



OZCHILD INFORMATION **PACK A**

# Foster Care

# 1: Introduction and overview



## Overview and summary

Thank you for taking the time to enquire about Foster Care. Foster Care can be a very rewarding experience for the whole family but is a process that requires careful thought and consideration. We have endeavoured to provide you with the basic information needed to make an informed decision about whether to proceed to an Information Session.

We hope that the information enclosed in this pack will help you to decide if the Foster Care journey is the right one for you and your family.

If we do not hear from you in the next two weeks we will contact you to determine your wishes with regards to your enquiry, however your assistance in returning the paperwork would be much appreciated to avoid unnecessary follow up.

**In this pack you will find the following:**

- **Foster Care Privacy Collection Statement & Grievance Procedure**
- **Steps to Becoming a Foster Carer**
- **Becoming a Foster Carer with OzChild**
- **Contact Information**
- **Details of the Information Session Dates for Prospective Carers**
- **Foster Care Training dates for future reference**
- **See Foster Care Enquiry Forms Pack B to complete**

After reading the enclosed information please complete the Pack B- forms and return them via email or by post to the address included in this pack. These forms provide OzChild with an introduction to yourselves and your family and indicate to us what you would like to do with regards to proceeding or closing the enquiry.

Once we receive these forms a worker from the Recruitment Team will either contact you by phone to speak to you further and arrange for you to attend one of our Information Sessions or alternatively close the enquiry.

If you feel Foster Care is not for you, but you know someone who would be interested, please ask them to contact our Recruitment Assessment and Training Team on 9212 3900, or pass this information pack on. If you require assistance to complete the forms enclosed in this pack please contact a member of the Recruitment, Assessment and Training Team on the above number.

## Foster Care - Privacy Collection Statement

OzChild is collecting information from you to assess your application to become an accredited Foster Carer with us. If you do not supply this information, OzChild may not be able to commence and/or proceed with the caregiver assessment process.

Personal information collected will be retained and used for the purposes of providing our services to you or (if you are the carer) the individual in your care. OzChild's collection of personal information is authorized under section 75 of the Child, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic). We will also use it to comply with our obligations under service arrangements with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

We may disclose this information to:

- DHHS and to other persons or organisations providing a service to a child and or family, such as out of home care or family service providers;
- other persons, or organisations, in the event a concern is raised about the care or safety of a child or young person or where we are required or authorized to do so by or under the law; and
- other staff members within the Foster Care Program for the purpose of assessment report writing and program allocation should your caregiver application be successful.

Your information will also be disclosed to the Assessment and Review Panel Members for caregiver assessment endorsement. The information collected will also be used for the purpose of maintaining your name on a register of carers, which is a requirement under section 80 of the Act.

We will respect your right to privacy and only use your personal information for the purposes it has been collected. If we need to use your information for other purposes we are obligated to seek your consent before doing so.

In some circumstances, the government department funding the service or OzChild may require information be obtained through a Freedom of Information request. OzChild's Freedom of Information policy is available through the avenues described above. If you would like help to access the Privacy or Freedom of Information policies of government funders please ask an OzChild staff member.

To access and seek correction of your (or the individual in your care) personal information, or to obtain a copy of OzChild's privacy policy, please go to [www.ozchild.org.au](http://www.ozchild.org.au) or contact OzChild's privacy officer by email at [privacy@ozchild.org.au](mailto:privacy@ozchild.org.au) or post at: OzChild  
PO Box 1312  
South Melbourne VIC 3205  
or upon request on (03) 9695 2200.

## Foster Care Grievance Procedure

OzChild endeavours to offer services that are safe, fair, non-discriminatory and in accordance with its core values of treating people with dignity and respect. OzChild endorses the principle of empowering service users to participate in decisions that affect them. OzChild aims to adopt work practices and principles that reduce the likelihood of grievances, complaints or conflicts arising. However, OzChild also endorses the right of any individual or service user to express dissatisfaction, make a formal complaint, or appeal against any decision, without fear of reprisal and in the knowledge that a resolution in the interests of both parties will be actively pursued.

