

# Foster Care Information Booklet



**LUTHERAN  
CARE**

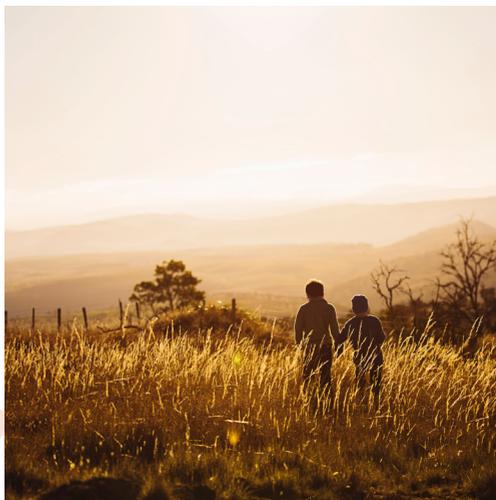
# HELLO

Thank you for your interest in foster care and for taking the time to learn more about fostering!

## IT'S A JOURNEY...

Foster care is a journey; an extension of your life beginning with your own personal experience or desire to learn more about the opportunities, to your first official enquiry, to a season of learning, training and reflecting on your suitability and capacity to provide care, to your formal assessment as a potential foster carer. When approved, you enter a new phase of adjustment, as your paths intertwine when you welcome a new key member into your family.

The journey doesn't begin or end when you welcome a new child into your home - but it is a profoundly new chapter in your lives. Lutheran Care walk alongside you and support you every step of the way as you navigate the challenges and enjoy the rewards of sharing your family, and dedicating yourselves to meeting the needs and best interests of the children and young people placed in your care.



## ABOUT US

Lutheran Care (LC) Foster Care Services offer both Generalist and Specialist foster care. We take a therapeutic, trauma and attachment-informed approach to both services, providing quality carer supports to our foster families, in support of stable placements and good outcomes for children and young people in care.

# WHY DO CHILDREN NEED FOSTER CARE?

Foster Care is a unique service to children offered by caring individuals and families.

When children are not able to live at home for various reasons, the first choice of placement is with relatives or someone they know. When this isn't possible, LC Foster Care Services and other agencies rely on individuals and families to open their homes to these children.

Foster carers are everyday people who have a strong commitment to helping children. Whether you can offer a short time or several months at a time, you can make a real, positive and lasting difference in the life of a child, young person or sibling group.

Our community needs special people who are able to offer caring homes to children and young people.

Sometimes parents are unable to care for children due to physical and mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency, domestic violence or imprisonment.

Sadly, there are also cases where children have been harmed by their parent/s and need to be kept safe.

Children may need foster care because there are no friends or relatives able to care for them in a crisis.

Foster care provides a caring home to children while the parent/s and family members receive support to help them work through their problems.

The child may be a baby, primary school-aged child or teenager, and some may need Specialist care.

Children and young people generally keep in touch with their birth parent/s, siblings and other family members, community networks and cultural connections while in foster care and they can return to live with their family where possible.



# WHAT DO FOSTER CARERS DO?

- Foster carers provide a stable, supportive and nurturing home. This helps a child feel safe and secure while separated from their parents, siblings or other family members.
- Foster carers provide emotional support and care for a child's day to day needs.
- Foster carers help the child communicate and behave in positive ways.
- Foster carers support the child in their education and recreational activities by encouraging them to try new things and affirm their efforts and accomplishments.
- Foster carers help the child maintain contact with their parents and extended family and enable them to continue their religious and cultural activities.
- Foster carers work with the child's case worker as part of the Care Team to achieve the set goal or plan for the child. They provide important information to the case worker about the child's progress.

Foster care is a unique service to children offered by caring individuals and families.



# WHO CAN BE A FOSTER CARER?

- Foster carers are everyday members of the community who have a strong commitment to help others, especially children.
- Foster carers may be male, female, single or a de facto, married or same-sex couple. They are usually over 25 years of age. People's maturity, health and lifestyle are also considered.
- Foster carers are not expected to be perfect but they do need to relate well to children and be committed to meeting children's needs.
- Foster carers do not have to be employed but they should have adequate financial resources to care for extra children. A foster care subsidy (which is not taxable) is paid to carers, which helps with the cost of caring for foster children.
- Foster carers should have adequate, safe accommodation for a child. This doesn't mean that foster carers necessarily own their home. A foster child does need a bedroom, which can be shared with other children if appropriate.
- It is generally suggested that the foster carers' biological children be older than the child who is being placed with the family. Research has shown this assists families to provide the necessary focus on the particular needs of a child in care.
- Life events such as undergoing fertility treatments, the death of a loved one, recent trauma or 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.

Foster carers come from all walks of life; we need all kinds of carers to care for all kinds of children.



# TYPES OF CARE

Both our Generalist Care and Specialist Care programs are therapeutic in nature. We exist to provide quality support to families and stable placements for children to help them heal, grow and thrive.

Many carers choose to register for multiple types of care.



