

Permanency Support
with CareSouth


Information for potential carers



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A hand holding a yellow and black soccer ball on a grassy field. The hand is wearing a silver watch. The background is a bright green field under a clear blue sky.

What is Permanency Support?

Each week more than 60 children enter Out-of-Home Care (OOHC) because they cannot live safely at home. Many have experienced neglect or abuse due to families facing multiple challenges including intergenerational trauma, domestic violence, parental drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues, poverty, lack of parenting skills and social isolation.

NSW's Permanency Support Program was introduced to the OOHC sector on 1 October 2017, to improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and young people who are currently in care or at risk of coming into care.

There are many ways you can make a difference in the life of a child or young person through providing a stable, loving home. CareSouth needs local families and individuals to become emergency, respite or restoration carers. We need people who can build trusting relationships with birth families and work alongside us to return children home safely. We also need families and individuals who are interested in fostering to adopt children in their care.

CareSouth carers are everyday people from all walks of life. They are young couples, same sex couples, single people, have children of their own or are retired. Caring for a child or young person can be a very rewarding journey for you and your family.

You've never been more needed.

our footprint

Our reach is great through regional NSW, throughout the southern and western regions. CareSouth offers services in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Southern Tablelands and far western NSW.



"Somewhere everyone can make a difference. It's about sitting down with your family and asking 'what could we do?'"

CareSouth carer Carolyn



Why choose CareSouth?

Based in Southern and Western NSW, and completely not-for-profit, CareSouth's vision is to create a positive future for children, young people, families, individuals and communities, providing opportunities in which people can enhance their quality of life.

CareSouth is a really progressive, bold and innovative, organisation. The children, young people, individuals and families, we support are at the centre of everything we do, of every decision we make, and they should be.

We provide a range of support services for children and young people in care to help them grow and develop new skills, build on their strengths and reach their potential. We work towards this collaboratively with our carers, caseworkers and Clinical Services team, including psychologists, speech pathologists, nurses and occupational therapists, along with initiatives like our Mentoring Program and Homework Hub. We also work with FACS and external stakeholders.

By choosing to become a carer with CareSouth, you can expect us to be there on the journey with you every step of the way. Our carers receive regular tailored training and caseworker visits, 24/7 after hours support, regular chances to meet up with other foster carers, clinical services and a tax-free allowance.

Keeping children safe and ensuring their well-being is everyone's responsibility. Our carers are a valuable part of our team. We support you, so you can support those who need it most.

What are the Types of care?

Becoming a carer can be for just a few nights, a period of weeks or months, or a lifetime commitment. CareSouth believes in linking vulnerable children to strong carer families who can provide short or long-term care to help children and their families turn their lives around. You can help through one of the many permanency pathways below:

Emergency Care is needed when there are concerns for a child's immediate safety. Emergency carers need to be able to provide care at short notice, after hours and on weekends.

Respite Care gives foster families a break and provides a positive experience for a child or young person. This is for short periods of time, usually one weekend a month, during school holidays or sometimes during the week. It is usually planned and scheduled in advance.

Family Preservation and Restoration involves providing early intervention activities and intensive support to families, so that vulnerable children and young people can remain with or be returned to their families when it is safe to do so. It is the preferred permanency option if a child or young person is placed in Out-of-Home Care while their family is supported to strengthen their parenting.

Foster Care can be for a period of up to two years, sometimes longer, while long-term decisions are being made for a child or young person. There is a focus on reuniting the child with their birth parents or extended family where this is possible.

Kinship Care is when a child or young person lives with a relative or someone they already know.

Guardianship provides children and young people with greater stability following a Children's Court decision that they cannot live with their parents. A guardian can be a relative or kinship carer, a family friend or an authorised carer who has an established, positive relationship with the child or young person. Guardians have full care, legal and decision-making responsibility for a child or young person in their care until the age of 18.

Adoption is a way of providing a permanent family for a child or young person who can't be restored to their parents or live with a relative or kinship carer. This is usually 'open adoption' which means supporting children and young people to remain connected to their birth family and cultural heritage. Foster carers who have had a child or young person in their care for a period of time may wish to adopt.

Whatever way you help, your commitment will be valued. A stable home, predictable routine and carers who set firm but loving boundaries can make a huge difference in the life of a child or young person. You've never been more needed.