Clients of OzChild have rights and responsibilities. Our Rights and Responsibilities statement sets out what service users can expect from OzChild services and staff and is provided here along with our Complaints by Service Users Policy, accessible via our website [www.OzChild.org.au](http://www.OzChild.org.au).

Alternatively, if you would like a copy of these documents, please speak with one of the recruitment team. Phone calls, at no charge, for your feedback on our services, can be made to 1800 727 141.

## Steps to becoming a foster carer



1. You make an initial enquiry and receive a foster care Enquiry Pack. You return the relevant paperwork.



2. You participate in an Information Session held at an OzChild office or at your own home.



3. Following the Information Session, you return the relevant paperwork which includes an Application to become a foster carer and a Medical Report Request Letter.



4. You participate in OzChild's Shared Stories, Shared Lives Training (SSSL).



5. During training, you return relevant paperwork including a life story, screening check forms (Police Check, Working with Children Check, Condition of Application Form, and House Plan Diagram). A disclosable police check may also be discussed with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and to other persons or organisations.



6. An assessment will be carried out in your home which consists of several interviews and includes a home and environment check.



7. A copy of your assessment will be presented to OzChild's Applicant Panel. As part of the Approval Process you will be asked to sign a Code of Conduct Agreement and other documents.



8. As an accredited carer, you will receive support and supervision from OzChild. You are required to participate in ongoing training and adhere to OzChild's policies and procedures in foster care.



9. Approval is renewed annually.

## 2: Becoming a Foster Carer with OzChild



OzChild is a private non-profit organisation funded by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to provide Foster Care. Our area covers the Southern Region of Victoria

OzChild's Foster Care program ensures high quality care is provided to children and young people who cannot live with their own family for a period of time.

Foster Carers are required to provide a level of care that is consistent with or exceeds the Program Requirements for Home Based Care in Victoria July 2012. The requirements are in line with what the community expects a good parent should provide for a child or young person and form the basis for assessing whether the care given to children and young people is adequate.

In line with the requirements, all people interested in becoming Foster Carers are assessed, trained and approved by OzChild. As outlined, as part of the assessment process you will be required to complete a number of screening checks. You will also need to participate in several interviews with assessors from OzChild.

The following information is designed to provide interested parties with some general introductory information in order for them to decide whether or

not they would like to pursue Foster Care. This information resource is not a substitute for further education and training and represents only a brief introduction to the process of becoming a Foster Carer. Please be advised that whilst we encourage you to lodge your Registration of Interest (if you believe that you are a suitable applicant), we are required to undertake assessments of suitability in line with agency, state and legislative standards and OzChild reserves the right to reject applications on these grounds.

### Who Needs Foster Care?

Children and young people from birth to 18 years of age enter the Foster Care system. They may enter care as individuals or part of a sibling group. Children can enter care on a voluntary basis; where a parent or caregiver has requested a Foster Care placement, or the placement may be statutory with Department of Human Services, Child Protection involvement. Foster Care may be needed because a birth family is experiencing stress but does not have their own network of support or parents may be experiencing personal issues such as financial problems, homelessness, domestic violence, parenting difficulties, drug and alcohol problems or physical and mental illness.

### Foster Carers:

- Look after children and young people in their own home, provide care, support and stability for a child or young person in a caring home environment.
- Receive fortnightly reimbursements
- Receive training and 24/7 case worker and after hours support.
- Are invited to multiple recognition and social opportunities each year.
- Can specify details in relation to the child/children they can care for and the type of care they would like to provide.
- Are screened, trained and assessed before being approved.
- Are volunteers in the community and represent a broad cross section of the population.
- In most cases are intended to foster children temporarily until the child is safe to return home.

