the court order, and a letter from the agency setting out the request for the card.

A foster child may not be transferred off a parent's Medicare card without the authority of that parent. When a child is in the care of a government agency (court order), the child may be copied to a Medicare card in the name of that agency. The agency may then make the Medicare card available to you, as the foster, relative or kinship carer. A child will not be included on your Medicare card unless you are providing long term care.

When an agency and the family share responsibility, a parent may authorise for the child to be copied to a Medicare card under the name of the agency.

How carers can use the Medicare card number

- In a care situation it may be useful if the agency either provides the Medicare card number or the Medicare card to the carer.
- You can copy a child on to more than one Medicare card, by filling out a Medicare 'Copy/transfer application form'.
- You do not need to have the child's Medicare card or number to make a claim (however, it is easier and more convenient if you do).
- You only need to have paid the child's medical bill to make a claim from Medicare.
- Where the doctor bulk bills and the Medicare card number is not known, the doctor may contact Medicare Australia on 13 2150 and ascertain the child's Medicare card number

Medicare Australia delivers a range of other services including:

- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme — 1800 020 613
- the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register — 1800 653 809.

To obtain a 'Copy/transfer application form', and to find out more information about Medicare card arrangements for children in out-of-home care phone your local Medicare Office, on phone 13 2011, TTY 1800 552 152, Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450 or visit the website at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au



A tribute to my foster carer (K)

I like the songs that we sing, and wheelchair dancing. K--- makes my bed nice. We have chocolate and K--- plays computer with me. K--- gives me big hugs. We read books, play music loud and dance.

C--- (9 yrs)

Concession cards coverage for children and young people in foster care

There are a number of ways you can have children or young people in your care covered by a concession card. If you are eligible for a concession card yourself, then your foster child may appear as a dependant on your card. It may therefore not be necessary to separately claim a foster child Health Care Card.

For example:

- if you are receiving an income support payment from Centrelink or Veterans' Affairs, you may automatically get a concession card that lists your dependants
- if you do not receive an income support payment, but you are entitled to receive the maximum rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A, you may automatically receive a Family Tax Benefit Health Care Card that lists your dependants
- if you do not qualify under the above provisions, you may claim a low income Health Care Card, which covers both you as the card holder and your dependants. (**Note:** to claim a low income Health Care Card, you must have income under certain limits — phone the Family Assistance Office.)

If you cannot obtain concession card coverage under the above provisions, you may wish to claim the foster child Health Care Card on behalf of a child or young person in your care.

Eligibility for the foster child Health Care Card

From 1 July 2001, all children in out-of-home care were given access to a Health Care Card. The card can be claimed and issued through Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office, and applies to children and young people in both formal and informal home-based foster care who are residing with an Australian resident.

Formal foster care refers to placements of children and young people through state or child protection agencies. Informal foster care is broadly defined to include relatives other than natural parents, and significant others in the child or young person's extended networks. (Children and young people in residential care are not eligible for a Health Care Card under the foster child provisions).

Applying for a foster child Health Care Card

Applying for a Health Care Card for a child or young person in formal foster care

If you apply for a Health Care Card for a foster child or young person in formal care your application must include documents that show details of the care arrangements. This may include one or more of the following:

- a letter from your agency outlining the child's

- name, child's date of birth, estimated length of placement, your name(s) and address, and if appropriate, details of the child's parents
- a copy of the child's birth certificate
- a copy of the current court order, and/or
- proof of your identify — for example, letter of appointment, legal instrument, or identity card.

Applying for a Health Care Card for a child or young person in informal foster care

If you apply for a Health Care Card for a foster child or young person living in home-based care without official involvement, your application must include documents from professionals involved with the family. The documents need to state that the child or young person in your care is in a private or informal foster care arrangement. This can include a letter from a social worker, general practitioner, school principal, or similar person familiar with the case, which states:

- child's name
- child's date of birth
- details of the child's parent(s)
- estimated length of placement, and
- your name and address.

The documents may also include:

- copy of the child's birth certificate
- copy of the current court order, or
- proof of your identify — for example, letter of appointment, legal instrument, or identification card.

Important: *The foster child Health Care Card is issued in the child's name and is valid for six months.*

If the child or young person in your care moves to a new placement, you should notify Centrelink or the Family Assistance Office.

Types of concessions

Health Care Card holders may receive:

- medicines listed under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme at the concessional rate; and generally free Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme prescriptions through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme 'safety net', after receiving 54 Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme scripts in the 2006 calendar year (for more information, phone the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme Information Line on 1800 020 613)
- bulk-billed general practitioner (GP) appointments, at the discretion of the doctor (the Australian Government provides financial incentives for GPs to bulk-bill concession card holders)
- a reduction in the cost of out-of-hospital medical expenses above a concessional

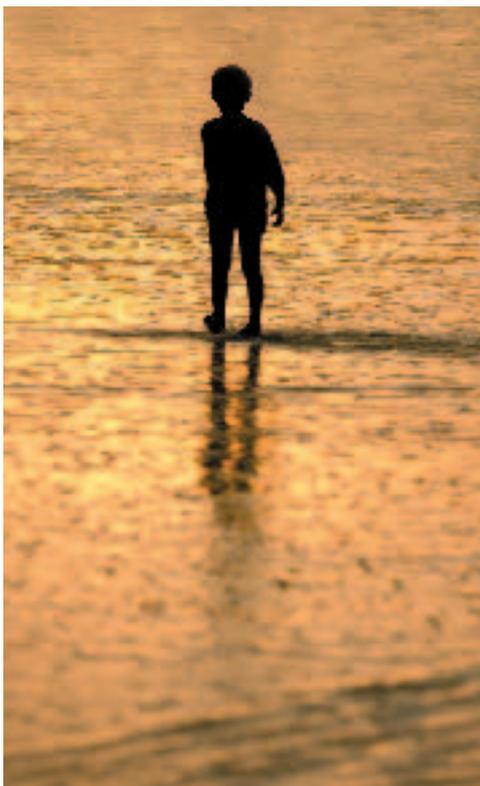
threshold of \$500 in a calendar year (current at 1 July 2006)

- additional health, household, transport, education and recreation concessions from state or territory and local governments.

Some private providers — like energy companies and insurance agents — may also offer concessions.

For more information about Concession Cards, phone Centrelink on 13 2300 or the Family Assistance Office on 13 6150
TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual services 12 1202 or visit the website at
www.familyassist.gov.au



Parenting Payment

Parenting Payment is an income support payment designed specifically for people, either single or partnered, who have principal care of a child. Parenting Payment can be paid in addition to Family Tax Benefit. In general terms, to qualify for Parenting Payment, you must:

- have principal care of a qualifying child
- have income and assets below certain limits, and
- meet the residence requirements.

Parenting Payment (Partnered) is only paid to one member of a couple and only one person can receive Parenting Payment in respect of a child (for example, as a foster, relative or kinship carer you cannot receive Parenting Payment for the same child at the same time Parenting Payment is paid to a natural or adoptive parent).

Newstart Allowance

Newstart Allowance is an income support payment for people aged over 21 years and below Age Pension age, who are unemployed. To qualify for Newstart Allowance you must be looking for work and participate in activities that will help you move on to paid work.

Under the Australian Government's Welfare to Work reforms, principal carers of at least one dependent child over a prescribed age are no longer eligible for Parenting Payment and will need to apply for another payment, typically Newstart Allowance. Principal carers on Newstart Allowance may be required to look for, or undertake, suitable paid part-time work of at least 15 hours a week unless exempt. As a foster, relative or kinship carer, you will be exempt from this obligation if you have documentary evidence from your state or territory authority that you are 'registered and active'.

For more information about Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance, phone Centrelink on 13 1021, 8 am to 8 pm
Monday-Friday
TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual services 12 1202, or visit the website at www.centrelink.gov.au

For more information on income support arrangements under Welfare to Work, refer to Page 10 'Welfare to Work - Information for carers on income support.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are significantly over-represented in child protection and out-of-home care statistics in Australia. At 30 June 2005, there were 5,678 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, an increase of 619 since 30 June 2004. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia at 30 June 2005 was 26.4 per 1,000 children aged 0 to 17 years, and on a state-by-state basis this ranged from 8.9 per 1,000 children in the Northern Territory to 40.7 per 1,000 children in Victoria.

In all states and territories, there are higher rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care than other children. The national rate of Indigenous children in out-of-home care was over six times the rate for other children. On a state-by-state basis, the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care ranges between nearly nine and 13 times the rate for other children.

As well as being more likely to be placed into out-of-home care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are likely to remain in care longer. In Victoria, for example, an Aboriginal child or young person stays four times longer in out-of-home care than a non-Aboriginal child. The average length of stay is 239 days compared with 62 days.

These large numbers of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care are a consequence of a 200-year history of land dispossession and destroyed livelihoods, families, communities, language and culture. In turn, these have caused economic, psychological and spiritual/cultural devastation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children today enter the care system because their families are still suffering from grief and loss, stress, poor physical and mental health, substance abuse, and violence.

Understanding the Aboriginal family

Traditional Aboriginal family practices provide very strict laws for people to live by. The keeping of these laws provides the family group with a strong sense of cultural identity and belonging.

There are a number of skin groups within language groups and all Aboriginal people are born with a skin name. Skin groups govern social behaviours and interaction, traditionally determining those they can trade with, marry, and so on.

Traditionally a clan consists of two or more family groups that share an area of land over which they have ownership. Clan boundaries are passed from one generation to the next, generally through the father.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's relationship with the land is different to that of other Australians. Aboriginal people have a deep spiritual connection with the land. 'The best way to allow spirituality to emerge in Aboriginal children is to allow them to experience it — to feel connection with people and places — and feel proud.'

Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle outlines a preference for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when they are placed outside their family (Lock 1997:50).

The principle has the following order of preference for the placement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

- with the child's extended family
- within the child's Indigenous community
- with other Indigenous people.

The Australian Government and all the states and territories have adopted the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle either in legislation or policy. The impact of the principle is reflected in the relatively high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are placed either with Indigenous care givers or with relatives throughout Australia.



The importance of maintaining links with personal culture

As a foster carer, you are not expected to know the answers to all questions about culture but you need to facilitate the child's learning about her or his own individual Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture. You need to understand that the child's Aboriginal family and community are the teachers of culture and ensure that the child in your care has as close a relationship with her or his family and community as possible, so that questions about culture can be directed back to the family or to an Aboriginal or Islander community member or an Aboriginal or Islander case worker. Carers can learn about the child's culture along with the child.

Cultural plans and 'genealogical tracking'

It is important that each Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child in out-of-home care has a cultural plan. In some states and territories these are completed by child protection departments as part of case planning, with input from Aboriginal case workers and the Aboriginal community. Your role as a carer in cultural planning is to support and promote the plans and to help implement them. Cultural plans include a 'genogram' or family tree, going back three generations from both sides of the family.

Other useful resources

There are also a number of publications available that can provide you with assistance as a foster carer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. One excellent booklet, recently published in Victoria by the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, is *Caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in Out-of-home Care*. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) is also producing versions of this booklet for other states and territories to assist non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander carers providing care for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children.

The booklets provide information about how you can best meet the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care. The booklets help you to achieve a better understanding of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and why they need to grow up with a strong sense and knowledge of their Aboriginal cultural identity. The booklets will be available from Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies in each state and territory.

Contacts for more information

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) provide a range of child and family welfare services and are the best places to contact for advice or information to assist with caring in a culturally sensitive and respectful way.

Contact details are available on the SNAICC National Services Directory which also includes details of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and children's services, health and legal services, government departments, peak bodies and resources agencies from across the country.

The Directory is located on the SNAICC website www.snaicc.asn.au or by phoning 03 9489 8099

Shane

Aboriginal carer

Shane and Anne's first, and only, fostering experience nearly failed before it began. Their story reads like an instruction manual of how not to begin foster care.

Still coming to terms with their own inability to have children, they decided they would try fostering. Anne is not Aboriginal, but both she and Shane felt that fostering Aboriginal children could help break the cycles of both discrimination and dispossession they might otherwise face.

