

## **Information Pack for Potential Foster Carers**

### **About Foster Care**

Foster care is required when a child or young person cannot live with their parents for a period of time. This may be due to relationship difficulties, child protection reasons, general family crisis or other issues. Foster caring with CareSouth involves providing a placement in your home, for a child/young person who has multiple needs. These young people will usually be aged between 0 and 18 years. Their histories may be varied including exhibiting a number of emotional behavioural problems.

### **What types of foster care are there?**

#### **Respite care**

This involves care provided for regular short stays (eg one weekend a month). It gives families a break and provides a positive experience for the child. Respite foster carers are asked to make a commitment for a period of at least 12 months.

#### **Temporary care**

Temporary care is short-term, overnight up to 3 months. At the end of temporary care, the child may return to their family or be placed in long-term care.

Temporary care may be needed because of:

- an emergency eg illness or other family crisis
- Intervention by the NSW Department of Community Services, where a child is removed from their parents to ensure their safety and well-being.

#### **Long term care**

This is care for children who cannot live with their families and need a family to grow up with, until their family circumstances change or they turn 18.

### **What are the criteria for being a carer?**

#### **Age**

No set age requirements, though it is expected that carers providing long-term care for a child will be able, if necessary, to continue care until the child is able to live independently.

## **Marital Status**

- Single people: With or without children
- Married/defacto couples: Must have been living together in a stable domestic relationship

## **Age of Child of Applicant**

If an applicant has a child, the age of the child placed must be at least 2 years less than the age of the child of the applicant. (Research has shown this assists in ensuring that the foster care family can provide the necessary focus on the particular needs of the child in care).

## **Fertility (where infertility is an issue)**

To be eligible to provide long term care, an applicant must have completed their involvement with a fertility program for a period of not less than 12 months.

Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of their infertility and an understanding of the impact of infertility upon each of them as an individual and as a family.

## **Health**

An applicant's health (both physical and mental) shall be such as to ensure he or she is able to undertake the task of fostering.

## **Religious beliefs**

Applicants should be able to respect and observe the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of others, including those in their care.

## **Financial Resources**

CareSouth provides a generous remuneration allowance for carers. This is a tax-free allowance. The foster carer is responsible for meeting the day-to-day expenses incurred in caring for the child person.

The Carer allowance is paid according to the needs of the child and the level of support that the child may require. The allowance ranges from \$350 to \$1,000 per week and covers most of the additional costs associated with caring for the child/young person.

Applicants for temporary care may be employed full or part-time, provided that they are able to give adequate time to the child in their care. For example, it may be possible to work part-time and still care for a school aged child. However, this may not be possible if the child has particular needs, or is very young.

## **Accommodation**

Applicants should have adequate and safe accommodation for a child. This does not mean that applicants should necessarily own their own home. A bedroom must be available for a foster child, though this can be shared with other children, if appropriate.

## **Caring skills**

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to undertake the special responsibilities involved in caring for a foster child. Carers must be able to:

- Demonstrate a strong, stable and structured home environment that is safe and free from abuse
- Be dependable, nurturing and possess good communication abilities
- Demonstrate a commitment to young people and children and promote the positive development of children and young people in foster care
- Work effectively as a team with staff from CareSouth , other organisations and birth parents
- Demonstrate a professional attitude and an ability to draw on and apply personal experiences appropriately with the tasks of fostering
- Be flexible

## **Involvement with CareSouth**

Applicants must be willing to participate in training and the 'Step by Step' assessment process. Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to work with CareSouth in order to meet the changing needs of a child or young person. This will involve a willingness and an ability to communicate with CareSouth and participate in planning and reviewing the child's care and their work with CareSouth.

## **Birth family contact**

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origins, culture and past experience of the child or young person in their care. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of CareSouth's commitment to ongoing contact between the child and his/her birth parents and a willingness to facilitate such contact.

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

CareSouth has a commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with carers who share their cultural background.

Carers who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are asked to provide proof of this (eg, a letter from a Land Council) and details of the community to which they belong, if they wish to provide foster care for a child from their own cultural background.

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

Carers are expected to work closely with CareSouth staff in developing appropriate discipline strategies for the particular child or young person in their care. Foster carers are not allowed to use any physical force to discipline foster children.

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical punishments eg hitting. It is very important that foster children are disciplined in a way that sends a strong message to them that they are cared for in spite of their behaviour. Experience has shown that hitting or other physical punishment is not effective in dealing with these children. Children in care because they have experienced abuse in the past usually have not experienced consistent caring parenting.

CareSouth has a behaviour management policy which guides carers on how they can appropriately discipline children.

## **Health and hygiene standards**

Carers are expected to conform to guidelines designed to ensure that children are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include practicing of universal infection control and ensuring that there is no smoking within the home.

Training is provided to carers about health and hygiene standards. Training related to a child/young person requiring care with specific health issues will be provided for carers accepting such placements.

## **Application to other agencies**

Applicants must advise of previous applications to become a carer with other agencies in Australia and overseas and the outcomes of those applications. Applicants will be asked for permission for CareSouth to contact others with whom you have previously applied/worked.