In both voluntary and statutory placements an assessment has been made by welfare professionals to determine that a child and their family's interests would be best met if the child was placed in Foster Care.

### Fostering and Your Family

Foster Carers need to have enough time, energy, and space available (both physically and emotionally).

Is this the right time in your life and in your family's life for new challenges?

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

All household members over the age of eighteen need to complete forms for a police check. Are they happy to do this?

If you have children, you need to think carefully about their needs and make sure you talk to them.

Another issue to consider is whether your family is accepting of diversity and working with children from different cultures and religions to your own?

Race, gender, marital status, employment, sexuality and religion do not affect a person's ability to become a Foster Carer.

Anyone who is available to provide safe and appropriate care for children is eligible to apply to become a Foster Carer with OzChild, please note however that you must be over 21 years of age to apply.

We encourage applicants to consider what type of care they are interested in providing and the kind of child/children they feel they would best be able to provide care for.

Some carers offer respite, and others provide full time care. Working full time does not preclude you from becoming a Foster Carer, but may have an impact upon the type of care you are able to provide.

OzChild Foster Care has a range of Foster Care opportunities including:

#### RESPITE

- Voluntary
- Children aged 4+ years (or younger with siblings in exceptional circumstances)
- Generally 1 weekend per month on an ongoing basis

#### EMERGENCY

- Voluntary
- Overnight to several weeks
- Pre-adoptive (newborn to 3 months)
- Referrals received after 2am

#### SHORT TERM

- Up to 3-6 months
- Non-voluntary or voluntary

#### LONG TERM\*

- 6 months or longer
- Non-voluntary or voluntary

#### THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE – THE CIRCLE PROGRAM

- Carers are provided with additional training and supports with the aim being that a care environment will be created capable of healing the traumatic impact of abuse and neglect with increased focus and supports for placement stability.

*\*Long term Foster Care is not the same as permanent care or adoption. The goal of Foster Care is generally for the child to return to the care of their birth family. A Foster Carers home address may or may not be provided to the child's guardian dependent on circumstances).*

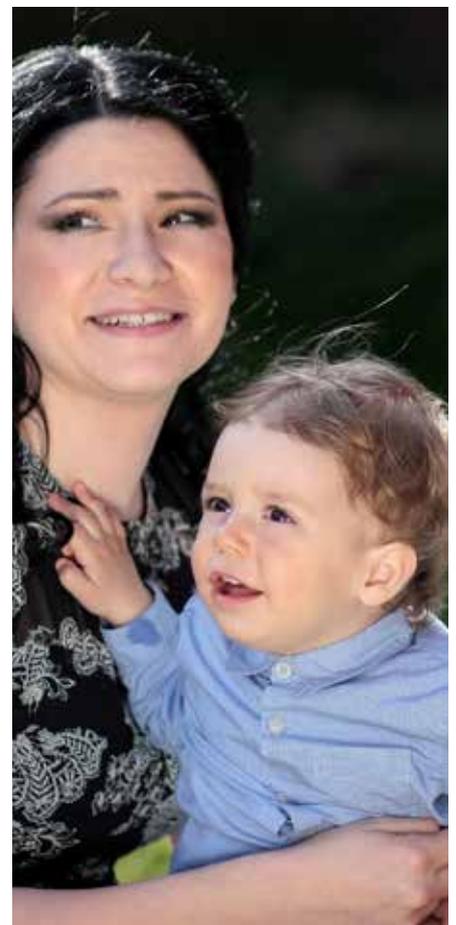
You may also wish to consider these factors when determining the placement type that might work for you:

**Age:** Children aged 0-18 enter Foster Care. For applicants who have children of their own you may need to consider how a particular age range will impact on your own child/children.

**Gender:** Equal numbers of boys and girls enter Foster Care but for some families it may be more suitable to foster children of one gender over the other e.g. if a bedroom is to be shared.