Shane works for a government department on Aboriginal issues, and is the chairperson of an Aboriginal organisation. Fostering was another way to contribute to his community, and share his skills. 'I have the talents of a Western world understanding, and I can use them to the benefit of my people.'

Shane admits now, however, that it was a shock when two children first came into their care four years ago. The couple were approved as carers after psychological and environmental assessments, but 'we were still looking at trying to have our own children, and were in a state of sadness'.

A call came from their state department of community services. 'They gave us some brief information. "It's a boy and a girl. Do you want to take them?" It was like a blind date.' Shane and Anne had put themselves down for long term care, but this was a short term emergency. They agreed to do it.

'So they drop them off – and somehow now there's two girls, instead of a boy and a girl - and give us a little piece of paper which just says their names, ages, and maybe a few other details. The kids had no personal items.'

'There's a 4 year old and a 3 month old baby. They say "Have you got baby gear?" We didn't, and "By the way, they need to be taken to the doctor's to be checked up."' There was no Medicare card, so a private doctor was not an option.

After two weeks, Shane and Anne rang the department and said they could not do it, and returned the children. 'We just felt we weren't getting the support necessary. We'd have expected a list of phone numbers – Parent Helplines, that sort of thing, but we didn't even get that.'

'But I think the main thing was it just wasn't the right timing. My wife was coming to the realisation, through these foster kids, and another IVF cycle that didn't work, that we really weren't having our own kids. It was a very emotionally draining time.'

After the children left, there was another twist. Shane and Anne changed their minds, and wanted the children back. 'That caused a lot of problems, and there was a thorough investigation. It took two weeks, but we got the kids back and they're with us now.'

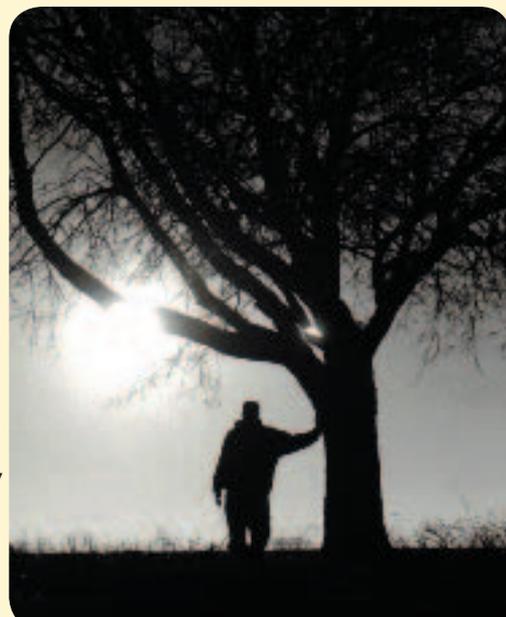
Over the next two years the children settled in, and were joined by a third sibling, a newborn. After extensive reviews, the placements were changed to long term and the children will now remain with Shane and Anne until they turn 18.

'The kids are comfortable and fully adjusted. They're all calling us Mum and Dad now. We just let them decide when they were ready for that. And they're very well accepted in our whole family; they've been taken on as nieces and grandchildren.'

Shane says the system has improved in his state in the few years he has been fostering. 'Foster parents can now access services, and goods that you might need.'

The children go to an Aboriginal childcare centre, get Aboriginal support at school, attend events organised by an Aboriginal child and family support agency, and are taken by Shane and Anne to the former mission where Shane's parents come from. They also have department-facilitated contact with their birth parents, who now have ten children, all in care.

Shane believes 'It's a basic thing we all should do – care for our children, and care for our community, as a parent, grandparent or foster parent.'



ABSTUDY

ABSTUDY is available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students who are studying an approved secondary course.

If your child in care is a primary school student she or he may also be eligible for ABSTUDY if they are aged 14 years or older on 1 January in the year of study.

ABSTUDY is also available to eligible full-time New Apprentices.

ABSTUDY may also be available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who go on to further study after leaving school.

If you have a young person in care, she or he may be eligible for the ABSTUDY Living Allowance, either at the 'standard' or 'away' rate, if they have reached the minimum school leaving age in your state or territory.

For more information, phone Centrelink on 13 1021

TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual Services 12 1202 or visit the website at

www.centrelink.gov.au

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with specialist interest in caring for children

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)	Suite 8, First Floor 252-260 St Georges Rd North Fitzroy VIC 3068 Phone 03 9489 8099 Email snaicc@vicnet.net.au Website www.snaicc.asn.au
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit (Australian Capital Territory)	Office for Children, Youth and Family Support Level 7, 11 Moore Street Canberra ACT 2601 Phone 02 6205 4798 or 1300 556 729 (After hours) Fax 02 6207 6364 Email ocyfs@act.gov.au Website www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs
Aboriginal Child, Family & Community Care (New South Wales)	State Secretariat, AbSec - NSW Level 7, 104 Bathurst Street Sydney NSW 2001 Phone 02 9264 0088 Fax 02 9264 0090 Email admin@absec.org.au Website www.absec.org.au
SA Aboriginal Family Support Services (South Australia)	134 Waymouth Street Adelaide SA 5000 Phone 08 8212 1112 Fax 08 8212 1123 Email afss@afss.com.au
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) (Tasmania)	7a Emily Road West Moonah TAS 7009 Phone 03 6272 7099 Fax 03 6273 0869 Email childrenscentre@tacinc.com.au
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency - VACCA (Victoria)	139 Nicholson Street East Brunswick VIC 3057 Phone 03 8388 1855 Fax 03 8388 1898 Email vacca@vacca.org
Yorganop Childcare Aboriginal Corporation (Western Australia)	1320 Hay St West Perth WA 6005 Phone 08 9321 9090 Fax 08 9321 9019 Email admin@yorganop.org.au Website www.yorganop.org.au

Foster care associations

Foster care associations exist in every state and territory in Australia. They are membership based, voluntary organisations supporting and representing the voices of foster carers, their families and the children they care for.

The Australian Foster Care Association Inc. works in partnership with the state and territory foster care associations and other community organisations in the child and family welfare sector to provide the support necessary for carers and children and young people unable to live at home, to achieve better outcomes.

Since foster care associations are made up of foster carers, their members are ready and willing to share experiences on a wide range of issues. In addition to the many government sources of support and information listed in this publication, foster, relative and kinship carers are encouraged to seek information and support from their own state or territory foster care association even if they choose not to become members of that association.

To find out more about foster care or to become a foster carer, contact the foster care association in your state or territory.



Foster care association contact details	
ACT	PO Box 4260 Kingston ACT 2604 Phone 02 6288 5994 or 02 6241 1665 (both 24 hours) Fax 02 6253 8887 Email fcaact@bigpond.com Website www.fcaact.org.au
NSW	131 Hawkesbury Road Westmead NSW 2145 Phone 02 9633 5816 or 02 9633 3824 (after hours) Fax 02 9633 4914 Email fcansw@fcansw.org.au Website www.fcansw.org.au
NT	5B/18 Bauhinia Street Nightcliff NT 0810 Phone 08 8948 3204 (Monday, Wednesday 9am – 5pm, Friday 9am – 1pm) Family and Children's Services After Hours Crisis Service 1800 700 250 (after hours) Foster Care NT Inc. Phone 0408 750 945 (after hours) Email ntfca@bigpond.net.au
QLD	5-921 Kingsford Smith Drive Eagle Farm QLD 4009 Phone 07 3268 5955 or 07 3807 8455 (after hours) Fax 07 3268 5970 Email fcq@fcq.com.au Website www.fcq.com.au
SA	P.O.Box 288 Kilburn SA 5084 Phone 1800 732 272 (24 hour) Fax 08 8186 4794 Email enquiries@cfc-sa.org.au Website www.cfc-sa.org.au
Tas	Room 3, Ground Floor, McDougall Building Ellerslie Road, Battery Point Hobart 7001 Phone 0437 006 876 (including after hours assistance and support) Email ksa2@bigpond.com Website www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/agency/partnerships/fostercarers.php
Vic	48 High Street Northcote VIC 3070 Phone 03 9489 9770 (business hours) Fax 03 9489 9119 Email admin@fcav.org Website www.fcav.org
WA	89 Hensman Road Subiaco WA 6008 Phone 08 9388 1911 or 08 9246 4285 (after hours) Country Callers 1800 641 911 Fax 08 9388 2405 Email admin@fcawa.com.au Website www.fcawa.com.au

Specialised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are available in several states or territories - see list on page 39

Matthew

young person in care

'I was the most annoying kid, impossible to teach.' That's how Matthew, now old and wise at 17, sums up his early years of constant strife at school.

He remembers 'swearing at teachers, chucking stuff at teachers, getting into fights.'

Matthew had lived with his birth mother until going into foster care at the age of eight, and has lived with the same foster parents since then, Shelley and Blake.

'I was out on the streets, and Mum couldn't control me. I was always in trouble with the school and the police. I didn't have a Dad to discipline me, and Mum couldn't do it. I didn't have any rules. It wasn't really Mum's fault. She couldn't control me. I can't really explain it. I couldn't take her seriously somehow. At ten I was nearly taller than her.'

Matthew's foster mother, Shelley, explains that Matthew's mother has serious health problems. He remains staunchly loyal to his mother, and sees her, and his seven year old sister, every two weeks. 'I get on very well with them', he emphasises. 'My Mum still cares about me a lot.'

He sometimes has his two mothers both in the living room at the same time, and calls them 'Big Mum' (Shelley) and 'Little Mum'. 'We have a laugh about that,' Shelley says.

Matthew's gratitude to Shelley and Blake is heartfelt. 'They were there for me. They were just really nice, and not angry with me. They were determined to change me.'

'At the start I didn't want to be with them. All kids in foster care, they'd feel the same way. They'd want to go back home and shit.'

'I'm surprised they didn't kick me out of the house. They were very persistent. They kept on trying.'

'Shelley was pretty much coming in to the school every day, fighting the principals, not taking "no" for an answer. If the teachers were getting sick of me and wanting me to be expelled, Shelley would always be on my side.'

'I didn't know why she would still like me. I was being a little shit.'

'I think I naturally didn't like adults. I'd spent more time with kids, who were much older than me – dodgy kids, who I shouldn't have been hanging out with.'

'But then Shelley and Blake came along, and demonstrated the good part of adults. They were willing to listen. They cared if I was in a really bad mood. They didn't get angry with me for being angry. They were calm and patient. They were very understanding.'

'At one school, the teachers hated me straight away, and Shelley and Blake saw it.'

After a couple of schools, and a couple of years with Shelley and Blake, he changed to a new school in Year 4, and began to change. 'It was a heaven school. The teachers were all so nice and understanding. They had a lot more patience.'

Matthew is now in Year 12, and hopes to go to university next year. 'If I'd grown up to be the kind of boy I was going to be, I would not be in school. I'd be in drugs, or an alcoholic, that kind of stuff.'

He likes 'anything to do with sport', and is interested in being a physical education teacher. He agrees that he would know what makes a good teacher.



Transition to Independent Living Allowance

The Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA), in conjunction with other support measures, is one-off support up to the value of \$1,000, designed to assist young people who are leaving or have left care, in order to meet some of the costs involved in moving to independent living.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance can be applied in a number of ways to best meet the needs of a young person leaving care, including making a contribution to the costs involved in starting employment, education or establishing a home. However, Transition to Independent Living Allowance can not be used to replace existing assistance schemes or services.

Please note that Transition to Independent Living Allowance is not a cash payment.

Who is eligible?

To qualify for Transition to Independent Living Allowance, the young person leaving your care needs to be:

- a permanent Australian resident, and
- aged between 15 and 25 years, and
- approaching or experiencing their transition to independent living, and
- at risk of an unsuccessful transition to independent living.

They must also:

- have been in, or currently be in formal and/or informal care, and
- have not received Transition to Independent Living Allowance before.

Important: A young person can only access the Transition to Independent Living Allowance once.

What is formal care?

To be considered to have been in, or to be currently in, formal care a young person seeking

this allowance must:

- be the subject of a care and protection order that places them in the care and custody of someone who isn't their parent, or
- have been the subject of a care and protection order that placed them in the care and custody of someone who wasn't their parent, and their order has ceased or expired because of their age.

What is informal care?