A photograph of a young boy with brown hair, wearing large aviator sunglasses and a black wetsuit, smiling broadly. He is standing on a sandy beach with waves in the background. To his left, the back of a girl's head with blonde hair is visible. The image is partially framed by a bright pink shape on the left and a light blue shape at the bottom.

caring for tweens and teenagers

There is a huge need for carers for children and young people from 8-18 years. Whilst caring for tweens and teens may be very different from caring for a baby or toddler, and have its own unique set of challenges, it can also be a better match for some families and a very rewarding journey.

Caring for a teenager or tween is often more of a mentoring role where you can engage with them in shared interests and activities that provide a positive experience and learning opportunities. The compassion you show and the way you advocate for a teen at school, in sport and the community are hugely important. You can help restore their confidence and pride, instilling self-belief and hope for the future. Your love, patience and hard work will make a difference for a lifetime.

What is the Process?

1

Contact

Contact CareSouth to discuss your interest and have an initial conversation. You can register your interest and receive an information pack.

2

Information Pack

Read the information pack carefully and register your interest.

3

First Visit

We will contact you to arrange a first visit to your home.

4

Information Session

You and your family meet with CareSouth staff and experienced carers to explore further how this might work for you and your family.

5

Carer Application

You complete our carer application form.

6

Training

You complete a training course with all adult members of your household.

7

Assessment

We work together with you to explore the most suitable option for you and your family at this time. Checks are done on your health, home, background, and personal references.



9

Coming to live

A child or young person or sibling group comes to live in your home.

8

Decision

We support you on the permanency pathway. This may vary depending on what type of care is the most suitable option for you and your family.

10

Ongoing training & support

You will be supported and provided with tailored training to meet the individual child or young person's needs.

What to Expect and Carer Responsibilities

When we receive a referral for a child or young person, CareSouth will match the needs of the child with the individual circumstances of the carer. A CareSouth caseworker or manager will contact you and provide as much information as practical about the circumstances and needs of the child or young person. You should be given the following:

- Carer Placement Confirmation Letter: confirms the placement and provides authority for carers to be able to access medical and other services for a child or young person in their care. For example, Medicare Card/Health Care Card/ Personal Health Record.
- Essential Information for Carers: provides essential information about the child or young person such as reasons the placement is required, how long the placement is expected to last, contact arrangements and details for family, significant others and professionals involved.
- Case and Support Plan: usually completed within 30 days. A caseworker is assigned to the child or young person and the carer family as soon as they enter the program.

Your general day-to-day responsibilities are to provide a safe and caring home environment and to provide experiences that meet the child's physical and emotional needs. Other important responsibilities include:

- Working as a team - a child or young person has the best chance of having his/her needs met when their carer,


caseworker and the child or young person work as a team;

- Attending meetings and contributing to the development of the child's Case Plan;
- Assisting in achieving the goals identified and participating in case review meetings;
- Supporting the child's or young person's relationships and contact with their natural family, where appropriate;
- Displaying a non-judgemental attitude, having respect and understanding, towards the child or young person's birth family;
- Providing opportunities for the child or young person to learn living and social skills;
- With appropriate support recognising, establishing and communicating limits and appropriate positive behaviour management strategies;
- Supporting the child or young person to observe and practise their religion (if any);
- Supporting the child or young person to maintain links with their cultural identity;
- Maintaining health records for the child or young person;
- Maintaining school records, photos, awards and other records on the child's progress;
- Gathering material for the child's Life Story Work and helping them to keep it up-to-date;
- Providing Carer Reports to the caseworker and reporting incidents as required.


carer Authorisation

There are some formal documents that outline the roles and responsibilities of carers that you are required to sign as part of the process of becoming a carer. Applicants are required to agree to working within the 'Code of Conduct for Authorised Foster, Relative and

Kinship Carers' framework, which sets out the minimum standards for providing care, before you can proceed to training and assessment. At the end of the assessment process, before carer authorisation is given, carers are asked to sign 'The Carer Agreement' by which you agree to abide by the CareSouth policies, procedures and guidelines provided in the Carer Manual.



you are not alone on
your carer journey.
careSouth carers
are a valuable part
of our team.

