

# I NEED YOU.

## Becoming a Foster Carer



Department of Health and Human Services



## THANKS FOR YOUR INTEREST IN BECOMING A FOSTER CARER.

This booklet contains information about the needs of children and young people who need care, and the steps to becoming a Foster Carer.

Becoming a Foster Carer involves a number of steps. By making your enquiry and reading this booklet, you have already taken the first step.

Prior to approval as a Foster Carer, every applicant is required to participate in a training and assessment process that will include background checks and a number of interviews.

If after reading this booklet you would like to take the next step towards being

a carer, please complete the Registration of Interest form on page 15 and return to:

**Foster Carer Recruitment**  
**Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Reply Paid 83315**  
**HOBART TAS 7001**

After registering your interest in becoming a Foster Carer, a worker from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) will visit you to discuss Foster Care in more detail and will answer any questions you might have.

To speak to someone about Foster Caring, please call the Real Carers Really Needed hotline:

**1800 REAL CARERS**  
**(1800 732 522)**

## WHAT IS A FOSTER CARER?


Foster Carers are people who look after children or young people who, for some reason, cannot stay with their family.

The reasons could include:

- the removal of a child or young person from their parents to ensure their safety and well-being; or
- an emergency, such as family illness or some other family crisis.

Foster Carers look after children and young people in the Foster Carer's own home. They are volunteers who are willing and able to open their homes and include these children and young people as part of their family. Foster Carers provide a child or young person with the necessary care and support that they need to feel safe and secure.

This care may be provided for a day, a week, a month, or for much longer, depending on the needs of the child.

A young boy with curly brown hair, wearing a dark blue zip-up sweater, stands in the foreground looking directly at the camera. Behind him, a young girl with brown hair, wearing a white and cream checkered cardigan over a blue shirt, leans on a wooden fence post. The background shows a grassy field with a fence and hills under an overcast sky.

**We need someone  
three days a month.**

## WHAT DO WE EXPECT FROM A FOSTER CARER?

### Personal qualities

To become a successful Foster Carer you will need to:

- have the time and energy to care for a child or young person who has experienced abuse or neglect and some level of disruption in his or her life;
- be able to communicate sensitively and responsively with children and young people;
- be supportive of the special needs of children who may be afraid or traumatised;
- be resilient and capable of dealing flexibly and positively with challenging situations; and
- be able to work in partnership with staff from the DHHS to achieve the goals that have been identified for a child or young person.

## CARE TEAM APPROACH

Foster Carers are one member of a broader care team for the child or young person. Other members of the care team are the child or young person's Child Protection worker, Departmental Support workers, other professionals such as the child's teacher or counsellor and members of the child's family.

The child or young person is at the centre of the care team and is encouraged to participate in key decisions for his or her future. This will include preparation of a care plan, covering the goals for the child or young person and support services needed.

### Birth family contact

Foster Carers must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origin, culture and past experiences of the child or young person in their care. This includes an acceptance of the commitment of DHHS to on-going contact between children and young people and their

parents and family, as well as a willingness to facilitate such contact in accordance with the child or young person's care plan. If it is possible the aim is to return a foster child to a safe and stable home.

Contact made with the child or young person's family is done under the supervision of trained staff employed by the DHHS.

### Schooling

As a general rule, we try and keep children and young people in their local area to allow for ongoing contact with familiar people and places. If a child or young person is in a short-term placement, they will usually remain at their own school. If a child or young person is in a long-term placement the arrangements for schooling will be organised as part of that child or young person's care plan. Foster Carers are expected to support these arrangements and take an active interest in the education of the child or young person in their care.

## WHAT TYPES OF FOSTER CARE ARE THERE?

### Short-term care

Short-term care is provided for children or young people while their family situation is assessed. The length of the stay can be from a few nights through to twelve months. At the end of short-term care the child or young person may return to their family or be placed in long-term care.

Depending on the situation, Foster Carers who started caring for a child or young person on a short-term basis may decide to make themselves available for long-term care.

### Long-term care

Long-term care is provided for children or young people who need a stable, supportive home in which they can live until the circumstances of their families change, or they turn eighteen years of age.

### Respite care

Respite care is provided for children or young people for short periods

of time on a regular basis, for example, one weekend a month. It gives families, including Foster Carers, a break from caring. Whenever possible, Respite Carers make a commitment of twelve months so that children or young people can establish a regular routine and get to know the families with whom they usually stay.