To be considered to have been in, or to be currently in, informal care they must:

- have 'Independent Status' for Centrelink payments because they cannot live with their parents; and
- currently be in, or have previously been in, informal out-of-home care; and/or
- currently be in, or have previously been in, Indigenous kinship care.

How to apply for the Transition to Independent Living Allowance

- The young person and the community organisation need to fill in a referral assessment form, which outlines what transition support the young person needs. The form is available from the FaCSIA website or from any of the administering organisations (see list on next page).
- The completed form is sent to an administering organisation which then processes the form.
- The administering organisation provides the Transition to Independent Living Allowance funds to the young person's community organisation or directly to the supplier of the goods and/or services.

To obtain a Transition to Independent Living Allowance referral assessment form:

- contact one of the administering organisations listed on the next page, or
- contact the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA):
 - write to FaCSIA at PO Box 7788, Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610
 - phone 1300 653 227, or
 - visit the website www.facsia.gov.au and follow the links to 'Youth' and 'Transition to Independent Living Allowance'.

More information may also be available from your state or territory community services or welfare department, from the foster care association or from the community organisation that is already helping the young person to make plans to leave care.



Transition to Independent Living Allowance administering organisations

Please address your enquiries to the Transition to Independent Living Allowance
Contact Officer in any of the following administering organisations

Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

- The Richmond Fellowship of the ACT Inc.
Phone 02 6248 6118
Fax 02 6247 7691
Email wilf@rfact.org.au

New South Wales (NSW)

- Biripi Aboriginal Corporation Medical Centre (Marungbai)
Phone 02 6551 3973
Fax 02 6551 2060
Email marungbai@tsn.cc
Centacare (Newcastle)
Phone 02 4903 3000
Fax 02 4961 2224
Email jo.bronwyn@mn.catholic.org.au
- Centacare (Sydney)
Manager: Ms Bronwyn Parker
Phone 02 9793 7522
Fax 02 9790 8421
Email alive@centacare.org
- Clarence Valley Community Programs Inc.
Phone 02 6642 7257
Fax 02 6643 2203
Email nsecomb@communityprograms.org.au
- Relationships Australia (NSW) - Aftercare Resource Centre
Phone 02 9890 3899
Fax 02 9890 1170
Email arc@ransw.org.au
- UnitingCare Burnside
Phone 02 4455 7016
Fax 02 4455 6907
Email schapman@burnside.org.au
- UnitingCare Burnside (Western NSW)
Phone 02 6884 5254
Fax 02 6885 1399
Email lizprice@burnside.org.au

Northern Territory (NT)

- Centacare (NT)
Phone 08 8944 2000
Fax 08 8944 2099
Email fmillar@centacare-nt.org.au

Queensland (QLD)

- Salvation Army QLD
Phone 07 3854 1245
Fax 07 3854 1552
Email yosbrisbane@aue.salvationarmy.org
(Attn: TILA Contact Officer)

South Australia (SA)

- Baptist Community Services
Phone 08 8277 8088
Fax 08 8277 9318
Email itownsend@sabaptist.asn.au
- Lutheran Community Care
Phone 08 8723 2869
Fax 08 8723 2854
Email bkanahs@lccsa.org.au
- Service to Youth Council
Phone 08 8413 8150
Fax 08 8212 2180
Email ycolgan@syc.net.au

Tasmania (TAS)

- Anglicare (Tasmania)
Phone 03 6234 3510
Fax 03 6234 8457
Email g.hitchens@anglicare-tas.org.au
- Glenhaven Family Care Inc.
Phone 03 6421 7793
Fax 03 6421 7794
Email gfcmanager@southcom.com.au

Victoria (VIC)

- Salvation Army (West Care)
Enquiries can be directed to
Phone 03 8311 5047 (recorded information)
or via Email to tila@aus.salvationarmy.org
Applications can be lodged by
Fax 03 9312 1131 or by posting to
PO Box 225, Sunshine VIC 3020

Western Australia (WA)

- Mission Australia (Bunbury)
Phone 08 9721 1122
Fax 08 9721 1133
Email cooka@missionaustralia.com.au
- Salvation Army (Crossroads West)
Phone 08 9328 1600
Fax 08 9328 1655
Email sylvia.mollasi@aus.salvationarmy.org
- Wanslea Family Services
Phone 08 9581 5843
Fax 08 9535 3163
Email peel@wanslea.asn.au

Note:

1. If a young person has left care and is not receiving support from a community organisation, they may still be eligible for a Transition to Independent Living Allowance payment. They should apply direct to FACSIA at GPO Box 7788, Canberra Mail Centre, ACT 2610 or approach their previous carer or agency.
2. TILA administering organisations may change from time to time. If the organisation you make an inquiry of is no longer providing this service, please inquire of them who is the local service provider, or phone 1300 653 227 or visit the TILA website at www.facsia.gov.au and follow the links to 'Youth' and 'Transition to Independent Living Allowance'.

Youth Allowance

If you have a young person in your care, they may be eligible for Youth Allowance from their 15th birthday if they are:

- subject to a care and protection order, and
- in full-time study, or undertaking an Australian apprenticeship, or looking for work, or a combination of Centrelink approved activities.

Important: *Each application for a young person in care to receive Youth Allowance is treated individually. It is therefore important that the young person provides all the relevant information when making a claim for Youth Allowance. A young person's carer may have to provide some of this information for the application to be assessed correctly.*

The granting of the Youth Allowance depends on

- whether the young person is still subject to a care and protection order
- the young person's age
- whether the young person is considered 'dependent' or 'independent' of the carer
- a Parental Means Test applied to the foster carer's income or assets
- a Personal Income Test applied to the young person's income.

If a young person is considered to be 'independent' their Youth Allowance is not subject to a Parental Means Test. Further, you as the foster carer, will no longer be eligible for Family Tax Benefit for this young person. Youth Allowance and Family Tax Benefit are not payable at the same time in respect of the young person.

Generally, Youth Allowance (Independent) may be paid to a young person if they are aged under 18 years, have not completed Year 12, and:

- are in full-time study or training, or
- agree to enter into an activity agreement with Centrelink.

If a young person is considered to be 'dependent' their Youth Allowance is subject to a Parental Means Test. Further, as the foster carer you will no longer be eligible for Family Tax Benefit for this young person.

Some young people in care (aged 16 years or older) are considered 'dependants' of their carer(s) even when they are not subject to a care or protection order. If this situation applies to your young person, they may still be paid Youth Allowance as a dependent young person, subject to your foster carer's income and assets meeting the Parental Means Test.

The usual age eligibility for Youth Allowance is between 16 and 20 for jobseekers, and 16 to 24 for full-time students or an Australian Apprentice.

Generally, Youth Allowance is paid into the young person's account unless there is a written advice from them asking that the payment go to a third party. If the young person is aged 16

or 17 then their Youth Allowance must be paid into the foster carer's account unless you as the foster carer give permission for the payment to go to the young person's account

Youth Allowance may be paid to a third party (or nominee, eg a carer) on behalf of the young person if they are not able to manage their financial affairs. To decide whether a young person is able to manage their financial affairs, Centrelink considers any medical and other evidence (for example, social worker reports and foster carer's submissions).

There are two payment rates for Youth Allowance. If you, as the young person's carer:

- 1 receive a foster care subsidy or allowance (from a state or territory government) then Youth Allowance is paid at the 'at home' rate.
- 2 do not receive a foster care allowance, then Youth Allowance is paid at the 'away from home' rate.

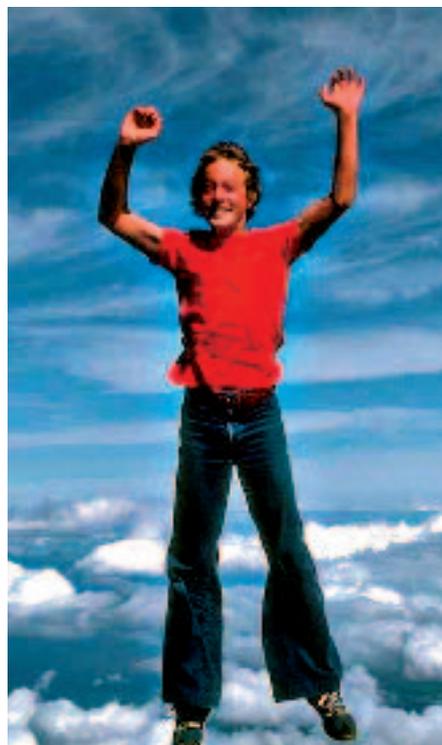
For more information, phone Centrelink on 13 1021

TTY 1800 810 586

Multilingual services 12 1202 or

visit the website at

www.centrelink.gov.au



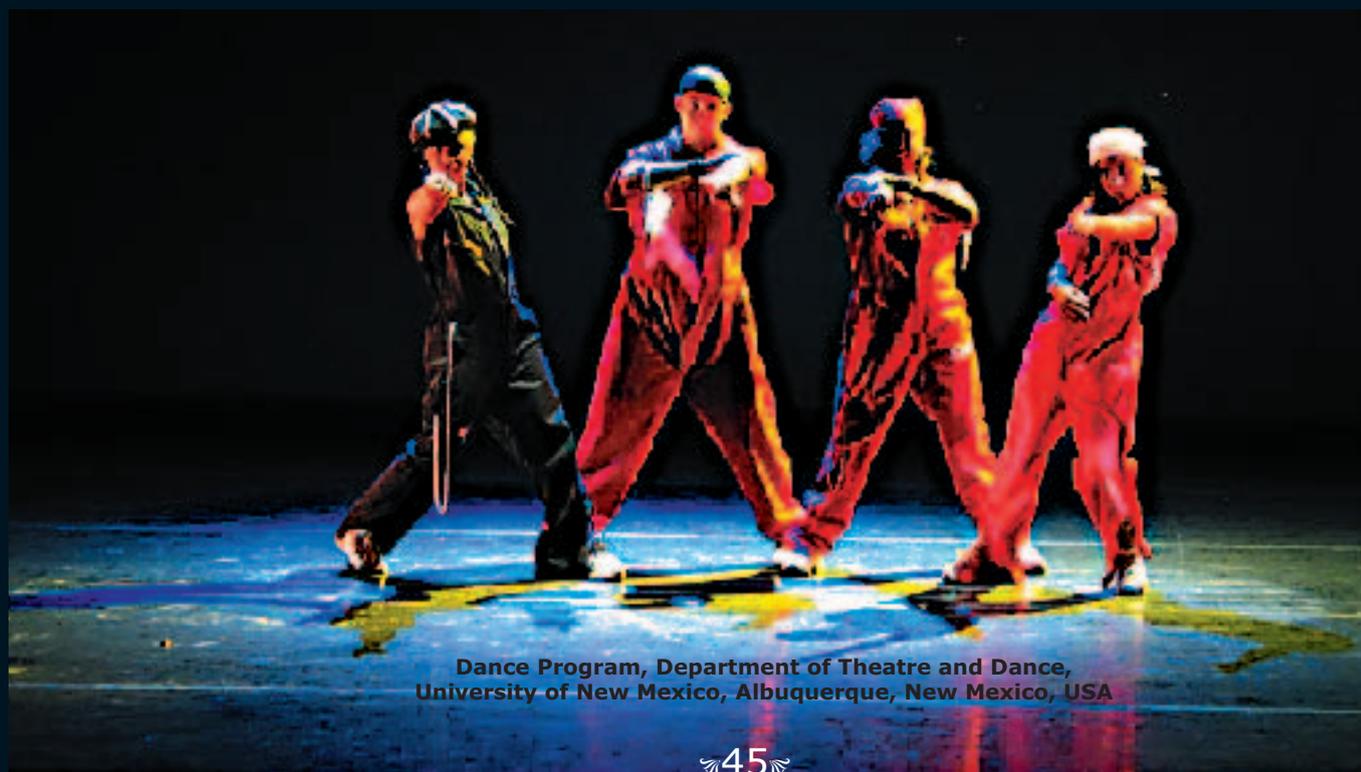
Rapp Care Song - Kerry Kemp

What does it mean to come into care,
The department's now looking after your welfare
And your social worker will work with you too
So you are safe and fed and like being you.
You get a care plan and can have your say
On what you need and want in the place you stay.
You can be yourself and can be so cool
When you say where you live at your local school.
You have some rights so do not be conned
That you can't have a say in your life and respond
To the things that are said about the life that you had,
About your brothers or your sisters or your Mum or your Dad.
You got a right to be happy, got a right to be sad,
Got a right to be healthy and a right to be mad.
Got a right to be safe, got a right to be private,
Now got a reason to keep it like that.
There are friends who can help you and give you advice
When you think no-one cares and you tread on thin ice.
And you almost go through to the water that's colder
There are those who will help with a leaning shoulder.
You tell your carer or your worker or someone you trust
You have to tell as it is being heard is a must
You can tell it to the advocates, Kerry or Loretta
They'll listen to your story and help make it better.
They want you to be safe like the rest of your friends
You deserve the best of care not the bits at the ends.
So if you are not feeling safe and life is worse than before
Phone 9 2 2 2 2 5 9 4*

*Kerry Kemp is Manager, Consumer Advocacy Service
Department for Community Development (WA)*

(NB Judy Garsed, the new Advocate for Children in Care in WA can also be contacted on 08-9222 2518)

*** The number in the rapp song is for Western Australia. For assistance in another part of Australia see the contact details under each state and territory support information in the later pages of this publication.**



**Dance Program, Department of Theatre and Dance,
University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA**

Australian Capital Territory support information

The Office for Children, Youth and Family Support (OCYFS), within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, has the Statutory responsibility for the protection and care of children and young people in the Territory under the *Children and Young People Act (1999)*. The Act provides the authority for the Chief Executive to place children and young people in foster care.

