



Australian Foster Care Association

Policy and Position Statement

on

Children and Young People with a
Disability in Foster Care

2005

For Foster, Relative and
Kinship Care Across Australia

Children and Young People with a Disability in Foster Care

Position:

Children and young people with disabilities in the care of the State/Territory have the same rights as all young people in care. In consideration of their special needs they have the right to adequate support services and financial assistance to enable them to learn and participate in family activities and mainstream society to their maximum potential. Foster families caring for these children have a right to adequate support services including financial assistance and training to enable the provision of consistent quality care and stability for the child/young person in their care.

Commentary:

The Australian Foster Care Association (AFCA) membership consists of representatives of the recognized Foster Care Associations of each State and Territory. The above statement represents the position of AFCA as at 1 January 2005.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive statement but rather covers the major issues raised by foster carers in relation to children and young people with disabilities, who are in care. This statement has been produced to encourage:

- Quality outcomes for children and young people with disabilities, in care;
- Satisfying partnerships between foster carers, relative carers, social workers and others involved in the delivery of services to children/young people with disabilities, in care.
- Consistency across the nation.

Definition:

Caring for children and young people with a disability who may have experienced abuse and neglect requires specialized care from highly skilled and well-supported foster carers.

Acknowledgements:

1. The Disability Discrimination Act applies to children and young people in care.
2. Duty of Care should be a balance between safety and the right of the individual to the experiences and risks of normal life.
3. Most foster children with disabilities are in long-term care. A home-based care placement is the preferred option.
4. Foster families require support services and financial assistance for the young person well past the age of 18 years until he/she is ready to move to alternate accommodation.
5. In the case of the foster family taking guardianship support services and financial assistance should continue.
6. Where possible and within their capacity the child/young person should contribute to decision making about all aspects of their lives.
7. The needs of foster children with disabilities are often better understood and addressed by experienced foster carers and therapists than by workers, who do not generally have the specialised training required in this area.
8. Families caring for foster children with disabilities are often financially disadvantaged due to their contribution to the cost of equipment, household alterations and extra costs incurred in enabling the foster child to fully participate in family life. The additional time associated with caring for a person with a disability reduces the opportunity for paid employment.
9. Foster carers are not covered by Occupational Health and Safety Guidelines.
10. Caring for children with disabilities automatically brings additional stress to foster carers and their family.

Issues:

1. Government disability services are not consistent between states, agencies and workers.
2. Existing support structures are not adequate. Whatever support is needed for the foster family to maintain the placement should be provided:
 - a. Adequate respite hours;
 - b. Financial assistance for home alterations and additions, accessible vehicle and equipment; and
 - c. Holistic case planning is required to identify individual specific needs and support services.

3. Additional training and accreditation for foster carers should be mandatory and appropriate to the child/young person in their care.
 - a. Independent living skills need to be taught at whatever level the child/young person is able to participate in.
 - b. The child/young person needs opportunities to participate in activities outside of the foster family to prepare for independent living.
4. Government policy assumes birth families are financially responsible for their adult children in education up to the age of 25, but generally does not continue to support foster children in the same circumstance.
5. Young people may not complete their education and may never be able to live independently. Therefore they will need ongoing financial and other support.
6. In some states support for foster families is often reduced or withdrawn at 16 years of age when the child/young person becomes eligible for the Federal disability allowance.
7. Foster Carers, educational staff, therapists and workers should collaborate to create Case Plans and Individual Education Plans with regular reviews.
8. When developing Plans for the child/young person all parties need to work respectfully together.
9. A right of choice exists for the child/young person with a disability to attend the most appropriate educational facility, whether a special or mainstream school.
10. Young people with disabilities should have equality of opportunity to continue into tertiary education.