



## Information for Prospective Foster Carers

*"If you've thought of becoming a Foster Carer, just do it. You'll make a big change in a child's life and they'll make a big change in yours."*

Jamaine Jones, former Geelong Cats player



## Congratulations on taking your first significant step in your journey to becoming a BCYF Foster Carer.

We are delighted you want to know more, and are here to support you along the way. This booklet will provide you with key information about becoming a BCYF Foster Carer.

In Australia, an increasing number of children and young people are requiring Foster Care. Despite the increasing need, there is a critical shortage of Foster Carers to provide the care they need, including in the Barwon area.

These children and young people need your help.

EVERY WEEK, THERE ARE MORE CHILDREN REQUIRING CARE THAN THERE ARE AVAILABLE FOSTER CARE HOMES.

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# What is Foster Care?

Foster Care is care provided by people in their own homes for children and young people during a time when they cannot live with their parents or extended family for a variety of reasons, including issues of risk or safety.

Where it is in their best interest, the aim is to reunite the child or young person with their biological family as soon as possible.

IN VICTORIA, THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 10,000 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN OUT OF HOME CARE. OVER 40% OF THESE CHILDREN ARE UNDER 4 YEARS OF AGE.

## Types of Foster Care



### OVERNIGHT OR EMERGENCY CARE

Provided to children and young people when their safety is at immediate risk. Often requested at short-notice until a longer-term plan is developed.



### SHORT-TERM CARE

Provides care for up to six months while a plan is developed and implemented for the child or young person to return to their biological family.



### RESPITE CARE

Provides support for a child's or young person's parents, guardians or regular Foster Carers by providing them with a break. These placements may be one or two weekends per month.



### LONG-TERM CARE

Provides a safe, loving and stable environment for a child or young person for longer than six months, and in some cases years.

# Who needs Foster Care?

## Children and young people requiring care:

- range from birth to 17 years of age,
- are culturally, linguistically, ethnically and religiously diverse,
- may enter Foster Care individually or as a sibling group, and
- are likely to have experienced various challenges in their lives, including:
  - » the death, illness or incarceration of family members,
  - » separation, grief and loss,
  - » abuse or neglect,
  - » displaying at-risk behaviour and their parents being unable to protect them,

- » homelessness,
- » emotional, behavioural and/or mental health issues, and/or
- » a physical and/or intellectual disability.

THE DECISION TO PLACE A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IN FOSTER CARE IS PRIMARILY MADE BY CHILD PROTECTION, WHICH IS PART OF THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, FAIRNESS AND HOUSING (DFFH). SOMETIMES BCYF CAN BE CONTACTED DIRECTLY BY FAMILIES SEEKING A PLACEMENT FOR THEIR CHILD.

“ I would like to thank my Foster Carers for their time, patience and allowing me to stay in their homes while I was unable to return to my parents. There are probably other things these people could have been doing instead of looking after me but they did, and I don't know where I would be now if they hadn't. ”

# Why become a Foster Carer?

A safe and stable home environment plays a critical role in promoting a child's and young person's development and wellbeing.

Every night in the Barwon Area, there are more children and young people needing a safe and supportive foster home to stay in than there are Foster Carers in the area. There is simply more demand for Foster Carers and placements in Barwon, than there is supply. For referrals that come from within the Barwon region, this means that many children and young people are placed outside the Barwon region away from positive influences in their lives that are conducive to their healthy and happy development, for example, their community, school, family, friends, sporting clubs and networks.

You could well be a significant and special person in a child or young person's life - you could be the difference!

BEING A FOSTER CARER PROVIDES A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO POSITIVELY IMPACT ON THE LIFE OF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON. IT IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT AND REWARDING ROLES YOU CAN PLAY IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

*"Every child deserves a comfortable home, so if you've got one you're willing to share you'll see happiness in kids you wouldn't have thought possible."*



# Eligibility



## Foster Carers must be:

- able to provide a safe, stable and loving home environment, with an understanding of and compassion for the effects of trauma on children and how it may present in behaviours,
- 21 years and over,
- an Australian resident (if you don't have permanent residency then you are unable to provide long term or permanent care, but can provide emergency, respite or short term care),
- able to work as part of a team,
- accepting of diversity and difference,
- willing and able to attend training prior to being approved as a Foster Carer and caring for a child or young person, and ongoing training; and

- willing to complete a number of screening checks as a part of the assessment process including health, referee, home and environment, police\* and Working With Children checks. Other people over 18 years living in your household will need to have a police check and a Working With Children check.