With the exception of a targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kinship and Foster Care Service, operating within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services Unit of OCYFS, and kinship care, all foster care is provided by the non-government sector.

OCYFS continues to play a pivotal role in the lives of children and young people in foster care through Care and Protection Services. This area is responsible for receiving reports of concern from the community, appraising reports, and on-going work with children, young people, and their families in accordance with the Act. The 'Looking After Children' case management and planning tool is utilised for all children and young people in foster care. The sector is governed by legislation, policies and procedures, Out-of-home Care Standards, and defined roles and responsibilities.

OCYFS is responsible for providing active and registered foster carers in the ACT with formal certification for exemption from participation requirements under the Australian Federal Government's Welfare to Work Reforms.

Foster carers are an important community resource and are required for the provision of home based care for children and young people who cannot remain at home or be placed with relatives or others who are known to them. Non-government agencies are responsible for recruiting, assessing, and training foster carers, and for on-going support in carrying out their delegated parental responsibilities on behalf of the Chief Executive. The government, non-government agencies, and foster carers work together as a team with the child or young person and his/her family to achieve a joint care plan goal.

The type of foster care provided in the ACT is respite care, emergency care, medium term care, long term care, and specialist foster care. Other forms of out-of-home care in the ACT are kinship care and residential care.

Recruitment of foster carers

People interested in becoming foster carers can contact an agency directly. Fostering agencies in the ACT support carers in a variety of ways. These include:

- Assessment using *Step by Step* – A competency based package for assessing potential foster carers
- Initial and ongoing training
- Caseworker support
- 24 hour telephone support
- A subsidy to assist with the cost of care
- Contact with other carers

Non-government agencies providing foster care in the ACT

- Marymead Child and Family Centre
- Barnardos Canberra

Department support

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
11 Moore Street (GPO Box 158)
Canberra ACT 2601
Phone 13 3427
TTY 02 6287 4392
Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450
Fax 02 6205 9183
Email ocyfs@act.gov.au
Website www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs

Care and Protection Services

Care Orders Team 02 6207 1069
Appraisals Team 02 6207 5169
Family Work Team 02 6207 1466

Child Abuse Reporting and After Hours Service
Phone 1300 556 729

Agencies

Marymead Child and Family Centre

Phone 02 6295 2755
Website www.marymead.org.au/

Barnardos Children's Family Centre

Phone 02 6241 5466
Website www.barnardos.org.au

Galilee, Family Placement Scheme

Phone 02 6290 2191

Life Without Barriers

Phone 02 6242 6222

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation – ACT Branch

Level 1,34 Laithlain St, Belconnen ACT 2616
Phone 1800 655 105
Fax 02 6262 7351
Website www.create.org.au

Legal support

Legal Aid Commission of the ACT

Phone 02 6243 3411
Website www.legalaid.canberra.net.au

Community Legal Services

Website www.naclc.org.au/directory/centres.html#act

ACT Pro Bono Clearing House

Phone 02 6247 5700
Email mail@lawsocact.asn.au

- Galilee Family Placement Scheme
- Life Without Barriers, Canberra

Government provided foster care in the ACT

- Kinship Care
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kinship Foster Care Service

Financial support

Foster carers in the ACT receive an allowance to subsidise the direct costs of looking after children and young people in foster care. Additional assistance can be provided by contingencies to reimburse additional costs, such as childcare and medical costs, where it is included in an approved Care Plan for the child or young person.

Foster carers are also eligible to apply for Commonwealth benefits and concessions for the children and young people in their care such as Parenting Allowance, Family Tax Benefit, Carers Allowance, and Child Care Benefit.

Training

Foster carers participate in *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* training prior to being issued with the authority to provide care to children and young people on behalf of the Chief Executive. Non-government agencies provide additional training to carers on an on-going basis, and carers are also invited to attend training held across the sector.

The ACT sector is currently developing an accredited training program for Foster Carers. Completion of this course would provide the carer with a Certificate at level IV.

Other support provisions (including support for children/YP)

Children and young people in care all have a case

manager and case plan as required under the Children and Young People Act 1999. An annual review is required. Other support provisions include:

- CREATE ACT is funded to provide support and advocacy to children and young people in care;
- The Department of Education and Training policy is that all children and young people in the Care of the Chief Executive have an Individual Learning Plan;
- The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services and the Department of Health have a joint protocol to ensure children and young people in care have timely access to health assessments and medical services;
- All children and young people in care are eligible for a Health Care Card.

Foster carers receive their primary support through the non-government agency they have chosen and who has undertaken their recruitment and training. Additional support is provided by:

- The ACT Foster Care Association Inc. and Australian Foster Carer Association Inc. for support and advocacy;
- Access to Commonwealth benefits;
- Annual foster carers conference;
- Access to community providing support services for parents of children and young people.

Family Group Conferencing is provided by the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support to prevent children and young people coming into foster care and to facilitate the restoration of a child or young person to their birth family or relative.

Foster Care Association of the ACT Inc.

Office PO Box 4260, Kingston ACT 2604
 Phone 02 6288 5994 or 02 6241 1665 (24 hours)
 Fax 02 6253 8887
 Email fcaact@bigpond.com
 Website www.fcaact.org.au

After hours assistance and support

Support is available from experienced foster carers 24 hours a day by contacting 02 6288 5994 or 02 6241 1665, or via email at fcaact@bigpond.com.

Services provided:

- telephone, email and internet support and referral service;
- newsletter;
- support at case conferences and meetings if you would like someone from the Association to attend with you;
- information about foster caring, assistance in accessing appropriate services and, where required, individual advocacy to ensure that foster carers issues are addressed;
- books, articles and videos on topics relating to foster care, child behaviour and raising children;
- support and assistance to attend specialist day time and weekend training, workshops, seminars and conferences;
- input into training sessions organised by the Office of Children, Youth and Family Support;
- annual foster care luncheon;
- social activities for foster families;
- participation in sector wide consultations and forums about out-of-home care and foster care matters;
- liaison with government and private agencies about policy and practice issues;
- member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., providing regular input on national issues that affect ACT foster carers.

New South Wales support information

Foster care is arranged and supported by the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and non-government foster care agencies. The authority to provide foster care comes under the *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 (NSW)*.

Foster care placements for children and young people can be short or long term and include:

- Emergency or crisis placements
- Short term (temporary) placements
- Bridging (medium term) placements
- Long term and permanent care placements
- Respite care placements

Recruitment, training and authorisation of carers

People interested in becoming foster carers should contact the Foster Care Recruitment Line (1800 011 110), their local DoCS office or a non-government foster care agency. They will receive an information package and will be invited to attend an information session where they can find out more about the roles and responsibilities of foster carers.

Potential carers are trained and assessed using the *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* training package and the competency based *Step by Step* assessment package. There is also a culturally specific training and assessment package for Aboriginal foster carers. The assessment process includes probity, reference and medical checks and currently involves interviews with all members of the household to help determine whether fostering is suitable for them and their family. The training is designed to give carers realistic information about foster caring, and help carers understand how children's life experiences effect their behaviour and their capacities.

Once the assessment and training is completed and the application to be a foster carer is approved, carers are authorised to care for a certain number of children, within a particular age range and level of need. Some carers may be authorised to provide short term emergency or respite care, others may be authorised for long term care.

Authorisation is for a period of five years and probity checks are undertaken again at the end of the five-year period. Throughout the period of authorisation carers receive support, supervision and ongoing training to develop and maintain the skills required to meet the needs of the child or young person in their care.

Financial support for foster carers

Foster carers in NSW receive a fortnightly allowance. A number of other payments and reimbursements are available to meet the additional costs of a child or young person. These additional costs may include professional therapy, specialist medical treatment and facilitating contact with birth families.

A list of allowance types and eligibility, and a list of extra financial support available to foster carers can be found on the DoCS website www.community.nsw.gov.au.

DoCS Helpline:

Phone 13 2111 TTY 02 9633 7698 to report child abuse and neglect (24 hours)

Department support and information

DoCS Head Office

4-6 Cavill Ave, Ashfield NSW 213
(Locked Bag 28, Ashfield NSW 1800)
Phone 02 9716 2222
TTY 02 9633 7698
Fax 02 9716 2999
Website www.community.nsw.gov.au

DoCS Community Services Centres and regional offices - see list of phone numbers on Website www.community.nsw.gov.au or in the White Pages.

Recruitment

Recruitment through the Foster Care Recruitment Line 1800 011 110, any local DoCS office, or ACWA foster care recruitment line 1800 629 628

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation – NSW Branch
Phone 1800 655 105 (for young people in care)
Fax 02 9267 9433

Kids Help Line
Phone 1800 55 1800

Legal Aid Helpline
Phone 1800 101 810 (for under 18s)

Youth Lifeline
Phone 131 114

Counselling support

Domestic Violence Line
Phone 1800 656 463
TTY 1800 671 442 (24 hours)

Lifeline
Phone 13 1114

Salvo Crisis Line
Phone 02 9331 2000 (24 hour suicide prevention line)

Alcohol & Drug Information Service
Phone 02 9361 8000 or 1800 422 599

Family Drug Support
Phone 02 9818 6166 or 1300 368 186

Parenting support

Karitane
Phone 02 9794 1852 or 1300 227 464 (24 hour information and counselling)

Tresillian
Phone 02 9787 0855 or 1800 637 357 (24 hour information and counselling)

Parent Line
Phone 13 2055 (advice and information for parents)

Ongoing support for foster carers

Specialised foster care support positions have been established in each of DoCS' seven regions to be responsible for the recruitment, training and support of foster carers.

DoCS caseworkers can help to arrange support from psychologists, remedial teachers, respite care and health services, depending on the child's needs as identified in case planning.

DoCS provides funding to the *Foster Care Association (NSW) Inc.* and the *Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat*, to support and train foster carers and caseworkers.

Recruitment

Recruitment through the Foster Care Recruitment Line 1800 011 110, any local DoCS office, or ACWA foster care recruitment line 1800 629 628.