### Specialist care

Specialist care involves care for children or young people with high care needs, such as disabilities or complex medical needs.

## WHAT ARE THE CRITERIA FOR BECOMING A FOSTER CARER?

### Readiness and capacity to provide care

Foster Carers must have the capacity to provide 24 hours care for a child or young person. That means that they must have stable accommodation and the personal time to meet the child's day-to-day needs.

The demands of caring for your own children may mean that this is not the right time to provide a home for another child.

You may be heavily involved in caring for your own parents and this may limit your capacity to care for a child in the immediate future.

If you are working, you should also consider the demands that your work commitments may place on your capacity to be a Foster Carer.

### Caring skills

Foster Carers must demonstrate an ability to undertake the special responsibilities involved in caring for a child or young person placed in their care.

Foster Carers must be able to:

- draw on and apply personal experiences appropriately in caring for a child or young person;
- support the child to settle into a new home, new routines and in most cases a new community;
- respond in a positive way to potential behaviours such as bed wetting, disrupted sleep patterns, reluctance to go to school, attention seeking behaviours and unwillingness to share emotions;

- support the child to participate in day-to-day activities including attending school and recreational activities;
- promote the positive development of the child or young person;
- attend to the child's day-to-day health care needs; and
- provide a safe environment that is free from abuse and/or neglect.

### **Age and ability**

Foster Carers are generally over 21 years of age and assessments are conducted on the capacity of the potential carer to provide quality care. It is expected that Foster Carers who choose and are approved to provide care for a child will be able, if necessary, to continue care until the child can safely return home or live independently.

### **Marital status**

DHHS has no requirements regarding marital status. Assessments are conducted on the ability of the applicant to provide stable, consistent and high-quality care for a child or young person.

### **Health**

The physical and mental health of Foster Carers should be such that they can undertake the task of caring. For applicants who would like to provide long-term care, this could involve raising a child to adulthood.

### **Employment status**

While Foster Carers may be in paid employment, it is expected that they be able to provide adequate, quality time to the child or young person in their care.

### **Accommodation**

Children and young people in care need adequate, safe and stable accommodation. A bedroom must be available for a foster child, although this can be shared with other children, if appropriate. Foster Carers do not need to own their home. Many Foster Carers rent privately or rent from Housing Tasmania.

### **Access to transport**

Foster Carers should have a driver's licence. Foster Carers are expected to provide transport to and from the day-to-day

activities (including attending school) that most children in the community participate in.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people**

DHHS has a commitment to maintaining cultural ties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Whenever possible, this includes placing children and young people with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foster Carers.

### **Discipline of children or young people**

Foster Carers must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical, psychological or emotional punishments. DHHS has behaviour management guidelines to help Foster Carers discipline children appropriately. Training is also provided.

**I need someone to  
play sport with me.**



## Health and hygiene

Foster Carers are expected to follow guidelines designed to ensure that children live in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include the practice of universal infection control. Training is provided to Foster Carers about health and hygiene standards.

## TRAINING AND SUPPORT

DHHS provides training for Foster Carers that covers topics such as:

- child development;
- behavioural management;
- effective communication;
- how to deal with a child's feelings of separation and grief; and
- working as part of a team.

Approved Foster Carers receive a copy of the Foster Carers' Handbook that outlines key information that Foster Carers need to successfully undertake their role.

Foster Carers also receive a quarterly newsletter which provides extra information and support.

## PAYMENTS

Foster Carers receive a non-taxable, regular payment to reimburse them for costs associated with caring for a child or young person.

## HOW DO I BECOME A FOSTER CARER

### Summary of steps

Becoming a Foster Carer involves a number of steps. These include:

- registration of Interest;
- home visit – preliminary assessment;
- training;
- formal application to become a Foster Carer; and
- formal assessment, including interviews and background checks.

### Registration of interest – home visit

Once we receive your Registration of Interest form, a DHHS worker will make arrangements to visit you at home and

discuss Foster Care in more detail.

This will provide you with an opportunity to ask questions and learn more about Foster Care. The home visit also provides an opportunity for our workers to learn more about you and undertake an initial assessment of your suitability to begin the formal application process.

### Training

After the initial home visit, you may be invited to attend a training program. The training program is part of the application process to become a Foster Carer, but is not something you pass or fail. The training provides an opportunity for you to learn more about Foster Care. We work with you to discover together whether providing care for someone else's child is likely to work for you, your family and the child or young person at this time.

