



Fostering Young Lives

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About us

Fostering Young Lives is one of many services provided by The Benevolent Society.

The Benevolent Society strongly believes that children and young people should be with their family wherever possible. That's why The Benevolent Society have a range of family preservation and early intervention services that try to keep families together, prevent children coming into care or support them to return home.

Where it is not safe for a child to stay at home for any period of time, Fostering Young Lives will find Carers who are committed to providing safe and nurturing homes for these children, for as long as they need.

Fostering Young Lives currently provides case management and specialist support for 200 children and young people



About Foster Care

Out of home care

Out of Home Care refers to the formal care of infants, children and young people up to 18 years of age who are unable to live safely at home.

Most children in out of home care are placed with carers in family based environments on either a short-term or long-term basis.

Wherever possible, children are placed with a relative, kin or someone they already know.

When this is not possible, Fostering Young Lives rely on our dedicated Foster Carers to provide children with safe, stable and nurturing homes.

Foster Carers are everyday people who have been trained, assessed and approved to provide care in their own homes, for children and young people who they are not related to.

Returning home (restoration)

'Restoration' is the term used to describe children and young people returning to live with their parents. Often children will return home once the problems that caused them to come into Foster Care have been resolved. Restoration is the best outcome for children or young people.

The NSW Children's Court will make the final decision about whether or not it is in the best interests of a child to return to the care of their parents. It can take up to two years for the court to have enough information to make a final decision about the long-term future of the child or young person. During this time, Foster Carers have a crucial role in assisting children to maintain ongoing relationships with their families.

If returning home is not an option, Fostering Young Lives will focus on finding Foster Carers who can provide children with a stable and permanent home.



Permanent homes

Permanency Support Program

People talk a lot about providing permanency for children in out of home care. What does this mean?

Important changes to the NSW child protection system came into full effect in 2019. These changes are part of what is known as the Permanency Support Program, which aims to ensure all children and young people have a permanent home that is safe, stable and loving. The Permanency Support Program has three goals:

- Fewer entries into care - by keeping families together
- Shorter time in care - by returning children home or finding other permanent homes for more children
- A better care experience - by supporting children's individual needs and their recovery from trauma

These changes are enabling more children to remain at home or return home to their families, whilst providing more permanent homes for children where this is not possible. This is important because evidence tells us children and young people in care who experience stability and permanency, are more likely to develop healthy and long-lasting emotional attachments, a strong sense of identity and connection, and achieve better life outcomes.

Increasingly, the role of foster care will be to provide a safe and loving home for children and young people while more permanent arrangements are explored.

What it means for children and young people

We want to make sure children and young people are safe and feel happy. We want to give them a caring home. The best way to do this is to make a plan with them to get a permanent home. This is called a 'permanency goal'.

A permanency goal helps give children and families certainty about where a child will live in the future. A permanent home will be different for each child depending on what they need.

Caseworkers will work on the permanency goal with children, families, and other people who love the child. Children and young people will be involved in making the decisions. Everyone will work together.

Ways to a permanent home

There are different ways a child can have a safe and caring home. These are called pathways.

The permanency pathways are:

FAMILY PRESERVATION

This means keeping a child with their parents, family, or kin, when it is safe.



RESTORATION

This means returning the child to live with their family when it is safe to go home.



OPEN ADOPTION¹

This is where a child becomes a legal member of another family for life.



GUARDIANSHIP

This is when a person or people other than the parent has the legal responsibility of caring for a child until they reach adulthood.



LONG-TERM CARE

This is where a child lives in a long-term care arrangement (e.g. with a foster carer or relative).

Family preservation or restoration are always the preferred pathways when it is safe. The pathway chosen will depend on the individual child and what is in their best interests.

¹ Adoption is not the preferred option for Aboriginal children

Why do children and young people enter out of home care?

The reasons for a child being removed from their parents are usually multiple and complex. Some children have been physically, emotionally or sexually abused or neglected.

Many of the families who have children removed have vulnerabilities related to poverty, domestic violence, family breakdown, social isolation and mental or physical health issues.

Some parents are poorly equipped to parent due to a lack of appropriate parenting skills being modelled to them as children and as a result of their own experiences of abuse and neglect.

Some children have chronic disabilities, complex medical needs or highly challenging behaviours that make caring for them difficult. Sometimes families will ask for their children to be placed in care, for a short or long time, so that the child can receive appropriate care while the parents receive support to cope with the child's high needs.

Regardless of the reason for a child being placed out of the home, parents nearly always love their children and experience significant distress when their children are removed. Children also love their family and experience grief and loss when they cannot stay with them, even when they have been removed from an abusive situation.