Advocacy and guardianship support

NSW Commission for Children and Young People
Phone 02 9286 7276

Office of the Children's Guardian (OCG)

Phone 02 9025 4200

Administrative Decisions Tribunal

Phone 1800 060 410 (free call)

NSW Ombudsman

Phone 02 9286 1000 or 1800 451 524 (free call)

Foster care service providers

For an extensive list of NSW foster care service providers see www.community.nsw.gov.au

Legal support

Legal Aid NSW (*Law Access NSW*)

Phone 1300 888 529

Website www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/asp/index.asp

Community Legal Services

Website www.naclc.org.au/directory/centres.html#nsw

NSW Bar Association Legal Assistance Scheme

Phone 02 9232 4055

Website www.nswbar.asn.au/Public/LegalAssistance/content_legass.php

Law Society of NSW Pro Bono Scheme

Phone 02 9926 0364

Website www.lawsociety.com.au/page.asp?partID=6744

Public Interest Law Clearing House (NSW)

Phone 02 9299 7833. Fax 02 9299 7855

Website www.piac.asn.au/legal/pilchhelp.html

Supreme Court of New South Wales Legal Assistance Scheme

Phone 02 9230 8071

Website www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/sc/sc.nsf/pages/probono

Indigenous care support

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat

Phone 02 9264 8190 or 02 9264 0088

Aboriginal Statewide Foster Carer Support Service

Phone 02 9264 0088 or 1800 888 698

Foster Care Association (NSW) Inc.

Office 131 Hawkesbury Road Westmead NSW 2145
Phone 02 9633 5816 (Office hours 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday)
02 9633 3824 (24 hour support)
Fax 02 9633 4914
Email fcansw@fcansw.org.au
Website www.fcansw.org.au

After hours assistance and support

A 24 hour support line is available for all foster carers, department or non-government. It is answered by experienced foster carers. Please call 02 9633 3824.

Services provided:

- telephone and Email support and referral;
- support person/s available to attend case conferences/court/mediation and administrative decision tribunal and various other meetings as requested, including allegations in care;
- access to Support Groups across the state;
- advocacy on all issues pertaining to foster care and kinship care;
- bi-annual conference;
- camps for carers and children in care and carers' own children;
- support to attend training, conferences or workshops about the care of children in out-of-home care;
- input into DoCS training of new caseworkers and/or information sessions about carers and caring;
- newsletter (10 times a year) delivered to all foster carers in NSW known to the Association;
- books, articles and videos relating to foster care available for hire from the Association library;
- partnership with the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community State Secretariat (AbSec) about indigenous care issues;
- partnership with CREATE to gain the maximum input for children and young people in out-of-home care;
- active member of AFCA, the national voice of foster carers, providing regular input on national issues with an impact on NSW foster carers.

Northern Territory support information

The Family and Children's Services (FACS) program in the Department of Health and Community Services (DHCS), has the statutory responsibility for the delivery of care and protection services to children and young people. Once a child is identified as being in need of care, FACS makes arrangements to locate a suitable placement.

The majority of children are placed in family based care, which includes foster care and relative care. Foster carers and relative carers are approved and registered to provide safe and nurturing care to children and young people within their own home. Foster carers can provide care to a broad range of children and young people. Relative carers are registered to provide care for specific children. They are typically related to the child or have a significant pre-existing relationship with them.

The majority of children are placed in out-of-home care because they have suffered harm or are at risk of potential harm. FACS will continue to work with the child's family to reunite them as quickly and safely as possible. Depending upon the child and their families' circumstances, children may be placed in emergency, respite, short or long term care.

FACS holds primary responsibility for recruiting, training, assessing and supporting the majority of family-based placements across the NT.

Legislation requires FACS to abide by the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle. This means that every effort must be made to place Indigenous children within their immediate or extended family networks wherever possible. If relative care options do not exist, placement with Indigenous carers will be sought. Typically, two thirds of children and young people in out-of-home care are Indigenous.

Training and accreditation

People interested in becoming a carer must be assessed to determine their suitability to provide care to our most vulnerable children and young people.

Information to determine a carers' suitability is collected through several face-to-face interviews, referee reports, and child-safe screening checks (including medical and criminal history check). Applicants must have a physically safe environment to care for children and young people.

The assessment process is about getting to know you and what you have to offer as a carer. Applicants will need to provide detailed information about themselves, their background and their family. This information is compiled into a confidential written report that informs the outcome of your assessment.

Suitable carers will be approved and registered for up to 12 months. It is a requirement that carers are re-assessed and re-registered every twelve months thereafter.

Limited orientation training opportunities are available to carers in the NT. Work is currently under way to deliver a consistent training package *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* to all carers across the NT. FACS will introduce mandatory orientation training in the very near future.

Government department support

Department of Health and Community Services

PO Box 40596 CASUARINA NT 0811
Phone 08 8999 2400

Translating and Interpreting Services
08 8999 4302 or 1800 676 254

Fax 08 8999 2700

Website www.nt.gov.au/health

FACS After Hours Crisis Service

Phone 1800 700 250

Darwin Urban Placement Unit Support Team

Ground floor Casuarina Plaza

Cnr Trower Road and Vanderlin Drive, Casuarina NT 0811

Phone 08 8922 7077

Katherine FACS

Katherine Government Centre, First Street, Katherine

Phone 08 8973 8600

East Arnhem FACS

Arnhem House Endeavour Square, Nhulunbuy

Phone 08 8987 0400

Darwin Remote FACS

Block 4 Royal Darwin Hospital Campus, Darwin

Phone 08 8922 8474

Alice Springs Placement Support Team

60 Hartley Street, Alice Springs

Phone 08 8955 6001

Barkly FACS

Tennant Creek Hospital, Smith Street, Tennant Creek

Phone 08 8962 4334

Children and young people support

Create Foundation – NT Branch Shop 17a Casuarina Plaza

Phone 1800 655 105

Fax 08 8945 7752

Legal support

Legal Aid Commission – NT

Phone 08 8999 3000 or 1800 019 343

Website www.ntlac.nt.gov.au

Recruitment

FACS always welcomes calls from people interested in becoming a carer. FACS encourages people of all ages, racial and occupational backgrounds to apply, as this enhances FACS’ capacity to make culturally appropriate placements and better match the needs of a child to a carer with the right skills to meet these needs. Indigenous carers are always encouraged to apply.

People can nominate to care for children of a certain age and/or children with special needs.

If you would like more information about becoming a carer contact the FACS office in your local area directly. Alternately you can visit www.nt.gov.au for further information.

Support

Being a carer means that you’re an essential part of the team that supports the current and future needs of the child or young person in care. As part of this team, you will have regular contact with a wide range of people and professionals and, in particular, ongoing contact with FACS.

Being a carer is a rewarding yet challenging role. Whilst FACS is a key source of support to all registered carers, other Departments, community based agencies, your friends and family can also provide you with support as required. The child’s caseworker will be a good source of information

specific to the child(ren) in your care. In emergencies, registered carers can also access the 24 hour FACS After Hours Crisis Service.

Carers are encouraged to meet other carers who share a valuable understanding of the demands of the caring role and can provide additional support to you and your family. The NT foster care association is able to link you to other carers in your local area.

Financial support

FACS pays regular payments to registered carers to contribute to the costs of caring for the child within their home. Carer payment rates are reviewed and adjusted annually.

Carer payments are not considered as wages or income, but are intended to re-imburse carers for the daily expenses of caring for a child including food, clothing, pocket money and other household expenses. Payments are calculated according to the age of the child.

Alternate payment rates may be applied when a child who has a disability and/or high daily care and support needs is placed with a carer. Higher payment rates are calculated on the basis that carers are expected to provide additional care and support above and beyond what would normally be expected.

Foster carers may come into contact with a range of services and organisations throughout their foster care career, services too numerous to mention in this publication. A comprehensive range of support services is located in the front pages of your local telephone book under the heading ‘Health and Help’.

Foster Care NT Inc.

Office 5B/18 Bauhinia Street (PO Box 1287), Nightcliff NT 0814
 Phone 08 8948 3204 (9am – 5pm, Monday, Wednesday; 9am – 1pm, Friday)
 0408 750 945 (After hours assistance and support)
 Fax 08 8948 0509
 Email ntfca@bigpond.net.au

After hours assistance and support

Foster Care NT Inc (foster carer to foster carer) after hours service 0408 750 945.

Services provided:

- telephone support and referral service;
- support at case conferences and meetings if you would like someone from the Association to attend with you;
- information about foster caring, advice and assistance in accessing appropriate services;
- individual advocacy as required;
- literature information to prospective foster families;
- social activities for foster families;
- newsletters;
- conferences;
- training seminars;
- annual camps in each region (Top End and Central Australia) for foster families;
- liaison with government and private agencies about policy and practice issues;
- active member of AFCA, the national voice of foster carers, providing regular input on national issues that have an impact on Northern Territory foster carers.

Queensland support information

The provision and administration of out-of-home care in Queensland is the responsibility of the Department of Child Safety, a department dedicated to protecting Queensland's children and young people and ensuring they are safe from abuse and neglect.

Under the department's program, out-of-home care in Queensland is predominantly delivered through family-based care by individuals who are recruited, assessed, trained and supported by either the department or specially funded non-government care services. While carers may be trained and supported by a funded care service, the department is responsible for approving all carers.

There are two types of family-based out-of-home care in the Queensland system:

- Foster care is provided by approved carers in their own homes. Foster carers provide safe and caring homes for these children to live for short or long periods of time
- Kinship care is provided by an approved person who is related to the child or young person in out-of-home care or considered to be a significant person in their life. Kinship carers can assist children and young people to maintain links with their family.

In June 2005 there were approximately 2,700 approved carer households in Queensland caring for around 5,700 children and young people in out-of-home care. In approximately 32% of these households the carer is a relative or someone else known to the child prior to their entry into care.

Training and approval of carers

Foster carer applicants are assessed to determine their suitability to care for abused or neglected children who are very vulnerable and who often require a great deal of support. This assessment is based on information collected through a variety of sources, including interviews, written assessments, initial pre-service training, referee reports, and personal history checks.

This assessment process is very detailed and can include, for example, consideration of the prospective carer's family structure, personal background, and their ability and motivation to become a foster carer. The ways in which families may cope with some of the pressures and stress associated with fostering is also taken into account. During the assessment, personal history checks (such as child protection checks) are undertaken and prospective carers are also required to possess a Blue Card provided by the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian.

Queensland's carer training package for foster carers is called Quality Care: Foster Care Training. The pre-service component of this training package is undertaken by applicants before they become an approved foster carer and is designed to help prospective carers prepare for their new role. All foster carers receive the same initial training, which outlines what is required of them, information about child development and behaviour management, and other skills they will need to provide quality care.

Government department support

Department of Child Safety
111 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
(GPO Box 806, Brisbane QLD 4001)
Phone 07 3224 8045 or 1800 811 810
TTY 07 3012 8655
Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450
Fax 07 3404 3570
Email info@chilfsafety.qld.gov.au
Website www.chilfsafety.qld.gov.au

Emergency support

Child Safety After Hours Service Centre

after hours telephone
Phone 1800 177 135
Website www.chilfsafety.qld.gov.au
Parentline - counselling for parents and primary carers
Phone 1300 301 300
Website www.parentline.com.au

Recruitment

Department of Child Safety Foster Carer Recruitment Line
Phone 1300 550 877
Email fcrecruit@chilfsafety.qld.gov.au

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation – QLD Branch
5/55 Clarence Street, Coorparoo QLD
Phone 1800 655 105
Fax 07 3847 3971

Carer support

Foster Carer Advocacy and Support Team (FAST) Unit

Phone 07 3268 5955 or 0400 647664 (FAST Co-ordinator)
Fax 07 3268 5970
Email fcq@fcq.com.au
Web www.fcq.com.au

Placement support

Children's Services Tribunal

Phone 07 3225 8346 or 1300 855 345
Fax 07 3225 8345
Email mailbox@justice.qld.gov.au
Website www.justice.qld.gov.au/cst

Legal support

Legal Aid Queensland

Phone 1300 651 188
Fax 07 3238 3300
Website www.legalaid.qld.gov.au

Following their initial approval as a foster carer, carers are required to participate in ongoing learning, completing an additional three modules in the first year after approval and thereafter according to an individually tailored learning and support plan.

Kinship carers have similar assessment and approval processes to foster carers.

All foster and kinship carers are approved in the first instance for a period of 12 months and are reassessed at the end of that time. If they remain assessed as suitable to remain carers, they are provided with additional approval periods of up to two years.

Recruitment

In Queensland, the recruitment of foster carers is an ongoing activity driven by the efforts of Child Safety Service Centres and funded care services.