## **Insurance**

Each carer is responsible for taking out their own insurances. CareSouth recommends that each carer have the following insurances:

- General Property (Building and Contents)
- Public Liability
- Comprehensive Motor Vehicle

It is also recommended that carers advise their Insurance Company that they foster children and clarify what/if any effect this has on their policy.

## Some important issues to consider

Caring for a child/young person with high needs can be a very rewarding experience for the carer and their family. You are in a position to have a positive and lasting effect upon the life of another person. You can offer a stable caring family environment for the child/young person and observe the positive impact this will have on his/her life.

Caring for someone else's child though, is not easy and in making the decision to apply to become a Carer you should consider the effects it will have on you and your family. Below are a number of issues to consider that may assist you in making your decision.

- You will be taking young people into your home who may have behavioural problems and may have experienced a wide range of abuse.
- The young person in your care may display behaviours that may confuse you. These behaviours could involve the young person acting out, yelling and swearing, crying or acting as if they don't care. They may act as if they are much older than they are. Rapid mood swings and manipulation of other family members could also be displayed.
- You should consider the general level of disruption and intrusion into your family that such a placement could bring. You could have Caseworkers from CareSouth and workers from other services coming into your home on a regular basis
- You will need to put a great deal of time into caring for the child/young person. You may be required to transport the young person to various places. You may be asked to attend meetings to discuss the progress of the young person.
- The young person cannot be left with any other person unless CareSouth or the Department of Community Services has approved them. This may mean some planning with day-to-day activities.
- You will have the ability to make decisions regarding the day-to-day care of the child/young person but you do not have the custody or guardianship of the child/young person.
- While every attempt would be made to involve you in the formulation of the case plan for the young person, you may at times disagree with the decisions made. As part of a team, you would be expected to cooperate with implementation of the plan.
- You will be asked to keep various records pertaining to the child/young person in your care.
- Caring for a young person with a history of problems may effect your relationships with friends, families etc. For example, some friends or family may feel uncomfortable around the child/young person due to his/her behaviour and therefore not visit as frequently.

- There could be the possibility that your possessions could become damaged or stolen.
- Children and young people placed in care situations cannot be physically disciplined. However, other methods of discipline may be used. You will have the opportunity to discuss this during our training and assessment. This may make it difficult for you, if you have strong views on the subject. In considering appropriate disciplinary measures, the child/young person's history must be taken into account.

## **What is the process of becoming a carer?**

Becoming a carer involves a number of steps. You have taken the first step in making your enquiry. If you have called us, we have registered your enquiry.

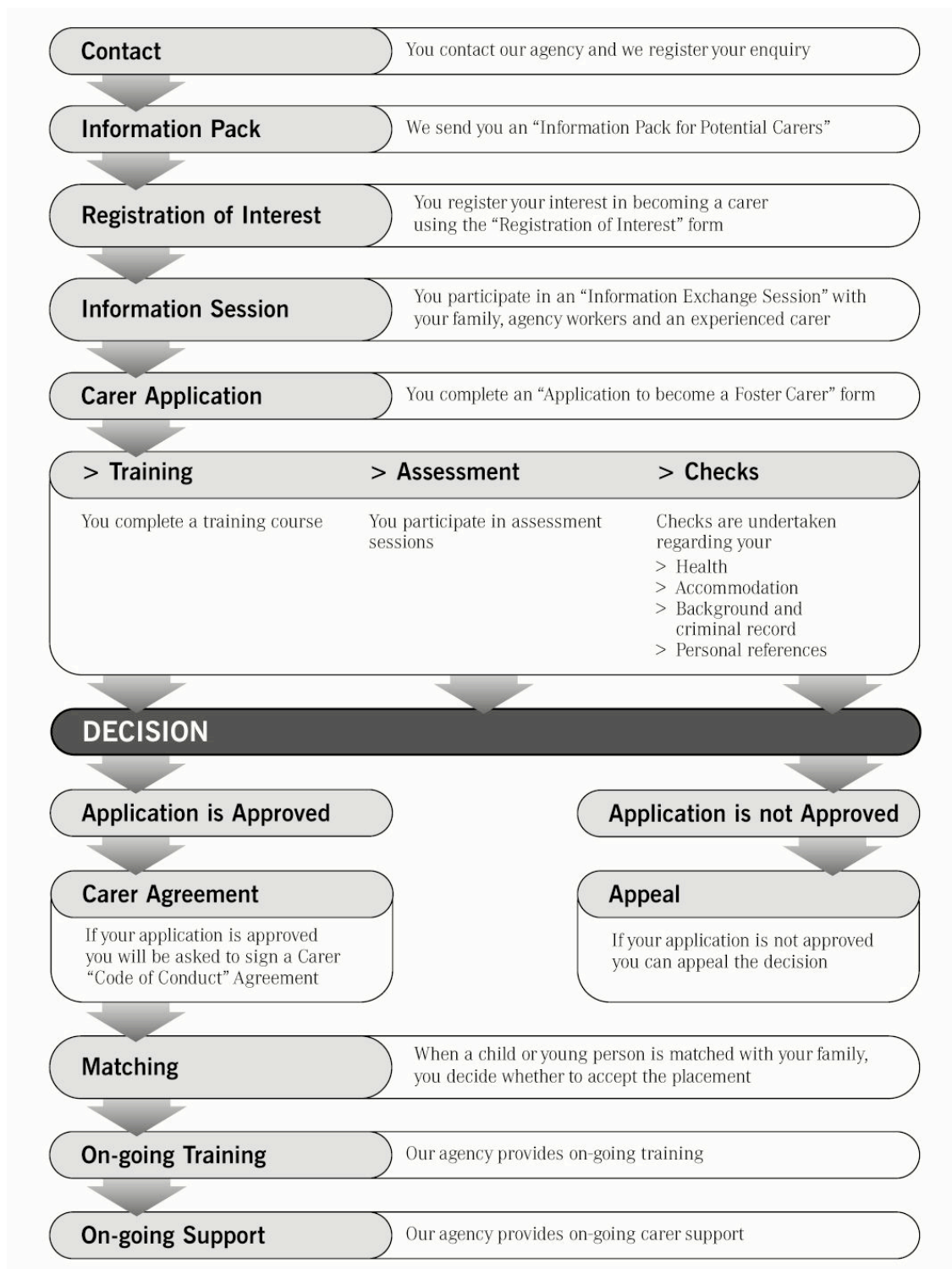
We would like you to read this information pack carefully. If you are still interested in applying to be a carer, send us the 'Registration of Interest' form attached to the covering letter. When you do that, we will arrange an initial 'Information Exchange Session'.