**Behaviour:** Some children come into care with a diagnosis of a behavioural disorder or other behavior issue.

**Special Needs:** Some children come into care with developmental delays, intellectual disabilities, chronic illness or physical disability.



## Team Work

For Foster Care to work for all parties, a key principal is team work. OzChild's Foster Care program centers on a clear and ongoing commitment to family preservation and reunification where possible for children entering care. In order to work towards that goal Foster Carers form part of a care team.

The 'care team', is the group of people who share the parenting responsibilities for a child or young person while they are living away from their family. The 'care team' usually involves the parents, the Foster Carer, OzChild caseworker, the Child Protection worker and any other significant adults, all working together in the best interests of the child. The goal is to actively promote relationships and interaction. Within the frame work of the 'care team', carers will be supported by their Foster Care worker.

## Your Home

When thinking about becoming a Foster Carer, you need to consider issues such as health and safety in the home, as well as more practical issues such as space and sleeping arrangements.

A home safety check of your property will be undertaken if you proceed to the assessment stage. This is done to ensure that your home environment meets the guidelines set out by the Department of Human Services. It is a very comprehensive list of requirements, ranging from inside the home through to the gardens, garages and driveways.

The process is designed to ensure a safe environment for foster children. If you have any queries or concerns in relation to potential safety issues it is a good idea to raise them with the agency early in the process and we can talk with you further.

It is preferable that a foster child has their own bedroom however it is not a requirement. This will be discussed through the enquiry process to determine suitability.



## Your Pets

Pets can be a source of great learning, comfort and enjoyment for children. You may need to review your current caring practices for your animals. Feeding/keeping animals inside needs to be done in a manner which is both clean and hygienic. Waste materials from pets need to be disposed of in a timely and hygienic manner and consideration needs to be given to the fact that housing animals inside can affect individuals with allergies so may be an issue in placement matching.

Many children come from households where there are no pets, and as such, you may wish to consider how a child might react to your pets (for example, they may be very afraid of big dogs, or be unaware that cats can scratch). Some children will need to be taught how to interact with pets.

Owning an animal that is a banned breed, is noted as being aggressive; or has been declared dangerous by the local council is not appropriate as a Foster Carer.

## Your Car

In order to be able to drive with a foster child in your car you must have a car that is insured, roadworthy and registered. Drivers transporting a foster child in the car need a full licence.

Foster Carers for infants and children must also adhere to legislation governing the use of child restraints, and all restraints must be compliant with Australian Safety Standards. Cars must contain a first aid kit, which will be provided to you upon accreditation.

Whilst having a licence is not mandatory, the role of a Foster Carer frequently involves transporting children.

## Your Lifestyle

It is important that all Foster Carers, their families and friends understand that providing a smoke free environment for children and young people is extremely important. Smoking is not permitted inside a Foster Carers home or in vehicles in which children are

travelling. Foster Carers who do smoke must do so outside the home.

Foster Carers must ensure that no one in close contact with a child or young person in their care is intoxicated.

## Health and Safety

When dealing with bodily fluids, it is imperative that Foster Carers be aware of and follow infection control practices. OzChild provides first aid and infection control training.

## Childcare and Education

Many people considering Foster Care have lots of questions relating to education and schooling of children.

Foster Carers can utilise child care to accommodate a child. These needs should be discussed with the OzChild worker during the enquiry process, when accepting a placement or as the need arises. At this time arrangements and funding will be negotiated.

As a general rule, babies and toddlers requiring full time care would not be placed in households where full time childcare is required in recognition of the importance of attachment and bonding in the early years of life.

Foster Carers sometimes require before and after school care to support a placement. If this is the case this should be discussed when being offered a placement.

Generally OzChild will endeavor to place children with carers who live close to the child's school to maintain their schooling and allow them to retain some stability. In instances where a Foster Carer believes that they would be unable to get a foster child to and from their school this should be raised at the point of being offered a placement.