There are many misconceptions and myths about who can and cannot be a Foster Carer. The good news is that almost anyone can be a Foster Carer! Foster Carers from diverse backgrounds is exactly what we are looking for to meet the needs of equally diverse children and young people requiring care.

*\* A police record would not automatically stop you from being approved as a Foster Carer. It would depend on the type and recency of the offence. Minor historic issues may not impact your eligibility to be a carer; however, certain offences would rule out approval.*

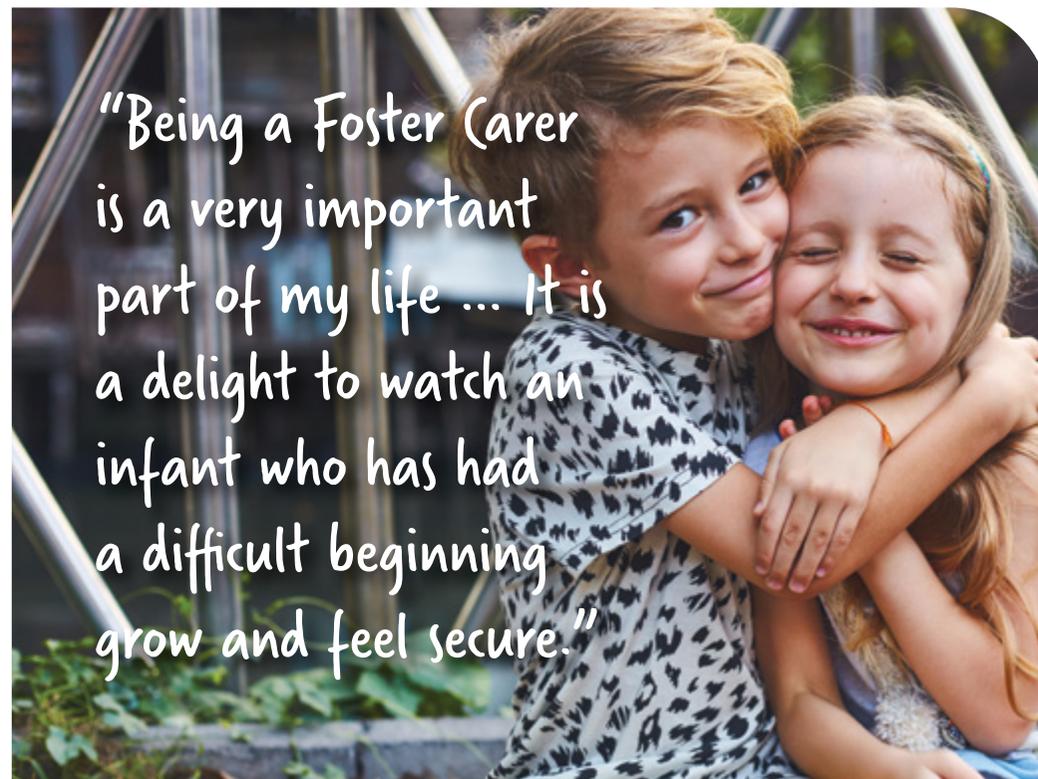
## Foster Carers may:

- be individuals or couples,
- be male or female,
- be working full or part time, not working, retired or studying,
- be culturally, linguistically, ethnically and/or religiously diverse,
- be single or in a relationship, including same sex relationships,
- own their own home or be renting,
- identify as LGBTIQ+,
- have children of their own, or not.

FOSTER CARERS ARE  
EXTRAORDINARY!