The reasons for a child being removed from their parents are usually multiple and complex

Types of Foster Care

Children and young people can require care for differing lengths of time. Foster Carers can look after children and young people for a few nights, a few weeks, months or until a child reaches adulthood and beyond.

No matter how long a child stays with you, as a Foster Carer you'll make a positive difference in their life in a way that stays with them forever.

Care Types

- **Immediate or crisis care**

Emergency Carers look after children who need an urgent placement because there are concerns for their immediate safety. These placements can occur after-hours and on weekends, so for this type of care you need to be able to make yourself available at short notice. Emergency placements often last for a few days to a few weeks while a plan for the child is developed.

- **Short to medium-term care**

Short to medium-term care can last anywhere from a few months up to two years. This type of care has a strong focus on reuniting children with their parents or extended family within two years. In such situations, children and young people may need a place to stay while their family are being supported to make positive changes.

In other circumstances, a short-term carer may be caring for a child before they transition to a long term or permanent placement.

- **Long-term care**

Long-term placements are for longer than two years and usually occur when a child is not expected to return to their family. In cases where guardianship or adoption are not a suitable option, a long-term placement with a Foster Carer is an appropriate way to provide children and young people with stability. It is usually hoped that the relationship between a child and their long term Carers will continue into adulthood and beyond.

- **Respite care**

Respite Care is for short, usually pre-planned periods of time. Respite Carers might care for a child one weekend a month or for a few weeks during school holidays. Sometimes respite might be unplanned, such as when a carer is being treated for illness or attending to a family emergency.

Respite Carers offer a child the opportunity to extend their support network and develop additional positive relationships. The new environment can provide a safe space for them to disclose their worries and fears, and give some much-needed, one-on-one attention to children who may be in permanent care with siblings or other children. Respite Care also benefits the child's full-time carers by giving them an opportunity to recharge so they can practice self-care and give the best of themselves to children.



Permanency: Guardianship and Adoption

The primary goal for children in care is restoration to family if it can be safely achieved. The Children's Court now has a two year time frame to decide if returning a child to their parent is possible. When restoration is not viable, other permanent placement options need to be explored as a matter of urgency.

In some circumstances, if the Court determines that a child or young person cannot return to the care of their parents, Carers can apply to become legal guardians or Adoptive Parents of the children who have been in their care.

Guardianship and adoption provide children and young people with greater stability following a Children's Court decision that they cannot live with their parents.

Guardianship or Adoption Orders transfers parental rights and responsibilities to the Guardians or adoptive parents and means the child is no longer considered to be in out of home care.

A guardian can be a relative or kinship carer, a family friend or an authorised carer who has an established, positive relationship with the child or young person. Guardians have full care, legal and decision making responsibility for a child or young person in their care until the age of 18.

Guardians and Adoptive Parents are required to support children and young people to remain connected to their birth family and cultural heritage.

**As a Foster Carer
you'll make a positive
difference in their life
in a way that stays
with them forever**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

The Benevolent Society and Fostering Young Lives are committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

As Australia's oldest charity, The Benevolent Society's vision for reconciliation recognises and acknowledges the past injustices inflicted on Australia's First Peoples as the original point of truth and foundation of all our reconciliation efforts. The Benevolent Society's Reconciliation Action Plan outlines our commitments to how we will make a positive impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. Our vision for reconciliation is to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a respectful and meaningful way that highlights the wisdom, strength and resilience of one of the world's oldest cultures.

The Benevolent Society are a proud supporter of the Family Matters campaign focused on reducing the over representation of Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. Key to our approach is translating good intentions to practical actions to make real change for the people who work with The Benevolent Society, and communities we support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle

Fostering Young Lives is committed to following the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Placement Principle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within our program.

The Principle establishes the basis for keeping children within their families and communities and the assurance that if separation or removal is necessary, the child's links with their family, community, and culture are actively maintained. We work closely with Aboriginal organisations to achieve this.



Key to our approach is translating good intentions to practical actions to make real change for the people who work with The Benevolent Society, and communities we support

The five core elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle (ATSICPP)

Prevention

Protecting children's rights to grow up in family, community and culture by redressing causes of child protection intervention.

Partnership

Ensuring the participation of community representatives in service design, delivery and individual case decisions.

Placement

Placing children in out-of-home care in accordance with the established ATSICPP placement hierarchy:

- with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives and family members; or
- with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the child's community; or
- with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-based carers

If the above preferred options are not available, as a last resort the child may be placed with:

- a non-Indigenous carer or in a residential setting

If the child is not placed according to the highest priority, the placement must be within close geographic proximity to the child's family.

Connection

Maintaining and supporting connections to family, community, culture and country for children in out-of-home care.

Participation

Ensuring the participation of children, parents and family members in decisions regarding the care and protection of their children.

Who can be a Foster Carer?