School fees and other large costs associated with a child's education are covered by an education/medical allowance paid quarterly to Foster Carers in addition to the basic reimbursement. Any costs over and above this amount should be discussed with your Foster Care worker.

## Financial Support for Short and Long Term Placements

Foster Carers receive an allowance towards the day to day costs of caring for a child such as for food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment.

The allowance is not considered a 'payment' for fostering, as such, it is not considered a source of income by Centrelink or for taxation purposes.

If you would like further detail it is advisable to speak to Centrelink directly.

In the event that additional funds are required to cover an expense beyond what is considered to be the ordinary cost of care, additional financial support may be available dependent on placement type.

## Fortnightly caregiver allowance rates for Foster Care based on age of child or young person



### Rate per fortnight as at 1 July 2015

\*Higher reimbursement levels apply for Foster Carers who provide either intensive home-based care for children or young people with additional needs or complex home-based care (usually one-to-one care) for extremely high needs young people. Payments are prorated and calculated on a night by night basis.

For the first six months of a statutory block placement, an additional fortnightly allowance is made to assist with establishing the placement such as for the purchase of clothing. There is also an education/medical allowance paid quarterly to carers which is in addition to the base allowance for statutory placements.



## Guests, Holidays, Babysitting and Overnight Stays

Children in the Foster Care system are generally either under the guardianship of their birth parents or the Department of Human Services. For this reason, permission must be sought in relation to interstate or overseas travel, consent must be obtained for children to partake in certain activities (such as motorised sports or horse riding) and approval must be gained for medical procedures and treatment.

### Holidays

If you plan to take a holiday while you have a child in your care, you need to consult with OzChild. In some circumstances, parents/guardians may not provide consent for a foster child to travel with you, in other instances, a child may be granted permission to travel interstate or overseas but consultation is always required.

### Overnight stays

If a child or young person in a statutory placement wishes to stay overnight at a friend's house, it is the carers responsibility to make a judgment about the suitability of this. The carer will then need to inform the OzChild worker of this arrangement.

### Babysitters

If you are utilising informal babysitting it is preferable that the person providing the babysitting is a known and trusted person from within the Foster Carers own network and a person known to the child. Ideally a discussion with the Foster Care worker would have occurred prior to the care arrangement.

### Guests

You are always welcome to have guests staying in your home whilst a child or young person is staying with you – however the agency must be notified in advance. People who regularly stay overnight at your home e.g. grandparents, interstate guests will be required to undergo a police check which OzChild will facilitate.

## Discipline

Parenting children who have experienced abuse and neglect often presents very different challenges and requires a different approach than is offered in 'mainstream' parenting advice.

The Foster Care worker will provide information and support regarding appropriate strategies.

### The DHHS requirements note that:

- Physical discipline of any kind against a child is not permitted- you may never hit or smack a child or young person in care.
- Threats to physically harm a child should never be used – you cannot threaten to hit or smack a child if they do not comply with a request.
- Children must never be denied a meal as a punishment or be threatened with 'going to bed hungry' as punishment. Withholding food is not acceptable.

By following the requirements Foster Carers are actively reducing the risk of allegations being made against them.

## Sharing Information

As you progress through applying to become a Foster Carer you will be asked to provide information about yourself and the people in your network. Details about how we use the information is contained in the Privacy Collection Statement.

Key information and checks are:

### A referee check

You will be asked to provide contact details for 3 referees (not family members) who we can contact.

### A Criminal History Check (Police Check)

This is currently undertaken by the agency and incurs no expense for volunteers. If you are concerned that you may not have a clear outcome to a Criminal History Check please discuss with a member of the Recruitment Assessment and Training Team. A police record would not automatically stop

you from being approved as a Foster Carer, it would depend on the type and recency of the offence; however, certain offences, such as sexual or physical abuse, particularly of a child, would rule out approval.