# Things to consider

Foster Care involves everyone in a household and family, and its impacts can be incredibly enriching. These impacts include creating a larger extended family, developing positive relationships and teaching family members, and importantly modelling to children, to open their hearts and give to their community. Partners, children, grandparents and others need to be considered and to understand how it may impact on them. If you live with others or have children of your own, it is important to discuss your interest in becoming a Foster Carer. You will all need to feel comfortable and ready to take the first step. Important issues and questions to consider include:



*"Being a Foster Carer is a very important part of my life ... It is a delight to watch an infant who has had a difficult beginning grow and feel secure."*



## LIFESTYLE

Having another child or young person living with you may require a number of lifestyle changes. Have you considered these changes and are you and your family willing and able to adjust to additional children / young people?



## BEHAVIOURS

Some children and young people requiring care have had difficult experiences that can lead to challenging behaviours. Foster Carers need to have enough time, energy, and space available (both physically and emotionally). Is this the right time in your and your family's life for potential new challenges?



## NATURAL FAMILY AND REUNIFICATION

Where possible, if in their best interest and at a time that it is assessed as safe and appropriate to do so, children and young people in Foster Care are reunited with their biological family. This can be a challenging time for Foster Carers. Are you prepared to accept such a challenge that comes with being a Foster Carer?



## A SUITABLE AND HEALTHY HOME ENVIRONMENT

Having a spare room in your home for a child or young person coming into care is preferable. Foster Carers need to ensure children and young people are cared for in a healthy environment, which includes a smoke free home.

# BCYF is here to support your Foster Care journey



BCYF is funded by the state's Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) to provide a Foster Care program.

BCYF has a long and rich history dating back to 1855 in the provision of out of home care to vulnerable children and young people exclusively in the Barwon region.

BCYF's service provision to both children, young people and Foster Carers has evolved and improved over 160 years. BCYF is committed to investing in the most valuable resource in Foster Care - Foster Carers.

BCYF understands and recognises the benefits of a team approach to Foster Care and the importance of being there for Foster Carers to provide emotional and practical support, and information and other guidance as required.

## BCYF provides:



Comprehensive and ongoing training at no cost.



An allocated Case Worker to support the Foster Carer and foster child or young person through phone calls, home visits and after hours support.



Access to a team of specialist professionals as needed.



Access to a 24 hour support service.



Access to planned respite care if you need a break



Linkages to broader state-wide networks with other Foster Carers such as peer support opportunities and access to Foster Care advocacy services.



Regular social events providing an opportunity for Foster Carers and Foster Care families to come together.



Financial assistance to cover the expenses of caring for the child or young person in the form of a fortnightly tax-free care allowance for each child or young person in care.

# A team approach in caring for children and young people



Foster Carers are part of a care team that works together to consider matters that any parent would naturally consider when caring for their own children.

The care team comprises those who share the parenting responsibilities for a child or young person while they are living away from their biological family that usually includes:

- the parents,
- the Foster Carer,
- BCYF Case Manager,
- the Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection Worker, and
- any other significant adults and service providers.

A RECENT SURVEY INDICATED THAT 94.7% OF FOSTER CARERS ARE SATISFIED WITH THE CARE TEAM PROCESS.

*“ I have spent three years of my life in Foster Care ... The time spent in Foster Care benefited me in many ways. One was by having a positive relationship with the carers enabling me to build on other relationships and learn new people skills. Due to this positive relationship I kept in contact with some of the carers who have become good friends and I have people I can talk to and go to for advice. ”*

# Foster Carer training

The Foster Carer training program *Shared Lives* that you will undertake prior to being approved as a Foster Carer and caring for a child or young person, as well as other ongoing training will prepare you for your role as Foster Carer. It will take you through the day to day responsibilities and challenges, and covers all aspects of a placement, from welcoming a child or young person into your home, through to common daily experiences, right through to what it is like to say goodbye. Also, non-Aboriginal carers receive specific training regarding caring for Aboriginal children and young people.