The 'Information Exchange Session' gives you and the people in your household an opportunity to meet with staff from our agency and, where possible, an experienced carer.

After this session you can decide whether you wish to continue the process of becoming a carer by participating in a training session and a series of assessment interviews, following this training. **It is extremely important that all adult members of the household attend this training session.** The assessment interviews are not something you pass or fail. We work with you to discover together whether fostering is a suitable option for you, at this time.

Once you have been approved as a carer, we will approach you when a child or young person is matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may arise for you and your household if you accepted the placement of that child or young person. Sometimes it is possible for you to meet the child or young person before you make the decision about taking that placement.

# Flow chart of the assessment process



## **Details of the assessment process**

### **Does the assessment process involve doing tests?**

No, the assessment process is designed to enable CareSouth and you to make an informed decision together. At each stage in the process you will be given feedback. This may include identifying issues that may impact on your ability to provide foster care.

### **What will the assessment interviews cover?**

Because being a foster carer is such an important task, you will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to being a foster carer. In particular, we will look at your ability to:

- draw from and apply your own personal experiences to the tasks of fostering
- provide good quality day to day care for children and young people
- provide a safe and nurturing environment
- Work with other people, particularly staff from CareSouth and other organisations and birth parents.

### **What does the medical check involve?**

During the assessment,

- you will be asked to complete a Health checklist
- Your doctor will be asked to complete a Medical Questionnaire.

The purpose of these checks is to determine if you have the physical and psychological health to undertake the task of fostering. Questions are asked about:

- physical health
- emotional health
- current and past illnesses and medical problems
- use of drugs (prescribed and unprescribed)
- Smoking

If any medical issue arises that may affect your suitability to foster, it will be discussed with you fully, to help us work out together its potential impact on children or young people in your care.

### **What does the accommodation check involve?**

This is a check to ensure that you are able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable. The check is carried out by a member of our assessment team.

## **What should our references cover?**

You will be asked to provide the names of two unrelated people who have known you for at least two years and can comment on your experience and ability to care for children, as well as your personal character. We may also speak to other people who have contact with you.

## **What does the criminal check involve?**

When you have completed a formal application to become a foster carer (not just registered your interest) and with your permission, our agency checks the criminal record of all people in your household 14 years or above. Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you or a family member from being a carer family. However, any criminal convictions that affect your ability to care safely for a child or young person will mean your application is not able to proceed.

Specifically you will be asked to:

- make a 'Prohibited Employment Declaration' that you have not been convicted of a serious sex offence which prohibits you from applying to be a foster carer
- Consent to the check, to allow screening of your criminal and work record in relation to sexual misconduct and acts of violence involving children

## **Can I appeal if my application to be a foster care is not approved by CareSouth?**

Yes. You are entitled to be given reasons of why your application has been rejected and have the decision reviewed. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except for personal references which may be treated as confidential.

## **Where to from here?**

Now that you have read this information package, you may have a better idea on whether providing Foster Care is appropriate for you and your family.

If you require any further information in order to make you decision on whether you wish to proceed, please contact our CareSouth Office in Nowra on 4423 6833.

On the other hand, you may feel that you meet the criteria for becoming a Foster Carer with CareSouth and wish to proceed with your enquiry.

If so, please complete the attached Registration of Interest Form and forward to either:

The Community Care Program  
CareSouth  
P O Box 1076  
NOWRA NSW 2540

The Community Care Program  
CareSouth  
2/19-21 Ralph Black Dr  
WOLLONGONG 2500

Thank you for your interest in becoming a foster carer with CareSouth.