For more information on foster care and becoming a carer in Queensland:

- Contact your local Child Safety Service Centre; or
- visit www.childsafety.qld.gov.au; or
- Phone the foster care recruitment line on 1300 550 877 for the cost of a local call.

Support

Currently, the department and funded care services offer a range of supports to foster and kinship carers that include ongoing case work, respite, participation in decision making, financial support, advocacy and referral, practical support, learning and development, and peer support and mentoring.

Carers can also receive support from other

government departments, community agencies, other carers, their community and the informal networks that they may develop. Carers can also seek assistance from Foster Care Queensland, a peak organisation that provides support and advocacy services to foster carers through Foster Carer Advocacy and Support Teams (FAST).

Financial support

Approved carers receive an allowance that is a contribution towards the direct costs of looking after children and young people in out-of-home care. The allowance covers items such as food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment. The allowance is not considered a 'payment' for fostering and it is not a source of income. It contributes to a reimbursement of the real costs associated with providing care.

An enhanced allowance is provided to those who care for children and young people with high and complex support needs. Other reimbursements to carers for child related costs are also available from the department.

Foster Carer Card

Approved foster carers and kinship carers throughout Queensland are eligible to receive the Foster Carer Card. The Card is intended to assist carers in their day-to-day fostering duties with easy identification to government agencies and services and also provides access to a range of discounts from participating businesses.

Information on Queensland's foster care program can be accessed at www.childsafety.qld.gov.au.

Foster Care Queensland Inc.

Office Unit 5, 921 Kingsford Smith Drive (PO Box 1179) Eagle Farm Qld 4009
 Phone 07 3268 5955 (9am – 5pm, Monday to Friday)
 07 3807 9455 (After hours assistance and support)
 Email fcq@fcq.com.au
 Website www.fcq.com.au

After hours assistance and support

Association after hours number 07 3807 9455, or call the nearest FAST delegate in your area – Phone 07 3268 5955 or after hours 0400 647 664.

Services provided:

- individual support services through the Foster Carer Advocacy and Support Team (FAST);
- FAST delegates through out the state to provide advice, support and advocacy where needed for foster, kinship and provisional carers;
- telephone and Email support and advocacy – 24 hours;
- newsletter provided monthly to members;
- resource booklets available to all members;
- staff undertake systems and peer advocacy;
- kinship care, Indigenous care and disability sub-committees;
- agents to the Children's Services Tribunal;
- facilitation of training modules for the Department of Child Safety;
- active member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., and regularly providing input on national issues that effect Queensland carers;
- organisation and facilitation of recognition awards for carers and staff;
- organisation of yearly Queensland Foster Care Conference;
- active on numerous workgroups that inform policy and practice for Department of Child Safety and non-government services;
- working with other peak organisations to enhance the Child Protection sector;
- working with non-government service providers.

South Australia support information

The Department for Families and Communities, through its statutory agency Families SA, is responsible for providing alternative care services in South Australia.

The alternative care sector also comprises non-government services who are contracted by government to provide a range of alternative care placement options, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous home based foster care, special needs care, stabilisation and transitional care, and adolescent care. Government and non-government sectors work together to provide placements for around 1,400 children and young people aged from 0 to 18 years who are unable to remain in the care of their legal guardians (in most cases, their birth parents).

Relative and kinship carers form a significant component of alternative care services in South Australia. This is in recognition of the importance for children to remain with their family or kinship groups in order to maintain relationships and cultural connections. Families SA identifies, trains and supports relative and kinship carers who are able to care for specific children within their family or kinship group. Approximately 26 per cent of all children who cannot reside with their birth parents or legal guardians are found placements with relatives or their kinship group.

Where placements with extended family or kinship groups are not an option, family based foster care is an important component of the alternative care system. There are approximately 900 foster carers (at June 2006) in South Australia and this is short of current demand. Foster carers are recruited, trained and supported through non-government agencies contracted by government. Approval and registration of foster carers is the responsibility of Families SA through its Registration and Licensing Unit.

The main placement types of care provided within South Australia include:

- respite care — generally for a regular planned period of time such as one weekend a month or a week during the school holidays
- emergency care — generally these placements are needed when a child or young person is at risk of immediate and serious harm and must be removed from their parents to ensure their immediate safety, welfare and wellbeing. However, emergency placements may also be required when a parent is unable to look after their child in the short term, for example, as a result of hospitalisation or imprisonment
- short to medium term care — when the goal is reunification with the biological parents
- long term care — when the placement is intended to be permanent.

Training

The recruitment, training, assessment and retention of foster carers in South Australia is currently under review.

Anglicare, as the major provider of home based non-Indigenous care in the Adelaide metropolitan area, provides a Foster Carer Orientation Course over a six to seven week period on four occasions

Government department support

Families SA

Guardianship and Alternative Care Directorate
Level 1, CitiCentre,
11 Hindmarsh Square
Adelaide SA 5000
(GPO Box 292, Adelaide SA 5001)
Phone 08 8226 7000
Fax 08 8226 6681
Email enquiries@dfc.sa.gov.au
Website www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au

Crisis Response Unit

Phone 13 1611

Families SA, case worker, supervisor, or manager at the local district centre — see White Pages for location contact details
Phone 13 1611 (after hours)

Reporting child abuse

Phone 13 1478

Carer information and support

Foster Carer Relations — Department for Families and Communities

Phone 08 8207 0796

Families SA case worker or manager at the local District Centre — see White Pages
Phone 13 1611 (after hours)

Phone 13 1478 to report child abuse or neglect

Your Alternative Care Service Provider

For your alternative care service provider contact your placement support worker or supervisor

Office of the Children's Guardian

Phone 08 8226 8570

Email gcyp@saugov.sa.gov.au

Website www.gcyp.sa.gov.au

Parent Helpline (24 hour information and help)

Phone 1300 364 100

Website www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Grandparents for Grandchildren SA

Phone 08 8265 5605 or 08 8266 3618

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Phone 08 8305 9200

National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (NAPCAN) SA

— protective parenting

Phone 08 8232 6430

Website www.napcan.org.au/SA/support.htm

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation — SA Branch

Phone 1800 655 1056

Website www.create.org.au

Kids Help Line — 24 hours

Phone Freecall 1800 551 800 or

Website www.kidshelp.com.au

Youth Helpline (24 hour support/counselling)

Phone 1300 131 719 or 08 8303 1691

Website www.cyh.com

throughout the year. Training usually consists of one evening or one day per week, depending on the carer's availability to attend. Foster carers are also expected to attend a small number of training sessions each year to support them in their role. Similarly, relative and kinship carers can be expected to attend some training sessions and ongoing information sessions, as required by Families SA, to assist and support them in their caring role.

There is some recognition of prior learning given to those who have previously studied topics covered during orientation training.

Recruitment

The Department for Families and Communities runs a Foster Carer Recruitment Service to provide information to people interested in becoming foster carers. The recruitment service sends information packs to potential carers. This includes information about the agencies that recruit, train and assess foster carers across the state.

Recruitment is managed through a number of service providers across the metropolitan and country regions of South Australia. There are specific agencies that target recruitment towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and varied cultural backgrounds, such as African and Afghani families for the Refugee Minors Programme.

All funded non-government service providers conduct their own recruitment. These agencies conduct a full assessment of the potential carer's capacity to be approved as a foster carer. If the carer is considered suitable, the provider may make a recommendation to Families SA's Registration and Licensing Unit to approve and formally register the carer.

Support

Families SA provides approved and registered carers (foster, relative and kinship) with a basic subsidy payment and extra allowances, such as education and clothing, to assist with daily living costs for the child or young person. The case manager may make additional funds available on an assessed needs basis. When there are special or high complex needs, such as the child has challenging behaviors and/or disability issues, an extra loading may be provided. Similarly, if case workers are working towards reunifying a child with his/her family, a reunification subsidy may be available for carers to assist with costs expected with the extra demands of reunification, such as transporting the child to and from access more regularly than normal.

South Australia is introducing a new emergency payment to carers (on top of the basic subsidy payment) in 2006, to acknowledge the effort of foster families in making their homes available in crisis situations.

Once a foster carer has a child or young person placed into their care, an allocated Families SA case manager and agency support worker provide ongoing support and assistance to support the placement. Relative and kinship carers are allocated a relative care support worker who can provide ongoing support and assistance.

Recruitment, training and support services

Metropolitan

Foster Carer Recruitment Service

Phone 1800 210 145

Website www.fostercarers.org.au

Anglicare SA

Phone 08 8256 2185

Time for Kids

Phone 08 8362 6311

Website www.timeforkids.com.au

Families SA (relative and kinship carers)

Website www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au

Northern country

(Port Pirie, Port Augusta, Kadina and Coober Pedy)

UnitingCare Wesley Port Pirie

Phone 08 8633 8601

Whyalla, Port Lincoln and Ceduna

Centacare Whyalla

Phone 08 8645 8233

Southern country

(South East, Riverland and Murrayland)

Anglican Community Care

Mt Gambier

Phone 08 8724 9211

Murraylands

Phone 08 8532 6303

Riverland

Phone 08 8582 2344

If you are interested in caring for children or young people with a disability:

Life Without Barriers (for children or young people with a disability)

Phone 08 8172 0855

If you are interested in caring for adolescents:

Baptist Community Services

Phone 08 8277 8088

If you are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and interested in becoming a carer:

Aboriginal Family Support Services - Metropolitan

Phone 08 8212 1112 or 1300 365 712

Website www.afss.com.au

Whyalla, Port Augusta and Port Pirie

Aboriginal Family Support Services - Port Augusta

Phone 08 8641 0907

Port Lincoln and Ceduna

Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Services (not AFSS affiliated)

Phone 08 8683 0162

Coober Pedy and Oodnadatta

Aboriginal alternative care service

(Waltjapiti) based at Families SA Coober Pedy

Phone 08 8672 4555

Southern Country Aboriginal Partnership

(auspiced with Anglican Community Care)

Mt Gambier

Phone 08 8724 9211

Murraylands

Phone 08 8532 6303

Riverland

Phone 08 8582 2344

A state-wide Crisis Response Service is available to all carers after business hours — Phone 13 1611.

The Foster Carer's Charter outlines the Department for Families and Communities commitment to foster carers, relative carers and kinship carers, and makes clear the rights and responsibilities of carers, Families SA case workers, and other partner agencies in the alternative care sector who support and work with carers.

Financial assistance

Families SA — your local district centre — see White Pages

Centrelink

Phone 13 1021

Website www.centrelink.gov.au

Family Assistance Office

Phone 13 6150

Website www.centrelink.gov.au

Complaints

Customer Service Officer in Families SA

Phone 08 8226 6930 or Freecall 1800 003 305

— must try resolving issue at District Centre level in first instance and if dissatisfied, can lodge complaint.

Office of the Guardian — represents the interests of children and young people in care
Phone 08 8226 8570

Email gcyp@saugov.sa.gov.au

Website www.gcyp.sa.gov.au

State Ombudsman's Office

Phone 08 8226 8699 or Freecall 1800 182 150

The Families SA Executive Director, Regional Directors, Director Guardianship and Alternative Care, DFC Chief Executive, Members of Parliament and the Minister for Families and Communities will also respond to written complaints.

Connecting Foster Carers – South Australia Inc.

Office	P.O.Box 288 Kilburn SA 5084
Phone	1800 732 272 (24 hour service from anywhere in Australia)
Fax	08 8186 4794
Email	enquiries@cfc-sa.org.au
Website	www.cfc-sa.org.au

After hours assistance and support

Peer support is available from experienced foster carers by contacting CFC's contact line 1800 732 272.

Services provided:

- telephone and internet support and referral service;
- newsletter to all South Australian carers;
- contributing to the dissemination of information to and about carers;
- peer support and assistance to obtain information about foster caring and accessing appropriate services to ensure that carers needs are addressed;
- support at case conferences and meetings if carers would like someone from the Association to attend with them;
- social activities for foster families;
- support and facilitation of regional support groups;
- liaison with government and non-government agencies about policy and practice issues;
- input into training sessions organised by the Department and non-government agencies;
- member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., providing input on national issues that have an impact on South Australian foster carers;
- supporting the development and implementation of innovative programs and strategies that build the strength and capacity of carers in the alternative care system;
- providing input into the development and revision of alternative care policies, charters and evaluations as they pertain to the interests, rights and responsibilities of carers;
- working with CREATE to gain the maximum input for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Tasmania support information

The Department of Health and Human Services manages the majority of foster care placements and all formal kinship care placements in Tasmania. The non-government sector manages cottage care placements and some foster care placements.