We want Carers who reflect the diversity of the many children and young people who need someone to take care of them. We welcome Carers from a variety of backgrounds and who have different life experiences and skills to help meet the needs of children and young people in Foster Care. Foster Carers come from all walks of life and can:

- Be single, in a de facto relationship or married
- Come from any cultural or ethnic background
- Be of any sexual orientation or gender identity
- Practice any religion or no religion
- Have children of their own or not
- Own or rent their home
- Be employed, not working, studying or retired

The most important thing we look for in Carers is a desire to help children and young people develop and reach their full potential.

There are some criteria that all Foster Carers need to meet:

What are the essentials?

- be an Australian citizen or a permanent resident
- be at least 21 years old
- have a spare bedroom in your home for the child being placed with you
- be in good mental and physical health
- willingness to undergo a personal assessment process including a criminal history check, working with children check and community services check



Other eligibility requirements:

Age of applicant

You will need to be at least 21 years old to ensure you have the maturity and life experience to undertake the task of caring. There is no upper age limit, however long-term carers will need to be in good health and able to continue caring for a child until they reach independence.

Relationship status

We accept applications from all persons whether they are single, in a de facto relationship or married. Couples need to be residing together and have been in a stable relationship for a minimum of two years. If you are in a relationship, you will both need to undertake the assessment process.

Carers with children living at home

We ask that you wait until your child is three years of age before you begin your fostering journey. Children who need care may have complex needs and often require a great deal of your time and attention. If your own children are still very young, it would be difficult to meet everyone's needs.

If you have your own children, you will only be able to look after children who are at least two years younger than your youngest child. Research and experience has shown this assists families to provide the necessary focus on the particular needs of a child in care and also minimises the disruption of family dynamics.

Fostering a child is a big change so it is important to talk to your children and to ask them how they feel about it.



**All kinds of kids
need all kinds
of Carers**



Before taking on the responsibility of providing care, it is important that the carer family is in a position to focus on meeting the needs of a child or young person

Fertility (where infertility is an issue)

While you may be able to build your family through Foster Care and provide a child with a permanent family, fostering is not the same as having a child of your own and is not a direct alternative to having your own children.

An applicant must have finished attempts to have children, including through fertility treatment or a surrogacy arrangement program, for a period of not less than 12 months. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of their inability to naturally conceive children and an understanding of the impact of this upon each of them as an individual and as a family.

Life events – choosing the right time

Prospective Foster Carers should be in a settled place in their lives and ready to undergo a rigorous assessment process and commit to the significant responsibility of fostering.

Life events such as undergoing fertility treatments, the death of a loved one, recent trauma or serious health issues, renovations or moving house, can be stressful experiences. Before taking on the responsibility of providing care, it is important that the carer family is in a position to focus on meeting the needs of a child or young person who may be placed in care and that they feel emotionally ready to provide the additional care and support that will be needed.

The assessment process should be the focus of prospective carers undergoing the authorisation process. If you are planning significant changes such as moving house, undertaking renovations or changing jobs we would ask you to wait until these events have taken place before submitting an application. Such changes could impact the outcome of assessment.

Work commitments

You can be employed full-time or part-time so long as you are able to provide adequate time to the child or young person in your care.

It would not be appropriate for a child in care to be enrolled in day care full-time, however it may be possible to work and still care for a school-aged child.

You will need to consider if your work is flexible enough to allow you to be available to spend quality time with children, attend meetings, participate in training and promote and support contact between a child and their family. You will also need to think about how will you get a child to and from school and care for them in the school holidays.

Family Time (also known as 'Contact')

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origins, culture and past of a child or young person in their care. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of, and a commitment to, ongoing contact between the child and their parents and a willingness to facilitate such contact.

Discipline of children and young people

Children in care often require extra support to manage their emotions and behaviour. Carers are expected to work closely with Fostering Young Lives staff in developing appropriate strategies to support the particular child or young person in their care. It is very important that children in care are disciplined in a way that sends a strong message to them that they are cared for irrespective of their behaviour. This might mean you will need to learn some new ways of responding to challenging behaviour.

Health & hygiene standards

Carers are expected to conform to guidelines designed to ensure that children are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include the practice of universal infection control and ensuring that there is no smoking within the home or car.

Care of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Fostering Young Lives have a commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with family, kin, community members or others who share their cultural background. We work hard to ensure they remain connected to community and culture to keep their identity strong. Children who are strong in their culture have higher self-esteem, confidence and expectations of what they can achieve.

Religious Beliefs

We welcome Carers from all religious traditions and backgrounds, or with no religion. It is expected that applicants will respect and encourage the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of any child or children placed in their care and that they will take a child's views about religious participation into consideration.

Accommodation

Applicants should have adequate and safe accommodation for a child. A spare bedroom must be available for a child in care.