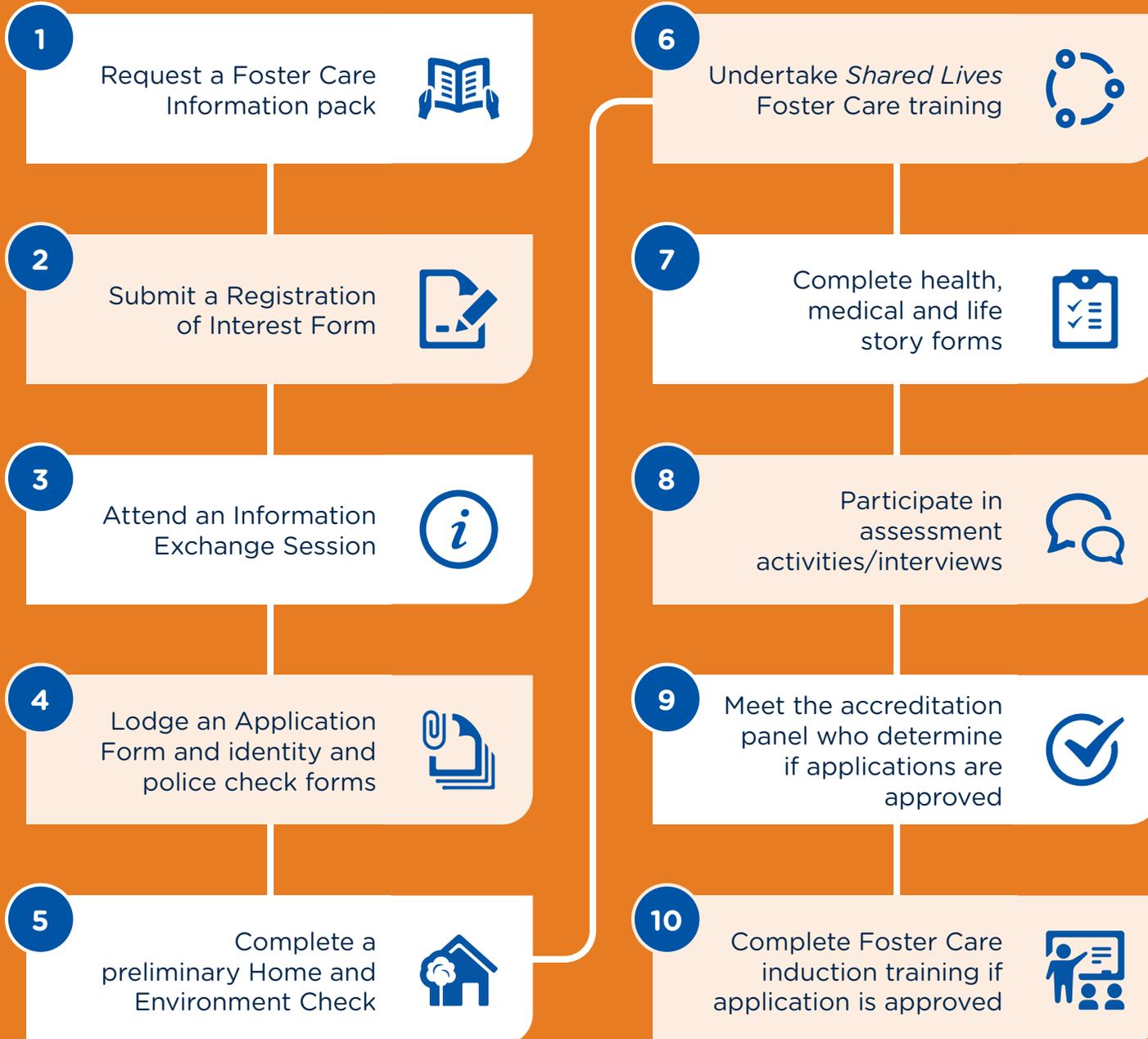
1/3 OF CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE IN THE BARWON REGION ARE ABORIGINAL.



"I have been in a few foster homes ... I think carers and kids need to communicate and work together. You need to sit down and chat about things so both carers and kids can understand where each other comes from ... communicate honestly and with respect."

# How to become a Foster Carer

Becoming a Foster Carer involves a number of steps. You will go through a process of assessment, including screening checks and pre-service training before you can be approved as a Foster Carer.



# Matching Foster Carers with children and young people



You are able to choose the age range of children and/or young people you would like placed with you and that is the best fit for your circumstances.

