



BECOMING A FOSTER CARER

Foster Care Association of Victoria Position:

Foster care programmes provide safe and supportive homes for children when they are unable to live with their own families. As a foster carer you will become the most important member of a caring team providing support for a child in need. As a foster carer, you may help a child achieve their goals and improve their quality of life now and into the future.

For further information and an introductory kit on becoming a foster carer, call the **Foster Care Hotline on 1800 013 088** or visit the website www.fosterabrighterfuture.com.au

WHO CAN FOSTER?

In Victoria, anyone who is over 20 years of age and can offer a child or young person in need a secure, caring environment is eligible to apply to become a foster carer, including:

- Single people
- Heterosexual and same-sex couples
- Older and retired people
- Young people
- Home owners or renters
- Students, unemployed people or those in full-time, part-time or unpaid work.

RECRUITMENT:

Each Community Service Organisation (CSO) recruits caregivers directly, using a range of recruitment strategies to raise awareness of their need for foster carers. The Department of Human Services has a list of agencies available at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/kinship-foster-and-other-care/foster-care>

The process for becoming a foster carer generally takes up to six months, and includes around 16 hours of mandatory training, an assessment process conducted by interviews with foster care workers, and completing the relevant checks required by law in order to work with children in the state of Victoria.

LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS:

Prospective caregivers must have a satisfactory police check, and are required to obtain a free 'Working with Children' check that includes a criminal records check for offences involving children. Working with Children checks must be renewed every 5 years.

TRAINING & ASSESSMENT:

All potential home based caregivers are required to undergo assessment and attend pre-service training to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high quality care to the children and young people they look after. Training is provided by the CSO which:

- Is responsible for the approval of people as caregivers
- Supports and supervises them when a child is placed in their care
- Provides ongoing training in partnership with DHS



A common, state-wide, competency based assessment and pre-service training package known as Step-by-Step is used by all CSOs for the training and accreditation of foster carers across Victoria. Sometimes CSOs offer joint training for their carers and those from neighbouring agencies.

WHAT ABOUT MY OWN CHILDREN?

It is essential that prospective carers and their children thoroughly discuss the likelihood of becoming a foster care family. Be open with your children about the likely changes this decision may have on your family, listen to and respect your children's possible concerns and let your children have time and space to consider the idea. Ask the CSO what supports are available for your children and, where age appropriate, your children should be involved in some of the assessment processes.

Berry Street has an excellent resource for the children of foster carers - *'I care 2'* is a training and support package for sons and daughters of foster carers. The program is designed to provide fun and interactive learning experiences and a safe space for children and young people to explore their caring experience. Check if the CSO uses this programme:

<http://www.berrystreet.org.au/BuyOurResources#Icare2>