English as a second language

There are a high number of children and young people in Foster Care who do not have English as their first language. Therefore, being placed in a family where English is not the first language can be beneficial to them. You will need a good level of spoken and written English to be able to communicate with other professionals, support children's education and keep records.



We work hard to ensure they remain connected to community and culture to keep their identity strong

What do Foster Carers do?

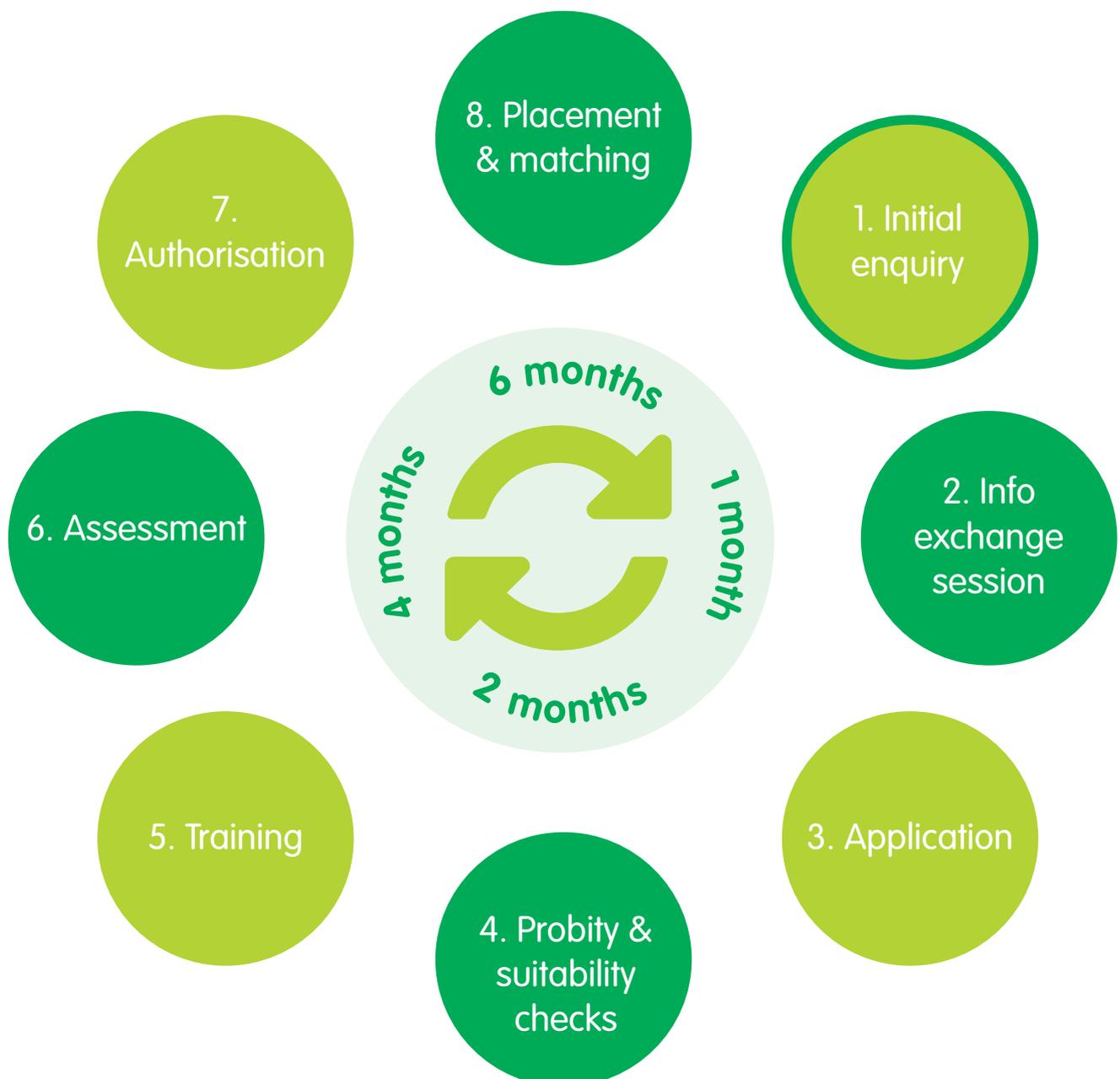
As well as providing day-to-day care for children and young people in care, Foster Carers advocate on behalf of the child, support their education, health and social and emotional wellbeing, provide boundaries and therapeutic parenting, attend meetings and work with the wider care team. Foster Carers are also encouraged to be reflective and continuously develop their skills.