Children and young people at risk of abuse or neglect may be placed in out-of-home care under the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*. In Tasmania placement options for children and young people include:

- Kinship Care (extended family/friends or community network)
- Family Group Home (short term placements in a home provided by the Department)
- Foster Care (emergency, short and longer term placements in the home of the carer/s)
- Sibling Group Care (longer term placements for sibling groups in a home provided by the Department and community organisations)
- Cottage Care (placements for medium to high needs adolescents provided through community organisations)
- Rostered Care (placements for high needs adolescents provided by the Department).

The preferred placement option is with members of the extended family and community network wherever possible. Family group conferencing is a key decision making process for children in need of care and protection in Tasmania. Planning for all children placed in out-of-home care in Tasmania is in accordance with the Looking After Children (LAC) case management framework.

Recruitment of carers

There is always a need for foster carers, especially carers who have the capacity to care for adolescents and the Department always welcomes people who are interested in becoming carers. Out-of-home care teams in each region recruit foster carers and other carers mainly through advertisements in local papers. Potential foster carers are invited to attend an information session before they apply to be assessed as suitable carers.

Potential kinship carers for specific children are identified through discussions with their parents and other family members. The use of family group conferences as a decision making process for planning for children with care and protection concerns is also an avenue for identifying family members who may be willing and able to provide care.

For more information about becoming a departmental carer please contact 1800 001 219 during office hours.

Training and accreditation of carers

Foster carers complete the training program, *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* before they are approved as carers. Approved carers are encouraged to further develop their skills through other training opportunities. Joint training with child protection workers is encouraged. Some carers have been supported to complete relevant modules of the Certificate Level IV Community Services (Protective Care) course.

Kinship carers are not required to complete the

Government department support

Department of Health and Human Services

34 Davey Street, Hobart TAS 7000
(GPO Box 125, Hobart TAS 7001)
Phone 03 6233 3185 or 1300 135 513
TTY, Translating and Interpreting Service
Available at all major hospitals
Fax 03 6233 4201
Website www.dhhs.tas.gov.au

Emergency support

A 24-hour phone line, which takes calls about suspected abuse or neglect of children aged under 18 years of age
Phone 1300 737 639

Drug and alcohol support

A 24-hour phone service, which provides anyone in the community with access to drug and alcohol counselling, information and referral to services
Phone 1800 811 994

Parenting support

Parenting Helpline

A 24-hour phone service that assists with stressful parenting issues and concerns
Phone 1300 808 178

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation – Tas. Branch

Works to ensure that children and young people in care are afforded the same life opportunities as all young Australians
45 Sandy Bay Road
Sandy Bay TAS 7004
Phone 03 6224 9822
Fax 03 6224 8733

Children's well-being

For support about matters that relate to the well-being of children in Tasmania, contact
Commissioner for Children
Level 5, 99 Bathurst Street, Hobart TAS 7000
Phone 03 6233 4520 or 1300 362 065

Legal support

For legal assistance contact Legal Aid
Commission of Tasmania
Phone 03 6236 3800
Website www.legalaid.tas.gov.au

Tasmanian law online – Tasmanian legislation

Website www.thelaw.tas.gov.au/links/index.w3p

Shared Stories, Shared Lives training program but are encouraged to attend specific sessions or other training programs relevant to them. The policy position in relation to kinship care placements recognises that kinship carers have similar but different needs to foster carers especially in relation to training and skills development.

Foster carers are assessed via *Step by Step* a competency based model for assessing potential foster carers. The format for assessing kinship carers has been adapted from *Step by Step*.

Financial support

Foster carers and formal kinship carers are reimbursed for costs associated with caring for a child placed by the Department. The level of reimbursement varies in accordance to the age of the child. The payment, known as the standard reimbursement, is paid into the carer's bank account on a fortnightly basis. The standard reimbursement covers the day to day child related costs including energy, food, clothing and footwear, household goods and services, health, education, transport, leisure and personal care.

Foster and kinship carers also receive an additional weekly payment (paid on a fortnightly basis) if the child is under a short term care order. Carers also receive an additional payment to purchase a Christmas and birthday present for the child if the child is in care at these times.

Additional costs because the child has additional needs such as extra health needs are met through

additional payments to carers as well as payments on behalf of the child. Additional payments must be approved through the child's care plan.

Other supports

Foster and kinship carers have a child protection worker attached to out-of-home care teams in each region. These workers provide training opportunities and activities for carers. They are also able to provide advocacy, support and resources such as written information on managing specific behaviours. Children and young people placed in out-of-home care have a child protection worker who provides case management support for the child and the carer. Case management support includes referrals to specialist services such as mental health services and support to the carer and the child in relation to the child's contact with family members. The Foster Carer Association of Tasmania Inc. is also available to support carers.

There are a range of services that may be involved in supporting a child in foster care. Care planning for the child is the mechanism for determining what services should be involved in supporting the child. The following contacts for Tasmania are general contacts for carers rather than a comprehensive list of services that are available to assist children in care. Carers should discuss any concerns they have about a child in their care with the child's worker.

Foster Carers Association of Tasmania Inc.

Office	Room 3, Ground Floor, McDougall Building Ellerslie Road Battery Point Hobart 7001
Phone	0437 006 876 (including after hours assistance and support)
Email	ksa2@bigpond.com
Website	www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/agency/partnerships/fostercarers.php

After hours assistance and support

After hours assistance and support can be obtained by phoning 0437 006 876.

Services provided:

- regular newsletters;
- meetings;
- social activities;
- an annual conference;
- support during case planing;
- support during family conference;
- advocacy and support for carers through the Foster Care Advocacy and Support Team (FAST);
- telephone support and referral service;
- working with Create to gain the maximum input for children and young people in out-of-home care;
- member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., providing input on national issues that effect Tasmanian foster carers.

Victoria support information

The Department of Human Services funds 34 Community Service Organisations, (including one state-wide Aboriginal Child Care Agency and four local community based Aboriginal organisations). These organisations recruit, train and support home based care givers to care for children and young people who are subject to child protection investigation and cannot remain in the care of their parents.

Increasingly, children and young people are placed in kinship care with either relatives or people known to them. These placements are approved and supervised mainly by the Department of Human Services child protection services. Where the Court makes a decision that a child cannot live with their birth parents in the longer term, the child may be placed with permanent care parents.

At any one time, there are approximately 1,800 children and young people in temporary foster care placements in Victoria, not including children and young people living with kinship or permanent carers.

Types of home based care programs

Children and young people requiring home based care placement have a range of needs, which require different levels of intensity of care. In Victoria, the types of home based care are:

General home based care

For children and young people aged up to 18 years who are unable to live with their families of origin, either in the short term or long term.

Intensive home based care

Intensive home based care incorporates 'specialised' home based care or 'innovative' home based care and 'shared' family care.

Specialised home based care and innovative home based care is for children and young people where previous, less intensive, placements have been inappropriate or unsuccessful because of the child's or young person's behaviour, additional needs, or high demands associated with co-placing large sibling groups.

Shared family care is for children and young people with a developmental delay (0 to six years), or an intellectual disability (six to 18 years). A community service organisation worker provides support and helps people to access specialist services and other local community resources. There is also a special fund to meet exceptional costs related to disability needs.

Adolescent Community Placement program

For young people aged 12 to 18 years who are experiencing crisis and are unable to live with their families for a range of reasons. The program helps young people to access a temporary, but safe and secure, home with a volunteer placement provider in their local area.

Complex home based care

For very high needs young people who need an individualised home based care option with intensive support and supervision. Care givers are reimbursed and supported according to the

Department support and information

Office for Children, Department of Human Services (DHS)

50 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne, VIC 3000
Phone 1300 650 172
TTY 1800 008 149
Email OfficeForChildren@dhs.vic.gov.au
Website www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au

Child safety support

Office of the Child Safety Commissioner

Level 20, 570 Bourke Street,
Melbourne, Victoria 3000
Phone 03 8601 5884 or 1300 782 978
Email childsafe@ocsc.vic.gov.au
Website www.ocsc.vic.gov.au

Peak body community service organisations

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

Level 5, 50 Market Street,
Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone 03 9614 1577
Website www.cwav.asn.au
The Centre operates the Foster Care Hotline 1800 013 088 for enquiries about becoming a foster carer in Victoria

Recruitment

For information on becoming a foster carer, contact the *Foster Care Hotline*.
Phone 1800 013 088 (freecall)
website www.cwav.asn.au/foster/index.html

Children and young people support

CREATE Foundation – Vic. Branch

Level 5, 50 Market Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
Phone 1800 655 105
Website www.create.org.au

Counselling support

Grandparents Victoria

A state-wide community organisation that provides advocacy and support for grandparents
Phone 03 9372 2422
Email director@grandparents.com.au
Website www.grandparents.com.au

The Mirabel Foundation

Provides support and information to carers and children whose parents are unable to care for them because of incapacity or death due to illicit drug use
Phone 03 9527 9422
Website www.mirabelfoundation.com

Parentline

Provides counselling, information, support and referral regarding child development and parenting strategies
Phone 13 2289

complexity and intensity of the clients' needs.

Recruitment

Each community service organisation recruits care givers directly, using a range of recruitment strategies to raise awareness of their need for foster carers. Additionally the Department of Human Services funds the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to raise community interest in foster care and recruit care givers through the Foster Care Project. This project provides a 24-hour foster care recruitment hotline (phone 1800 013 088) that provides general information on foster care and refers people to their local community service organisation.

Financial support

All care givers receive some reimbursement towards the ordinary day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person. The level of reimbursement depends on the age of the child or young person in their care and the complexity of the child's care needs. An additional sum of \$48 per fortnight is paid to care givers for the first six months in placement. The care giver reimbursement is a contribution towards the cost of items such as food, clothing, household items, gifts, pocket money and entertainment.

The Department of Human Services pays reimbursements fortnightly. Care givers are entitled to reimbursement for a child in their care until the child or young person reaches 18 years of age; completes the school year that they commenced prior to their 18th birthday; or gains full time employment.

Quarterly educational and health payments

As well as the fortnightly reimbursements, payments of \$200 per quarter per child or young person (pro rata, depending on how long a child or young person is in placement) are made to assist care givers to meet the educational and health needs of children and young people in their care.

Other financial support

On a case-by-case basis, supplementary client expenses and Placement Support Grants are also available by application to assist with a range of additional expenses.

Training and assessment

All potential home based care givers are required to undergo assessment and attend pre-service training to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high quality care to the children and young people they look after. At present, training is developed and delivered by the community service organisation who:

- has responsibility to approve people as carers;
- supports and supervises them when a child is placed in their care; and
- provides ongoing training in partnership with the Department of Human Services.

A common state-wide, competency based assessment and pre-service training package is being developed for use by all community service organisations.

A formal community service organisation or

Community Service Organisations

34 Community Service Organisations (CSOs) provide foster care programs. CSOs' contact details may be obtained through the Department of Human Services regional offices or through telephone directories

Legal support

Children's Court

Deals with matters relating to children and young people regarding protection and care, as well as criminal offences
 Phone 03 8601 6700
 Website www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au

Victorian Legal Aid

Legal information and assistance, with fees worked out depending on your financial situation and the assets you own
 Phone 03 9269 0234 or
 1800 677 402 (country callers)
 Website www.legalaid.vic.gov.au

Law Institute of Victoria Legal Assistance Scheme

Phone 03 9607 9311
 Fax 03 9602 5270
 Email lawinst@liv.asn.au
 Website www.liv.asn.au/public

Victorian Bar Legal Assistance Scheme

Website www.vicbar.com.au

Public Interest Law Clearing House

Phone 03 9225 6680 or 03 9225 6675
 Website www.pilch.org.au

regional approval panel approves care givers. Prospective care givers must have a satisfactory police check, and are required to obtain a free 'Working with Children' check that includes a criminal records check for offences involving children. Working with Children checks must be renewed every five years.