**Short Term** Care may be needed at any time and on very short notice. This is an immediate response to a child/ren who may be in a crisis and being removed from unsafe circumstances.

A child or young person might stay for one night, a period of up to 90 days, or a period up to 12 months depending on the child's circumstances. During this time, the child's social worker may also be exploring possibilities for the child to reside with extended family members, or other community members that the child/ren may already have a connection with.

The social worker may also be assessing the possibilities of the child/ren reunifying with their parent/s.

There is a great need for short term carers who have the flexibility in their lives to provide a safe and nurturing care environment for as long as the child/ren need it. This is a crucial time for the child/ren to build positive relationships and experience stability in routine and care, while their social worker and the Care Team determine a long term plan.

A child or young person may be placed in long term care or be reunited with their birth family.





**Long Term** Care may be needed when a child is unable to live with their family and needs a stable, safe environment in which to grow up or until they can return to their family. Long term care may be required until the child turns 21.



**Respite** Care can take many forms but usually takes place over weekends and school holidays. This type of care provides families with a break while the child or young person enjoys a positive experience. It can be negotiated on a regular basis or a once off stay.

## SPECIALIST CARE

We offer trauma and attachment-informed Specialist Care to children and young people with complex needs, who require a higher level of care than Generalist foster care.

This includes children living with complex medical conditions, disability or significant behavioural challenges, who need a caregiver who can be available for them full-time. There is a great need for individuals and families who can provide children with this extra level of care within a stable and loving family.

Through comprehensive training and assessment, our Specialist Care Program equips applicants with the knowledge and skills needed to care for children with complex needs and help them reach their full potential.

Our program offers ongoing training tailored to the child's care needs, a carer allowance that enables the primary caregiver to leave the workforce, and intensive family support throughout the caring journey.



# STEPS TO BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

As part of the initial information gathering process, people interested in becoming foster carers are invited to attend an information session. A Foster Care Information Session will assist you to:

- Become better informed about the significant responsibilities of foster carers
- Consider the implications of undertaking the foster carer role, including how it may impact your family and friends
- Determine what type of foster caring is best suited to your strengths, capacity and lifestyle
- Hear first-hand from a LC foster carer about their insights and experiences.

Information sessions are usually conducted in small groups of other people like yourself, who are interested in becoming a foster carer.

We host regular information sessions and these details are included in your Information Pack and regularly updated online.



## REGISTER YOUR INTEREST (ROI)

If you would like to proceed towards an application to foster, you're invited to submit a Registration of Interest following an information session or receiving our Information Pack.

You can decide at any step of the process not to proceed with the assessment.

If you have any concerns, please be sure to discuss them with one of our workers. They will help you work through any issues you may have.

# Flowchart of assessment process for foster carers

**Contact:** You contact the agency and the agency records your enquiry

**Information Pack:** The agency sends you an “Information Pack for Potential Carers”

**Registration of Interest:**

You register your interest in becoming a carer by using the “Registration of interest” form

**Information Exchange:** You participate in an “Information Exchange Session” with members of your household, facilitated by the agency

**Carer Application:** You complete an “Application to become a foster carer” form

**Assessment Activities**

**Safety checks**

- Home safety check
- Health checks
- Referee check
- Agency check (if applicable)
- Working with Children Check clearance

**Pre-approval Training**

**Assessment sessions**

- Attitudes and Connections
  - Personal Resilience
  - Child focused Nurture
  - Working with Others
- Conversation with your children**  
**Conversation with members of your support network**

**Assessment Report:** An assessment report with the agency’s recommendations is submitted to the Department for Child Protection for consideration

**Review and Background checks:** Department for Child Protection will review the assessment report and conduct child protection history checks on relevant members of your network

**Decision:** The Department for Child Protection makes a decision regarding the approval or non-approval of your application, and may ask for additional information to inform that decision

**Notification of decision:** The agency will be notified of the Department for Child Protection’s decision and will provide you with the decision in writing

**Matching:** When a carer household is approved, the agency begins discussions about arranging a suitable placement of child/ren with your family

**On-going Training:** The agency provides on-going training

**On-going Support and Review:**

The agency provides on-going carer support and conducts a review of your approval annually



# STEPS TO BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

The next step in the initial screening process includes conducting child-related criminal history screenings for all people over 18 years of age who live in your home. This includes any adult you have identified as being in your home on a regular basis or who may assist you with providing care and support.

You will also be required to undergo a medical check with your regular GP. Contact will be made with the Department for Child Protection and the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion for screening checks, and your assessment worker will speak with the referees you have nominated.

During an initial home visit, your assessment worker will confirm that your home is safe for children and meet with any people who reside in your household. During this process, a worker will discuss your specific areas of interest as a potential foster carer.

If the initial assessment screening meets the requirements, you will be invited to participate in further formal assessment and training processes. Over several weeks, you will be visited at home numerous

times and your family will be encouraged to attend a variety of training activities so that the agency can learn about your lifestyle and circumstances.