Foster Carers are generous with their time and energy. They strive to build trusting relationships with children by listening to them, including them in decision-making and family life, celebrating their achievements and providing them with unconditional kindness. Carers draw upon skills of patience, resilience, and adaptability to deal with tough days and unexpected hurdles. Foster Carers also practice self-care and recognise when to seek assistance.



Steps to become a Foster Carer

Your Foster Carer Assessor will guide you through the process to becoming a Foster Carer and ensure you know what is happening every step of the way. They'll explain what becoming a Foster Carer involves, the different types of placements available and the next steps.



1. Initial enquiry

You can register your interest in Foster Care by filling out the enquiry form found at www.benevolent.org.au/foster. Once we receive your enquiry, one of our knowledgeable team members will get in touch with you to provide you with more information about what is involved in being a Foster Carer. We will email you an information pack to read through in your own time. We will also ask you about your household and current circumstances to make sure you are currently eligible to become a Foster Carer. Once we've had an initial chat to you over the phone, we will establish if it's the right time for one of our fostering advisers to visit you at home.

2. Information exchange session

If you meet initial eligibility to become a Foster Carer and you wish to move forward with your enquiry, the next step will be for our specialist Assessors to visit you at home with your family. This is a great opportunity for us to get to know one another a little better. You are encouraged to ask any questions that will assist you decide if fostering is right for you. We will also talk to you in more detail about:

- What it's like to be a Foster Carer
- The different types of Foster Care
- What children and young people in care need
- How carers are assessed
- Support and training provided

While we're with you, we will have a look at your home to make sure it meets our safety requirements.

This visit will assist us to make a joint decision about whether fostering is the right option for you and your family at this time.

3. Application

If you would like to proceed and we think you are suitable to be a Foster Carer, we will send you a detailed application pack. The application form asks for background details about you and your family.

The application pack also includes instructions for completing compulsory checks.

You will be required to complete and return all application documents within 30 days.

4. Probity and suitability checks

A number of probity and suitability checks will be completed during the application and assessment stage. These checks are outlined below:

ID check

We will need verified copies of ID

Criminal record check

It's a legal requirement for you and other members of your household to undergo a criminal record check. The check applies to all people living in your house aged 16 or over and may also be undertaken for anyone in the household over 14 years, if there are issues of concern.

Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you or a family member from becoming a Foster Carer.

Working With Children Check (WWCC)

All household members 18 and above will need to obtain a Working with Children Check to allow screening of your criminal and work record in relation to sexual misconduct and acts of violence involving children.

Health check

You will be asked to provide self-reported information about your wellbeing and your doctor will need to complete a medical questionnaire about your health. Information we will require includes:

- Your physical health
- Your emotional health
- Your current and past illnesses and medical problems
- Your use of alcohol or drugs or both (prescribed and non-prescribed)
- Smoking

Referee checks

You will be asked to provide the name of at least 2 people not related to you. Your referees must have known you for at least 2 years and be able to comment on your personal character and ability to care for children.

Home Safety check

As part of the assessment, we will conduct a check to make sure that your home is appropriate and a physically safe environment.

Community Services check

A check will be done to see if you have previously been reported to, or had involvement with, Department of Communities and Justice (formerly FACS).

Previous Foster Carer applications

Applicants must advise of previous applications to become a carer with other agencies in Australia and overseas and the outcomes of those applications. Applicants will be asked for permission for our agency to contact others to whom you have previously applied.

Employer check

If you are employed we will also ask to speak with your employer for a reference. This will not be done until assessment sessions have commenced.

5. Training

Once all your paperwork has been returned to us and your probity checks have been cleared, you will be required to attend a training course called 'Shared Lives'. Shared Lives is conducted over three separate days and is designed to give you realistic information about Foster Caring and help you understand how children's life experiences may impact them and how you can support them to heal from trauma. The training includes learning about:

- Child protection
- How and why children enter care
- The experiences of children coming into care
- The impact of trauma on brain development, attachment and behaviour
- Therapeutic approaches to fostering
- Building resilience
- Self-care
- Understanding and managing challenging behaviour
- Supporting children to remain connected to family and culture
- Valuing diversity and promoting equality
- Working as part of a team

If you have children, we request that you make alternative arrangements for them while you attend training as the content presented is not suitable for children.

6. Assessment

Following your application, we'll undertake a fostering assessment. This will help us to identify what individual skills and qualities you'll bring to the role.

