



Foster Care Information Booklet

Welcome to foster care

Stretch-A-Family (SAF) has a therapeutic foster care program that offers care to children and young people aged 0 – 18 years. The aim of the program is to offer a home to any child who is unable to live with their family for any reason and who have been referred from Family and Community Services. SAF would support and train you to enable you to offer a safe, nurturing family environment to any child, regardless of their culture, religion or any special needs.

What are the types of foster care?

There are a number of different types of foster care; respite care over a weekend or school holidays, short term or emergency placement, medium term placement or long term.

- **Emergency**

Emergency placements can be for a few nights up to 2 weeks.

- **Short term**

Short-term placements are up to 3 months and may just be needed while a family works out difficult circumstances so that the child may return home. As the carer, you can help maintain the child's relationship with their family and this can include supporting family contact.

- **Medium term**

Medium term placements are up to 1 year and as with short term the carer may be expected to help maintain the child relationship with their family and support family contact.

- **Long term**

Long term placements are for children/ young people who cannot return to their birth family. They will live with the foster carer until they are 18 or able to live independently.

- **Respite**

Respite care is provided as part of an individual care plan. It may be provided on a regular basis over a weekend once or twice a month, during school holidays or because circumstances have required the long term carer to go away for a short while. Our aim is to provide any child having regular respite with a regular respite carer so that they can build a relationship.

Please note that we are not an adoption agency.

What is expected of a foster carer?

Regardless of what type of care you provide your role is to provide a loving, supportive and stable home for children and young people.

Most children still have strong family ties and as a carer you will assist with maintaining their family ties and being supportive of their birth family and birth family contact as this is essential for a child's development and sense of self. It is also essential to support the child's cultural and religious background, as well as providing them with a safe, nurturing environment. We will work with you to help set appropriate boundaries to encourage positive behaviour and positive outcomes for the child/ young person. You are also responsible for respecting the confidentiality of the child and their birth families and for showing them understanding, respect and empathy.

Foster carers are an integral part of the team. We involve foster carers in decision making and work closely when developing a care plan to best support the child/ young person.

What do children in foster care need?

Children need someone to care about them, to provide them with a loving, safe, home environment, to stand up for them and give them a voice, to respect them and their families, to provide routine and boundaries, to make sure they get an education, to feed them, to wipe their tears, to have fun with them, to open them to new experiences, to listen to them, to involve them in decisions that affect them, to let them have a say, to help them develop a sense of identity, to feel like they belong – all the things we needed when we were children.

Could I be a foster carer?

Foster carers come in many shapes and sizes but the one thing they have in common is usually their main motivating factor to become a carer – a love of children and the belief that they can help give a child/ young person a better life and to make a difference.



There is no set criteria for becoming a foster carer other than being over 21 years of age. You can be male or female, single or in a relationship (married, defacto, same sex), renting or a home owner, employed or retired, studying or a stay at home parent and come from any cultural background.

How do I become a foster carer?

All applicants will be required to:

- Go through the full assessment process, this can take up to 6 months
- Have their home inspected to ensure it meets minimum health and safety standards
- Participate in an assessment of your whole family
- Have a spare room for sole use by a foster child
- Be subject to a Criminal Record Check and a Working With Children Check
- Be required to attend pre-approval training course
- Be in possession of a current first aid certificate

Once authorised as a foster carer, you must be committed to attending ongoing training and working closely with SAF.

All applicants are entitled to discontinue the process the process at any time if you do not wish to continue.

What's next?

If you wish to proceed with your enquiry, please complete the online [foster care enquiry form](#). Once this has been received you will get a call within 2 working days from one of the foster care team to discuss your application and arrange an initial home visit to meet you and inspect your home.

If the decision is made to proceed with your enquiry at that point, you and all of your household members over the age of 16 will be required to complete the Criminal Record and Working with Children Checks, along with other forms you for you to fill out such as health forms and references.

You will be required to attend a training course that gives a deeper understanding of the effect of trauma on children/ young people and why they come into care – this can be 2 – 3 days and may run in one block over a weekend, or separately over a couple of weekends.

The assessment will be carried out over a period of weeks, possibly a few months and once completed, the assessment will be given to you to read and for your comment before going to the CEO for approval. If your application is approved, you will be given a copy of the carer code of conduct, carer rights & responsibilities to read & sign, you will be provided with your letter of authorisation and a caseworker will be allocated to you.

If your application is not approved you are entitled to appeal the decision and will be guided through the appeals process.

What happens once I've been approved?

SAF will then begin the process of placement matching based upon the information you have given us as to your preferences. You are entitled to turn down a placement should you not feel it is the best fit for your family.

While SAF will endeavour to meet your wishes as quickly as possible it may take some time to find a good match so it may be a while before you get a placement.

How do we support our carers?

Carers are at the heart of what we do and are valued members of the care team. SAF is committed to providing 24 hour support, there will always be someone to talk to if you need it.

You will also receive support to attend training – we expect all our staff to update their knowledge and skills throughout the year and we provide the same opportunities to our foster carers. All carers will be required to attend a minimum of 4 training courses a year and we will send details of any courses that are provided to foster carers and support them to attend.

Carers will receive a minimum monthly face to face visit from the caseworker where their needs will be discussed along with any issues. The caseworker will also visit with the child routinely separate from the carer visit.

The caseworker will be available for support/ advice and will assist with any behaviour management or educational needs for the child as required.

Foster Carer Payments

Foster carers receive a reimbursement payment on a fortnightly basis into their bank accounts. The amount will depend upon the age and the needs of the child they are caring for. We have our rates listed on our website.

All children and young people deserve to live somewhere safe, to have their health care needs looked after, to receive education and to be part of a family.

SAF is dedicated to offering every child that comes into our service the best chance we can give them, by placing them with the best carers we can find. We commit to providing you with ongoing training, practical and financial assistance and the opportunity to become a member of a specialised care team focused upon meeting the needs of any children placed with you.

Our foster carers are an integral part of our care team and SAF will support you in providing the best possible care for children and young people.



We'll support you to support them.