### Application to become a Foster Carer

Once you complete the training program you will be better placed to decide if you wish to proceed with a formal application

to become a Foster Carer. At this stage you will be given an opportunity to submit a formal application and we will complete a more detailed assessment process with you.

### Assessment

The assessment process is designed to enable both you and DHHS to make an informed decision about your suitability as a carer. At each stage in the process you will be given feedback. This may include identifying issues that may affect your ability to provide care.

Being a Foster Carer means taking on an important responsibility. Because of this, you will be asked about many aspects of your life that are relevant to being a carer. In particular, we will look at your ability to:

- draw from and apply your own personal experiences to the tasks of caring;
- provide good quality day-to-day care for children and young people;
- provide a safe and nurturing environment; and

- work with other people, particularly staff from DHHS, other organisations and birth parents, towards the achievement of the goals identified in the care plans.

### Background checks

Before a potential Foster Carer is finally approved, DHHS must conduct a series of checks. These include a medical check and referee reports. DHHS must also obtain information from Tasmania Police and law enforcement agencies in other States and Territories about any convictions that have been recorded against you or any member of your household who is over eighteen years of age.

The recording of a conviction does not necessarily exclude you from becoming a Foster Carer. The nature of the offence that was committed and your age at the time the offence occurred are factors that are taken into account when assessing your application.

### What other checks are there?

DHHS will ask for permission to access any child protection records that involve you and any other person who regularly stays at your residence. Having such a record with DHHS does not mean you will be unable to become a Foster Carer, but the outcomes of any previous contact with Child Protection Services will be taken into account when assessing your application. DHHS may also ask for permission to check records relating to family violence. We will ask for verification of identity for any adult on whom we are conducting these checks.

### Application to other organisations

Potential Foster Carers must advise of previous applications to become a Foster Carer with other organisations in Australia and overseas, and the outcomes of those applications. As part of the assessment process, DHHS will ask for permission to contact those other organisations.

## Approval and placement

DHHS will contact you to advise if you have been successful with your application to become a Foster Carer. Once approvals have been obtained you will be asked to sign a Foster Carer Agreement. Once the agreement is signed, a child or young person will be matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns you may have before accepting the placement of the child or young person. Ideally you will meet the child or young person before you make a decision as to whether or not you will provide care for them.

If you accept the placement, you will become one member of a care team that will work together to achieve the goals identified in the care plan for the child or young person.

## Can I appeal if my application to be a Foster Carer is not approved?

You are entitled to be given reasons why your application has been rejected and

you can have the decision reviewed. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except personal references which may be treated as confidential.

## Support and training by FCAT

The Foster Carers' Association of Tasmania (FCAT) provides support to approved Foster Carers across Tasmania. FCAT activities include an annual conference for Foster Carers and an annual 'fun day' known as the Carers' Big Day Out. FCAT also hosts annual Christmas parties in each area for children and their carers.

FCAT also provides support for Foster Carers in other ways. Experienced Foster Carers are trained to explain departmental policies and procedures to newer Foster Carers. They are also able to provide support if the Foster Carer is not happy about a decision that has made about the child or a complaint has been made against the Foster Carer.

FCAT also distributes a quarterly newsletter to Foster Carers. For more information refer to: [www.fcata.org.au](http://www.fcata.org.au)