Throughout this process our specialised Foster Care Assessors will meet with you several times to complete a comprehensive assessment, provide ongoing training and support you through the assessment process. The Foster Carer assessment process is quite in depth and usually takes between four and nine months from enquiry to authorisation. The length of time and number of sessions required to complete an assessment will vary depending on a number of factors, including:

- The time taken for documents to be returned
- The availability of prospective Carers to participate in assessment sessions and attend training
- The number of household members (we will have a chat with them, to make sure they understand the changes that will occur in the household if you take on Foster Caring)
- Children of applicants (we will speak to children of prospective Carers, including adult children who do not live at home)
- Whether you are in a relationship (we will speak to each of you separately about your relationship)
- Any information that arises during the course of the assessment that requires further exploration

We'll ask you about many aspects of your life relevant to being a Foster Carer. In particular, we will look at:

- Personal readiness to become a Foster Carer
- Life history - including experiences of trauma, grief and loss
- Previous and current relationships and support network
- Personal resilience and stress management

- Experiences that you can apply to the tasks of fostering
- Willingness to learn and develop as a Foster Carer

The assessor will also help you identify your skills and experiences related to:

- Providing a safe and nurturing environment that is free from use
- Promoting a child's self image, culture and identity
- Provision of good quality day-to-day care for children
- Working effectively as part of a team that includes a child's birth family, case manager and other professionals

Through discussions with your assessor you will decide what type of Foster Care you wish to provide, and what age and gender of child would best fit with your lifestyle.

We'll give you transparent and ongoing feedback about how your assessment is progressing at each stage of the assessment process. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that arise which may impact on your application.

7. Authorisation

When the assessment process is completed our Foster Carer Assessor will complete an assessment report which will be provided to you to read and provide feedback. After we have consulted with you, the report will be considered by The Benevolent Society's Foster Carer Authorisation Panel, which includes senior members of staff and other professionals.

You will be notified of the outcome of the Panel in writing and this will be recorded on the NSW Carer's Register.

If your application is not approved, you will be informed of the reasons in writing.

You will also be able to request a review of the decision.

If you are approved, you will be informed of any conditions of your authorisations, this may include the number, ages and gender of children or young people who you are able to care for. A member of staff will visit you to complete an Authorisation Agreement.

8. Placement and matching

Throughout the assessment process we will have got to know you and your family and spoken about placement matching for your family. After you have become authorised, we will contact you when a child or young person that is a good match for your family is needing care and you will be given the opportunity to choose whether to accept the placement.

Once a child or young person is placed with you, we will allocate a dedicated Case Manager who will help you welcome the child into your home and provide ongoing support throughout the duration of the placement.

We know becoming a Foster Carer can seem like a lot of hard work, but the process is comprehensive so we can make sure all our authorised Foster Carers are safe people who can stay the course for a child in their care. We need to ensure anyone applying to look after vulnerable children is doing it for the right reasons. It's also important that we make sure you have the skills and information you need to be a great Foster Carer.



Things to consider

important information, challenges and rewards

Foster Carers recognise the significant rewards this role brings to them and their families, but also acknowledge that caring for the children placed with them comes with challenges.

The role of a Foster Carer is to offer a safe home environment; provide love, nurture and guidance; meet the day-to-day needs of a child and provide them with consistency and routine.

Will fostering impact your family?

Yes. Becoming a Foster Carer is an important decision that will impact your life and the lives of those around you. It's important to include all your household members in discussions about becoming a Foster Carer. All household members need to be committed to fostering and will be involved in the assessment process.

There are many benefits for children of Foster Carers who are involved in fostering and many develop strong caring and empathy skills. There are also things that kids find difficult about being part of a Foster Carer family, such as having less attention from their parents, having to share their toys and adjusting to any challenging behaviours the child displays. It's important that you talk to your children about fostering and prepare them for any impact it may have on the family.

Could you stay the course for a child who has challenging behaviours?

Children who come to live with Foster Carers have experienced a significant life change, usually as the result of a traumatic experience. It is normal for these children to feel scared, angry, confused and sad. As a result of past experiences and trauma, many children in care will have behaviours that can be difficult to manage. A child in care may display aggressive behaviour or sexualised behaviour. They may self-harm, steal, abscond, hoard, have issues around food or body image and have difficulty making and keeping friends. They might find it difficult to identify how they feel or to calm themselves down.

You will need patience, resilience, empathy and optimism in order to help children in care to heal from trauma, manage difficult emotions, learn new ways of coping and adjust to living with a new family. Family routines, loving boundaries and nurturing care can also help children feel safe and begin to regain their trust in adults. Most importantly Foster Carers are asked to care for a child irrespective of their behaviour and persevere when times are tough.

Foster Carers are part of a team providing care for a child or young person and support is available to help promote positive behaviour. All carers receive training on trauma and behaviour management to equip them with strategies that will help them to start the healing process for the children. Case Managers will assist you to develop specific strategies tailored to a child's individual needs and can support you to access additional professional assistance if this is required.

Are you willing and able to support children to maintain a positive attitude towards their family and help them maintain relationships with people who are important to them?