BCYF encourages open and honest communication. You are able to advise BCYF staff if you are unable to accept a child or young person into your home, for any reason. You may need a break from your caring role for a period of time, or a specific child or young person may not be right for your family for any number of reasons.

Before accepting a placement you are able to obtain information about a child or young person which will help you prepare for the placement, including:

- if they have medical needs, and how to take care of them
- their current routine: whether they attend child care, kindergarten, school or work
- their behavioural needs and support they may require
- the reason for their current placement.

“Caring for a teenager in your own home is more rewarding than most people think ... offering safety and security, a good listening ear and some TLC is sometimes the catalyst in receiving the rewards from the kids in your care ... something as small as a ‘thank you for listening’ or ‘thank you for understanding’ is the first step in what might be an amazing friendship between teen and adult. ”

# Foster Care allowance and payments



Foster Carers receive a fortnightly care allowance towards the ordinary day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person until he/she reaches 18 years of age, completes the school year he/she commenced prior to his/her eighteenth birthday or gains full time employment.

The level of allowance depends on the age of the child or young person in care. Higher levels apply for those who provide care for children or young people with additional or complex needs. The care allowance covers items such as food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment. The allowance does not pay for the Foster Carer's time and skills, but simply contributes towards the cost of caring for a child or young person.

The allowance is not considered income for any purpose including Centrelink, yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits, or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

## Other financial support

There are additional payments per quarter per child or young person to assist Foster Carers in meeting the educational and health needs of children and young people in their care.

At times, Foster Carers may incur exceptional expenses for items that go beyond day-to-day care, the cost of which may be reimbursed and as arranged by prior discussion and dependant on the amount, purpose and available budget.

1/3 OF CHILDREN IN OUT OF HOME CARE IN THE BARWON REGION HAVE A DISABILITY.

## Commonwealth Government benefits

In addition to the fortnightly reimbursement, Foster Carers or young people may be eligible for financial support through Centrelink, such as:

- Family Tax Benefit
- Additional Family Disability Allowance
- Youth Allowance
- All carers are eligible for the Child Care Rebate and some for the Child Care Benefit. BCYF will be able to guide you on how to arrange this.
- All children and young people on guardianship/custody orders are eligible for personal Health Care Cards and Medicare cards.

Foster Carers can apply for an exemption from the Welfare to Work requirements.

## Further information and next steps

Thank you for considering the information for prospective BCYF Foster Carers.

If you have any further questions at this early stage, please get in touch with us. Simply phone us on (03) 5226 8900 Mon - Fri 9am - 5pm or email us at [fostercare@bcyf.org.au](mailto:fostercare@bcyf.org.au).

If you think becoming a Foster Carer may be for you, please complete a Registration of Interest in Foster Care form and to return it to BCYF in the pre-paid envelope provided. We'd love to hear from you!

A BCYF team member will then be in touch to set up an Information Exchange Session.

We hope this is the beginning of an exciting new chapter for you and a long and prosperous partnership with BCYF.

*“ Each child who has come into our lives has added something to ours. Foster Caring is wonderfully rewarding, positive learning, challenging to all, but to see a young child grow into a happy and healthy young child/person is the best reward of all. ”*





## About BCYF

### Vision

A community where people are safe, connected and empowered to live well.

### Purpose

To provide, deliver and develop services, where the need exists, that advance the rights and well-being of children, young people and their families.

### Values

Integrity, Commitment, Inclusion

BCYF is a not-for-profit community service organisation committed to achieving better outcomes for communities across the Barwon region of Victoria. One of our founding organisations has been serving the Geelong community since 1855. BCYF collaborates with our government, non-government and community partners to deliver evidence-based prevention, early intervention and treatment programs.

*Foster  
a Future*

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📘 /BCYFGeelong

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BCYF acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of the land we stand on. We will continue the legacy of our founding agencies in working to create a community where all people, indigenous and non-indigenous, are safe, connected and empowered to live well.

BCYF recognises the diverse needs of our community and we ensure our services are inclusive of all children, young people and their families including those who are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, those who identify as LGBTIQ and persons living with a disability.

Integrity Commitment Inclusion