### A Working With Children Check (WWCC)

This is a national database coordinated by the Department of Justice. All volunteers with the OzChild Foster Care Program are required to hold a WWCC card. This card is free for volunteers and may be revoked in the event that a person is charged with a criminal offence against a child.

### A Medical Check

You are required to arrange for your local doctor to complete a medical check on your behalf. Part of this check includes your doctor being given an opportunity to support or not support your application based on your state of physical and mental health.

### A Life Story

Applicants are required to provide an account of their experience as a child, adolescent and adult in writing to the agency.

## Supporting You

There are many opportunities for Foster Carers to engage in support services or participate in social activities with OzChild. The following is a guide to some of the opportunities offered:

- OzChild provides initial and ongoing training to learn about children coming into care and to develop Foster Carer's skills.
- OzChild provides regular support to carers through telephone calls, home visits, and after hours support.
- You are a part of a care team so will never be alone in caring for a child or young person.
- Foster Carers can receive support through broader state-wide networks with other Foster Carers, such as support groups.
- Additional support by specialist services can be provided.
- OzChild holds several social functions throughout the year enabling carers to develop networks of support with other Foster Carers.
- OzChild links Foster Carers to the Foster Care Association of Victoria. The Association advocates for Foster Carers and the children and young people in their care.

OzChild believes that through support and learning opportunities Foster Carers will be in a better position to support vulnerable children and young people who come into their home.



## 3: What's Next?



Return the forms provided in Pack B and a worker from the Recruitment, Assessment and Training Team will be in touch to speak with you further to answer any questions and queries that you may have and to discuss your attendance at an Information Session.

### **Thank you for your interest in the Foster Care program**

For further information or to enquire about the next step to becoming a Foster Carer, please phone 9212 3900 or email us at

[FosterCareRecruitment@OzChild.org.au](mailto:FosterCareRecruitment@OzChild.org.au).

Alternatively you may choose to visit our website [www.OzChild.org.au](http://www.OzChild.org.au)

## Foster Care Information Sessions 2016



### DANDENONG

1536 Heatherton Road, Dandenong  
Melways 90 G3  
Parking available onsite or across the road behind the Dandenong Club  
6.30 - 8.30pm

Thursday	July 14
Thursday	September 15
Thursday	November 17

### FRANKSTON

Landmark Corporate Centre  
Level 3, 454-472 Nepean Highway, Frankston  
Melways 102 C2  
Parking available onsite  
Meet at the side entrance on Well St opposite McDonalds  
6.30pm-8.30pm

Tuesday	August 18
Tuesday	October 18

Tea, coffee and light refreshments are provided.

Please RSVP by calling **03 9212 3900** or email **FosterCarerRecruitment@ozchild.org.au**. If you need to cancel, please contact the Recruitment team at least 48 hours in advance.

If you have any enquiries on the night, please call **0437 937 600**.

## Foster Carer Training 2016



### DANDENONG

1536 Heatherton Road, Dandenong

Saturday	June 18	9.30am - 5.00pm
Wednesday	August 10	6.00pm - 9.30pm
Wednesday	August 17	6.00pm - 9.30pm
Wednesday	August 24	6.00pm - 9.30pm
Wednesday	August 31	6.00pm - 9.30pm
Saturday	October 8	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	October 15	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	November 26	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	December 12	9.30am - 5.00pm

### FRANKSTON

Landmark Corporate Centre  
Level 3, 454-472 Nepean Highway, Frankston

Saturday	September 3	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	September 10	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	November 5	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	November 12	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	November 26	9.30am - 5.00pm
Saturday	December 12	9.30am - 5.00pm

Tea, coffee and light refreshments are provided.

Please RSVP by calling **03 9212 3900** or email **FosterCarerRecruitment@ozchild.org.au**. If you need to cancel, please contact the Recruitment team at least 48 hours in advance.

If you have any enquiries on the night, please call **0437 937 600**.