For more information about the processes for becoming a foster carer in Victoria, phone the foster care recruitment hotline on 1800 013 088.

Other support

Community service organisations provide regular support to care givers, including after hours support. Home based carers can also receive support through broader, state-wide networks with other care givers, including the Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc.

Looking After Children provides a framework for identifying the needs of children and young people

and developing plans which aim to meet these needs. Care givers are important members of each child or young person's care team. They share the parenting responsibilities and work collaboratively with the Department of Human Services and community service organisation staff, other professionals, birth parents and/or other significant adults, and the child or young person, to provide good care.

The Partnering Agreement — *School Attendance and Engagement of Children and Young People in Out-of-home Care* between the Office for Children and the Department of Education and Training — requires schools to establish a Student Support Group for all students in out-of-home care. This involves developing an Individual Education Plan for all students in home based care. It also involves caregivers, and assists them to meet the educational needs of children and young people that they care for.

Foster Care Association of Victoria Inc.

Office 48 High Street (PO Box 729) Northcote VIC 3070
Phone 03 9489 9770 (9am – 5pm Monday to Friday)
Email admin@fcav.org
Website www.fcav.org

After hours assistance and support

Committee members and interim help line volunteers provide after hours support. For contact details, telephone the Foster Care Association of Victoria office or see the Association's newsletter at www.fcav.org.au

To support and assist in Indigenous care matters, the Association works with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) (Phone 03 8388 1855) and other organisations representing Indigenous people on these issues.

Services provided:

- telephone and Email support, information and referral service;
- attendance at case conferences and case planning meetings as support person for carer if requested;
- bimonthly newsletter;
- annual Foster Care Conference;
- participation in policy working groups;
- encouraging and supporting development of regional and local support groups for carers;
- certificates of recognition to foster carers;
- annual super support awards to agencies;
- help line (currently being established);
- website at www.fcav.org;
- member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., looking at national issues that affect Victorian foster carers.

Western Australia support information

Foster care in WA is shared between the Department for Community Development and non-government sector placement agencies.

The Department for Community Development arranges the placement of children, who are in the care of the Department's Chief Executive Officer, with departmental foster carers and with non-government placement agencies. The Department has a central carer register, which includes all departmental and non-government foster carers. At any one time there are approximately 1500 children in foster care.

The Department for Community Development offers a '1:1' specialised intensive service which recruits, assesses and trains carers for young people with difficult to manage behaviours.

The Department has developed a home based, professional foster care service and is currently recruiting carers. As well, an Intensive Placement Support and Treatment Team is being established.

The Department funds the Foster Care Association of Western Australia Inc. to provide foster carer advocacy, support, assistance and advice.

The *Children and Communities Services Act 2004* was proclaimed on 1 March 2006. It means there will be significant changes to the processes and procedures in the children in care area.

Training and accreditation

Preparation training is mandatory for general and relative carers. Carers usually attend a series of preparation training sessions while relative carers can work through the required training with an assessor in their own home, if preferred. Training programs incorporate a competency based approach, which is reviewed annually, and continuous training opportunities are offered to all carers via the Department for Community Development specialist unit — Fostering Services (Phone 08 6380 5900).

In approving carers, the Department must be satisfied that the individual is able to:

- Provide care for a child in a way that promotes the wellbeing of the child and the child's family and interpersonal relationships, and protects the child from harm
- Provide a safe living environment for a child
- Work cooperatively with departmental officers, a child's family, and other people when providing care for a child
- Take responsibility for the development of their competency and skills as a carer
- Is a person of good character and repute.

For existing carers, who have not completed the newly developed, competency based program, the review process is based on 'Recognition of Prior Learning' principles and processes. Although Fostering Services, within the Department for Community Development, is not a registered training organisation, a mandatory training package for general carers has been developed to enable accreditation within the National Training Framework. Consultations about the framework are under way with CSHEITAB (WA) regarding

Crisis Care

A **24-hour government phone line** for people in crisis — offers help with issues like domestic violence, child abuse and suicide counselling
Phone 08 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008

Alcohol and Drug Information

A 24-hour phone service with access to drug and alcohol professional counselling, information and referral to services (part of QUIT WA, not an emergency service)
Phone 08 9442 5000

Parenting Line

Provides information and advice about caring for children aged up to 18 years
Phone 08 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432 (country callers)

Government department support

Department for Community Development

189 Royal Street, East Perth WA 6004
(PO Box 6334, East Perth WA 6892)
Phone 08 9222 2555 or 1800 622 258
TTY 08 9325 1232
Translating and Interpreting Services 13 1450
Fax 08 9222 2776
Website www.community.wa.gov.au

Consumer advocate

Receives complaints about the Department for Community Development service
Phone 08 9222 2594 or 1800 013 311

Advocate for children and young people in the department's care

Phone 08 9222 2518 or 08 9222 2594

Legal support

Children's Court

Deals with matters relating to children and young people regarding protection and care as well as criminal offences
160 Pier St, Perth WA 6000
Phone 08 9218 0112
Website www.justice.wa.gov.au

Family Court of Western Australia

Helps with resolving or determines family matters
Phone 08 9224 8222
Website www.familycourt.gov.au

Legal Aid

Phone 1300 650 579
Website www.legalaid.wa.gov.au

Welfare Rights and Advocacy Service

Provides free, independent information, advice, advocacy
Phone 08 9328 1751
Fax 08 9227 1375
Website www.wraswa.org.au

Women's Law Centre

Free legal advice line for women in WA, mainly focusing on family law
Phone 08 9272 8800 or 1800 625 122

progressing a qualification for foster carers within the Community Services Training package.

Criminal record screening and department record screening are undertaken for both general and relative carers before carers are registered. Criminal record screening is updated every three years and department record screening is updated as part of the review or re-assessment process.

Recruitment

Departmental general carers are recruited, assessed and trained by Fostering Services. An information package about foster care is available from Fostering Services.

Relative carers are recruited, assessed and trained by the Department's district offices located throughout the state.

Assessments for all carers are endorsed by a Carer Assessment Panel which includes an experienced carer.

Staff with the Department's 1:1 program and the professional home based treatment service recruit, assess and train collaboratively with Fostering Services.

Fostering Services and the non-government placement agencies are also exploring the development of collaborative recruitment strategies.

Persons interested in being a foster carer should contact:

- Department for Community Development Fostering Services
Phone 08 6380 5900 or 1800 024 453 (freecall WA statewide),
Website www.community.wa.gov.au
- Foster Care Association of Western Australia Inc.
Phone 08 9399 1911 or 1800 64 1911 (freecall WA statewide)
Website www.fcawa.com.au
- Anglicare Teenshare emergency, medium and long term foster care for young people aged 12-17 years
Phone 08 9325 7033
- Mercy medium to long term foster care for children aged 0-17 years
Phone 08 9442 3444
- Mofflyn long term care for children or young people with disabilities – funded by the Disabilities Services Commission
Phone 08 9458 5333
- Spectrum children with complex needs under the aged of 12 years
Phone 08 9245 2441
- Wanslea Family Services emergency foster care for children up to 12 years
Phone 08 9245 2441
- Yorganop emergency foster care and medium to long term care for children of Aboriginal descent
Phone 08 9321 9090

Financial and other support

A non-taxable subsidy is paid to general and relative carers ranging from \$198 per fortnight for 0 to six year-olds to \$300 per fortnight for 13 to 18 year-olds. 1:1 carers receive \$675 per fortnight. Clothing allowance is paid for all children

Recruitment

Fostering Services, Department for Community Development

Phone 08 6380 5900 or 1800 024 453
Website www.community.wa.gov.au

Foster Care Association of Western Australia Inc. See next page for details

Community foster care agencies (See 'Agencies' below)

Agencies

Anglicare Teenshare

Emergency foster care program for young people aged 14 to 17 years
Phone 08 9325 7033

Email teenshare@anglicarewa.org.au

Mercy

Long term foster care for children aged 0 to 17 years

Phone 08 9442 3444

Email familyservices@mercygroup.com.au

Parkerville Children and Youth Care

Medium to long term care for children and young people aged 0 to 17 years
Phone 08 9295 4400

Uniting Care West (formally Mofflyn)

Long term care for children or young people with disabilities (Referrals through the Department of Community Development)

Phone 08 9458 5333

Email www.unitingcarewest.org.au

Wanslea Family Services

Emergency foster care for children aged up to 12 years

Phone 08 9245 2441

Email dutysw@wanslea.asn.au

Yorganop

Emergency foster care for children of Aboriginal descent

Children and Young People in care support

CREATE Foundation – WA Branch

8 Oswald St, Victoria Park WA 6100
PO Box 4033, Victoria Park WA 6979
Phone 08 9470 6155 or 1800 655 105
Fax 08 9470 6177

Website www.create.org.au

Advocacy or children's support

Advocate for Children in Care

Phone 08 9222 2518

Consumer Advocacy Service

Phone 08 9222 2594

in placement three times per year, with the amount reflecting the age of the child. Pocket money is also provided reflecting the age of the child.

Counselling services for foster carers are available from the Department for Community Development funded external provider. Telephone support and advice is available from the Department for Community Development:

- Crisis Care 08 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008
- Parenting Help Line 08 9272 1466 or 1800 654 432
- Fostering Services 08 6380 5900 or

1800 024 453 and

- The Foster Care Association 08 0388 1911 or 1800 65 1911.

The government has developed a handbook, a Statement of Commitment and Charter of Rights for foster carers in partnership with the Foster Care Association of Western Australia Inc. Handbooks are available from the Foster Care Association website at www.fcawa.com.au, or by writing to the association at 89 Hensman Road, Subiaco WA 6008.

Foster Care Association of Western Australia Inc.

Office	89 Hensman Road, Subiaco WA 6008
Phone	08 9388 1911 (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday), or 1800 641 911 (24 hours)
Email	admin@fcawa.com.au
Website	www.fcawa.com.au

The Foster Care Association provides support, advice, advocacy, mentoring for new carers, support groups, children's clothing and equipment.

After hours assistance and support

To speak to another foster parent about a problem, phone the Foster Care Association on 08 9246 4285 (after hours).

Crisis Care

If you cannot contact your case worker and you need help at any time, phone Crisis Care and ask to speak with the social worker — just talking may be enough to overcome the problem
Phone 08 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008.

Services provided

- phone support and referral service, mentoring for new carers, and support groups;
- support at case conferences and meetings if you would like someone from the Association to attend with you;
- information about foster caring for foster families, assistance in accessing appropriate services and, individual advocacy to ensure that their issues are addressed;
- facilities for contact visits — our premises in Subiaco are available for the child in your care to visit with their family; contact visits in Subiaco need to be supervised by an agency or departmental worker;
- information to potential foster families;
- print information resources and videos, books and articles are available on loan;
- second hand clothes and equipment for all foster children — these are free, however donations to the store are always welcome;
- daytime and weekend training workshops;
- input to training sessions organised by the Department for Community Development and private agencies;
- certificates and Badges of Appreciation presented to foster families, based on the length of time they have been fostering;
- 'Certificates in Training' presented to foster families for training modules they have completed·social activities for foster families;
- liaison with government and private agencies about policy and practice issues;
- member of the Australian Foster Care Association Inc., providing regular input on national issues that affect WA foster carers.

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Feedback

This publication is the first national publication of its kind in Australia. We hope it has provided information that you as carers or supporters in the foster care sector find useful, interesting and encouraging.

If you

- think the publication was a good idea and has been helpful, or
- have suggestions to make about how else to inform foster carers about the support that they can obtain, or
- have stories to offer, or
- think there is a need to provide further information of this kind, please let us know with an email to AFCAHandbook@bigpond.com

If you would also be prepared to answer any further questions, please provide your contact details with your other comments.

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Department of Employment and Workplace Relations
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State and Territory government agencies:

Australian Capital Territory: Office for Children, Youth and Family Support
Northern Territory: Department of Health and Community Services
New South Wales: Department of Community Services
Queensland: Department of Child Safety
South Australia: Department for Families and Communities (Families SA)
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The people from around Australia who shared their true experiences in the stories, and the children and young people the excerpts of whose tributes to their foster carers have also been included



Their future is in our hands

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