## FLOWCHART OF THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

### CONTACT

You contact DHHS via 1800 REAL CARERS (1800 732 522) hotline

### INFORMATION PACK

Find out more about Foster Care by reading the information booklet

### REGISTRATION OF INTEREST

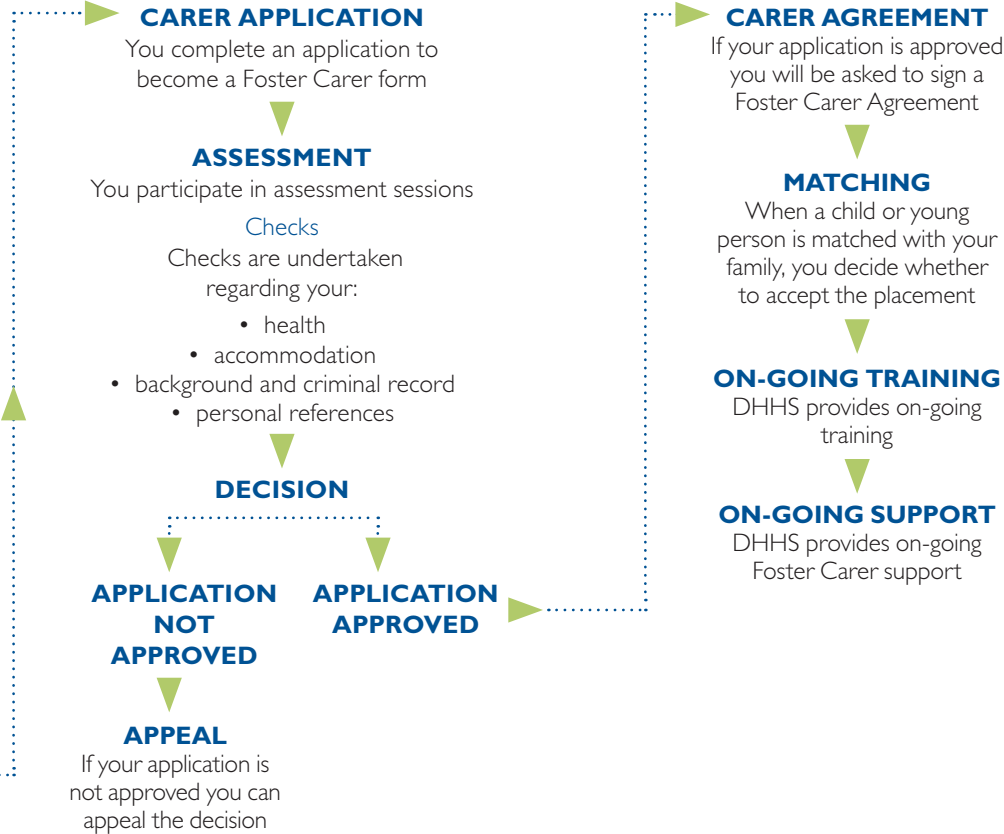
Register your interest by completing and returning the registration of interest form

### HOME VISIT

A worker will contact you to arrange a home visit to discuss your interest

### TRAINING

You will be invited to participate in a training course to learn more about Foster Care



## **FOSTER CARE PROGRAMS MANAGED BY COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS**

While the DHHS recruits Foster Carers, there are also other community organisations that receive funding to provide foster care for children and young people.

Emergency and Respite Foster Care is provided by Kennerley in the South and Glenhaven Family Care (Temcare) in the North and North West.

Some of these placements may become longer term placements.

Life Without Barriers provides foster care for children and young people who have more complex needs. In the main, this organisation supports Foster Carers who are willing to provide a home for adolescents.

The DHHS approves all Foster Carers (Government and Non-Government Foster Carers).

If you are interested in being a Foster Carer with a non-government organisation, you should contact one of the organisations in your area. The contact details are:

### **Statewide**

Life Without Barriers, (03) 6236 7700

### **South**

Kennerley, (03) 6272 5900

### **North**

Glenhaven Family Care, (Temcare)  
(03) 6343 7551

### **North West**

Glenhaven Family Care (Temcare)  
(03) 6424 7167

The DHHS also funds the CREATE Foundation to support children and young people in care and to represent their views. CREATE manages programs and activities for children in care. For further information about CREATE go to: [www.create.org.au](http://www.create.org.au)

**I need someone  
who'll be there for me.**



**I need a mentor  
who'll give me  
support and guidance.**





## REGISTRATION OF INTEREST IN BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

1. Your name(s):

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2. Your address:

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3. Telephone:

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4. Email address:

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5. What languages are spoken at home?

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6. Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait  
Islander? (if yes, please indicate which)

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7. Have you previously applied to any  
other agencies or organisations to  
provide foster care?

(Please mark one): Yes / No

If you answered 'Yes' above, please provide  
details and the result of the application:

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8. What type(s) of care are you interested  
in applying for?

(Tick those you are interested in)

Short-term Foster Care

Long-term Foster Care

Respite Care

Specialist Foster Care

Please return this form to:

Foster Carer Recruitment  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Reply Paid 83315  
HOBART TAS 7001

**1800 REAL CARERS (1800 732 522)**  
**[www.fostercare.tas.gov.au](http://www.fostercare.tas.gov.au)**

Department of Health and Human Services GPO Box 125 HOBART TAS 7001