Supporting family relationships

It is sometimes hard for people who are thinking about providing Foster Care to understand why we emphasise the need to support the relationship between the child and their parents and family. It is important to understand how significant a child's parents are to them, even if they are unable to provide all the care the

child needs or have hurt the child in some way. Children and young people need to be reassured that their parents still care about them even when they are unable to be the day-to-day caregiver.

A Foster Carer must understand they are looking after another family's child, and that the family will continue be an important part of that child's life. The child may also have strong links with other family members such as brothers and sisters and grandparents. All Foster Carers, including respite carers, need to support and build on those existing relationships.

These relationships are not necessarily easy. However, research and experience has shown the importance of Foster Carers encouraging children and young people to maintain positive and strong connections with their families. This is very important to the child's identity and sense of belonging. Relationships can be maintained through pre-arranged visits, letters and phone calls.

Facilitating family time

Face-to-face contact between a child and their parents, siblings or other members of their family is also known as 'family time'. As a Foster Carer, you will be expected to facilitate family time for a child or young person in your care, where it is safe and appropriate to do so. Children and young people find family time more natural when it is supervised by their Foster Carer rather than a support worker or Case Manager. Research shows that children who do keep in regular contact with their families tend to do better in care than those who lose touch. These connections help children to understand where they have come from and to develop their sense of belonging and identity.

We acknowledge that sometimes family time can be challenging and emotionally complex, both for children in care and Foster Carers. You might have mixed feelings towards parents

spending time with their children, particularly if they have previously caused the child harm in the past. You might feel uncomfortable if children have mixed feelings about their biological parents. You could experience frustration if family members do not attend contact and leave a child feeling rejected. During contact, parents may make false promises, say something inappropriate or show love by buying presents or junk food for their child. Family members may also criticise the way you are looking after their child. It is important to remember that the child's family are likely to be experiencing feelings of shame, anger, jealousy, grief and loss. We ask Foster Carers to remain empathetic and non-judgemental. When the relationship between Foster Carers and members of the birth family is positive, kids can claim their connections to their biological family and their birth family without feeling like they're being disloyal or hurting someone they care about.

Foster Carers are not expected to do this alone! This is a relationship that will develop over time. Your Case Manager will develop a relationship with the biological family before you have any contact with the family and you will be provided with support and guidance along the way.

Could you say goodbye to child when a placement ends?

Saying goodbye to a child you have loved and cared for is never easy. Children might leave when they return to family, transition to a different placement or in the case of older teenagers they may decide they are ready to live independently. Handling emotions associated with kids leaving can be difficult, even if you accept the decision.



Is fostering the right decision for you?

Some questions you may like to think about to help you decide whether you're ready to continue your fostering journey right now, include:

- What other stresses are going on for your family right now? Is this a good time to invite new challenges?
- Could you handle ongoing uncertainty about how long children would stay in your care?
- How would you cope if a child placed in your home had behaviours you found confronting?
- Do you have strategies to manage your own children's feelings about sharing your time, home and belongings?
- Will you be able to say goodbye to children who leave to return to their families?
- Do you have time to meet all the needs of a child, including taking them to school and appointments, facilitating contact with their family and significant others, attending meetings with Case Managers and other people who are part of the child's care team and participating in training and development activities?
- Can you support a child to spend time with family and maintain relationships that are of importance to the child?
- Will you be able to keep going if observable changes are small or not apparent at all?
- Are you able to share the decision-making for a child?

Rewards

Experienced carers say the rewards outweigh the challenges and are most often found in the day-to-day interactions with children. Some of the rewards include:

- Keeping children and young people to stay safe
- Helping children and young people to reach their full potential
- Creating opportunities for children to form close relationships and to feel valued by others
- Watching children develop and thrive
- Being there to celebrate a child's achievements
- Keeping siblings together
- Making sure children leave care with the skills required to live independently
- Enhancing your own parenting skills and knowledge
- Being a highly valued and contributing member of a caring team
- Assisting children and young people to stay connected with their family and culture
- Helping to plan for the future of children in your care
- Seeing your own children learn to appreciate others' needs
- Providing children with positive and lasting memories

FAQ

Will I meet the child's family?

So long as it is safe, it is likely you will facilitate contact with birth family and significant others for a child or young person in your care. In most cases, your Case Manager will develop a relationship with the biological family before you have any contact with the family and you will be provided with support and guidance along the way.

Will the child's family know where I live?

In most cases, the law says that information about the child or children's placement must be given ('disclosed') to their parents and to other people who are important to the child or children. This is because giving out this information helps the child or young person stay in contact with the people who are important to them. The safety of your family and any children placed with you will always come first when considering what information can be disclosed. Your consent will always be requested in writing before your personal information is disclosed and you can request a review of the decision.

Can a child or young person go back to their family?