Consideration of your parenting skills, experience and affinity with children are important aspects of the assessment. This information later enables us to place children with you who best fit your lifestyle, your family and your circumstances.

Upon meeting the competencies required, your assessment worker will prepare a comprehensive assessment report that will be submitted to the Carer Approval and Review Unit within the Department for Child Protection. The Department may require further information or in certain cases decline the application.

There is no doubt that the foster care assessment is a very rigorous process. We appreciate your understanding about our responsibility to ensure that we are providing a quality service, and the highest level of care for the children and young people who are placed in our care.

# INFORMATION COLLECTION AND STORAGE

During the screening and assessment process required to become a foster carer you will be asked to provide very detailed information about yourself and others living in your home. All information collected, whether or not you decide to proceed with becoming a foster carer, will be kept by the LC Foster Care Services for two years, as required by the Department for Child Protection.

Before providing information to us you should ensure that you have advised and gained the consent from each adult concerned with the process. It is important that they are aware that it will be recorded and stored for two years.

It will be necessary for us to seek information about you from other sources such as your doctor, nominated personal referees, the Screening Unit of the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion and the Department for Child Protection to help determine your suitability as a foster carer.

If you have any questions or concerns about the collection and storage of information please contact our office and we will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.



# TRAINING FOR FOSTER CARERS

Training is offered as part of your applicant and assessment process and for ongoing support to assist you as a foster carer when children are placed in your care. During the assessment process, your training will cover the following topics:

- Foster Care Context
- Bonding and Attachment
- Grief and Loss
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Identity and Birth Family Contact
- Challenging Behaviour
- Teamwork
- Cultural Competency
- Safe Environments for Children and Young People (SECYP)
- Safe Care of Infants; compulsory if registering for care of 0-2 year old.
- First Aid and CPR (completed via a First Aid Registered Training Provider)

It may be identified that you need additional training prior to taking a placement. If so, this will be discussed with you by your assessment worker.

## LIFELONG LEARNING

Once you become a registered carer, your learning and development is an ongoing process with training provided for support. You will be required to attend training to refresh your skills and knowledge of topics such as SECYP, SCI and First Aid CPR.

If you would like assistance in a particular area, your LC Support Worker will be able to help you by linking you into suitable counselling (Marte Meo supportive communication skills training) or advanced training opportunities.

# SUPPORT FOR FOSTER CARERS

Lutheran Care Foster Care Services highly values the critical role of foster carers and the contributions that their families and friends make to the nurturing of children and young people.

We are therefore very committed to supporting foster carers in a variety of ways by providing:

- Additional support from the LC Aboriginal Cultural Worker if you are caring for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child
  - Additional support from the LC Multicultural Worker if you are caring for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) child/ren and young people
  - Professional development and ongoing training opportunities to enhance skills in child development, discipline and working with challenging behaviours
  - Regular contact and visits to support your family and review the progress and wellbeing of the child or young person in your care.
- Foster carer network support group meetings
  - After hours (24/7) support services
  - LC carer events throughout the year to enable you to connect with other carers
  - A secure online Portal for sharing information, inspiration and resources among staff and carers in the LC carer community
  - Professional counselling if needed and access to the LC Employee Assistance Program.



# WHY DO PEOPLE BECOME FOSTER CARERS?

Foster carers are special people who provide a vital service in our community. More and more families are needed to take on this challenging and rewarding role.

Prospective foster carers have often thought about registering their interest for some time before they actually apply.

People become carers for many reasons but the key reason is usually that they love and enjoy the company of children, are child-focussed and believe they have the time and energy to provide a safe and nurturing home for children.

Carers often say they want to help children who haven't had the opportunities and experiences they had when growing up, or they enjoyed providing similar experiences for their own children's growth. They feel this is their way of giving something back to the community.



# IS FOSTER CARING RIGHT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

Deciding to become a foster carer and sharing your home with another child or children can be a big decision to make.

To help you decide if foster caring is right for your family, involve family members in discussions about the following types of questions:

- Why do you want to become a foster carer?
- How will your children feel about sharing their room, toys and your time?
- Do you feel you have the time and space in your home for another child?
- Think about the way you manage your own children's behaviours. Do you do this in a positive way, without use of physical punishments?
- Do you think you could support a foster child's relationships with birth family members, even if you disagree with their lifestyle?
- Could you support a child to maintain their cultural, spiritual and religious connections?
- Do you think you could support a child in being reunified with their birth family?
- Could you financially support having another child in your home?
- Are you able to provide a culturally safe environment for an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other CALD child?
- How will you ensure that family and friends do not smoke in the home?
- Are there changes you would need to make to your home to make it suitable for a foster child? Are you willing/able to make these changes?

When you have discussed these and other questions with your family, our Foster Care Team would be delighted to hear from you and to assist you with any queries you may have.



# WHAT'S THE NEXT STEP?

If you would like to take the next step toward becoming a foster carer, please contact our Foster Care Team.

## CONTACT US:

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When you open your home to foster care, you not only change the life of a child, you change your own.

Memories for life.



**LUTHERAN  
CARE**

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