Children and young people are normally placed in short-term placements during court proceedings. At this time their family has the opportunity to engage with Community Services and the Courts to demonstrate that they are able to provide a safe environment for the child or young person. It is important to note, a child's parents or significant persons may apply to the Court for a change of circumstances at any point (except where a child has been adopted). The Court takes the child or young person's current attachment and relationship with his or her carers into consideration when making a decision about who a child should live with. The Court's decision is made in the best interest of the child.

Do we get to pick the school for the child or young person?

If a child is staying with you for a short period, they will usually remain at their own school so they continue to have contact with familiar people and places. If it's a long term placement then schooling options for the child would be discussed in partnership with the child's Case Manager.

Can we travel with a child or young person in our care?

Travel can be a great experience for children and young people!

You can travel within NSW if it doesn't interfere with the child's schooling or planned family contact. If you are travelling interstate you will need permission.

Overseas travel with a child is possible with a little bit of forward planning. The child or young person in your care will need consent to travel and will require a passport. Your Case Manager will apply for a passport on behalf of the child and in some cases, the consent of the child's birth parents will also be sought before applying for a passport. To avoid delays and disappointment, let your Case Manager know well in advance if you're planning to travel overseas.

I work full time. Can the child attend day care or before and after school care?

For pre-school age children, carers need to be available two full days out of every usual five day working week to ensure they are able to attend appointments as required, and to develop a positive attachment with the child in their care. A child should only be in formal childcare for a maximum of three days a week.

School age children can be in before/after school care for a maximum of 10 hours a week. They can be in either before OR after school care, but not both on one day in order to minimise the number of transitions they need to make each day.

What if the placement isn't working?

We know that being a Foster Carer can be challenging, which is why we provide a number of supports and services to ensure Foster Carers and children are supported throughout the placement to work through issues as they arise. Additional specialist support services are available when required.

Children in Foster Care who move from one home to another, face additional difficulties which can make it hard for them to concentrate on school, build friendships and family relationships, heal from trauma, and feel secure and loved. For this reason we ask Foster Carers to do their very best to make a placement work.

We recognise that occasionally placements may not be viable or safe for carers/and or the child. In these cases we encourage Foster Carers to be transparent with their Case Manager to ensure the agency are able to initiate appropriate next steps.

What is the NSW Carers Register?

The NSW Carers Register is a centralised database of persons (and their household members) who are applying to be Foster Carers or who are existing authorised Foster Carers. The aim of the register is to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of all children and young people in out of home care. All designated agencies in NSW must use the register to share information about Foster Carers and prospective Foster Carers. The register will let agencies know if someone has previously been an authorised Foster Carer or has applied to be a Foster Carer with another agency. Further information about the NSW Carers Register is available via the Office of the Children's Guardian website.

Will the child have access to Medicare?

Yes, children and young people under 18 years of age who are in out of home care are entitled to Medicare benefits. They are also entitled to Child Dental Benefits if they are aged between 2 and 17 years of age. The agency will consider requests for additional financial support in situations whereby a child or young person requires essential additional medical or dental treatment that is not covered by Medicare benefits.



What support do Foster Carers receive?

Our Foster Carers are never alone in their caring journey. It is important that carers feel supported, equipped and encouraged in their critical role of caring for children. Support will include:

Regular home visits and meetings with your Case Manager

All Foster Carers have a Case Manager available to them to provide advice and practical support.

Financial support

Foster Carers receive a fortnightly allowance to reimburse some of the day-to-day costs incurred when caring for a child or young person. The allowance is based on the age and needs of the child and is tax-free. The payments do not affect your eligibility for any other government allowances that you are entitled to. If a child is assessed as having extra needs, then the amount of the carer allowance increases accordingly.

24/7 on-call support

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

Professional support in dealing with any behavioural, physical and emotional difficulties the child may be experiencing.

Training

All Foster Carers will also have access to specialised support, services and training offered by My Forever Family NSW.

Specialist support

For children and carers who need additional support, your Case Manager can refer you to professionals such as psychologists, paediatricians and speech pathologists.

Free and confidential counselling for you and your family

Foster Carers and their immediate family have access to The Benevolent Society Employee Assistance Program. This gives you access to confidential counselling with qualified and experienced clinicians who can help you manage any challenging or stressful situations you may encounter as part of your role. You can also utilise this service to support you with any personal, family or work issues that are impacting on your wellbeing. You can access counselling over the phone or face-to-face.



Get in touch today

Our friendly and helpful Foster Care Specialists are ready to answer your questions. Whether you're looking to start the process, or just want more info, our team can help.

To find out more information
about our services, go to
benevolent.org.au/foster

Or connect with us at:
1800 236 762



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The Benevolent Society acknowledges the Traditional owners of country throughout Australia and recognises Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders both past, present and emerging.