A close-up photograph of a man with glasses and a blue t-shirt holding a baby. The baby is wearing a light blue zip-up hoodie and is looking down at the man's chest. The man is smiling and looking at the baby. The background is a blurred green field. There are decorative pink and blue geometric shapes in the top right corner.

Almost anyone can consider
caring for a child or young
person. careSouth carers
are everyday people
like you.

Support for our carers

Our Commitment to You

At CareSouth we value our carers. We are committed to supporting our carers and their families in a number of ways including:

- Regular contact with a consistent, experienced and skilled caseworker
- Timely and responsive support when requested
- 24 hour on-call service
- Carer views and opinions listened to and taken seriously by workers
- Including carers in case discussion and planning
- Keeping carers informed with up-to-date information
- Recognising carers as an important extension of our team
- Ongoing carer training
- Carer Support Groups
- Psychologist services
- Respite for carer families
- Concerns and complaints dealt with in a timely and effective manner

Education and training can help you understand what's going on for you and the child or young person in your care, and give you ideas about strategies and solutions to make things better. For example, you can learn about how neglect and abuse

can impact on a child's development and behaviour, how to help kids feel a positive connection to their culture, or how to prepare yourself and the child or young person in your care for restoration with their birth family.

All carer applicants are required to complete the *Shared Stories, Shared Lives* initial carer training (in addition to the assessment process) to be approved as a carer.

Each carer will receive an induction session at the end of the assessment process. Topics discussed include: carer allowance and expenditure; discipline of children in care; completing Carer Reports, incident and medical consultation forms; Case Plans; medical and health needs; incidents in care; carer development and placement support.

Ongoing training is provided for all carers. Some examples of training available include: child development; caring for a child with a disability; managing challenging behaviour; supporting birth families with family time; maintaining a child's culture; Life Story Work; meeting educational needs of children; managing contact between children in care and members of their birth families.

Our carers are important to us. That's why CareSouth invests in long-term relationships with our carers.

carer Allowance

Foster, Relative and Kinship carers are volunteers, so they're not paid a wage. However, there are a number of allowances and payments available to help you ensure a safe and comfortable home for the child in your care, with ample opportunities for learning and personal growth.

The Carer Allowance you receive is provided to help you cover the costs of caring for a child or young person.

You are expected to use the allowance to cover the day-to-day costs of looking after the child or young person in your care, such as:

- food
- clothing and footwear
- daily travel
- suitable car restraints
- gifts
- household provisions and costs
- hobbies and activities
- general educational expenses
- holidays
- general medical expenses
- pocket money

You don't have to keep receipts to show how you spent the Carer Allowance on everyday items. However, receipts are usually required for out-of-pocket expenses that are part of the child's Case Plan, for example, the cost of healthcare, childcare and some education services. If you have any concerns, you can check with your caseworker for details.

The Carer Allowance can vary depending on particular circumstances related to the child or young person's needs. If you need more specific information about the amount you can expect to receive to cover a child or young person's expenses, just give us a call and we will be happy to help you.

The Carer Allowance is not counted as income by Centrelink, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) or financial institutions.





Realities of Being in Care

We are all shaped by our life experiences. A child or young person in care will often come with experiences that have impacted upon their physical and emotional development. Caring for a child or young person may offer different challenges from caring for your own children. Your ability to provide structure, stability and a child focus is so important.

It may take some time for a child or young person to adjust to living with a new family. Sometimes this is expressed in anxiety, anger or difficult behaviour. A child or young person may find it difficult to trust, talk about their feelings, feel like they belong or feel safe. We will be there to support you every step of the way, to enable you to best support those who need it most.

Whilst a child or young person in care will need lots of nurturing, this alone may not be enough. They may require additional supports, medical attention and meetings with caseworkers. As a carer you may need to put time and effort into accessing these supports.

It is important that a child or young person in care is supported to maintain contact with their own families. Acknowledging a child's family and background is essential to their sense of identity and belonging, and this enables them to move forward with their life.

Becoming a carer can be a very rewarding journey for you and your family. By providing a stable, caring family environment for a child or young person you can make a very positive difference to a life.

The Impact of Trauma

To be a successful carer, it is important to understand the impact of trauma on a child or young person. The story of Matthew and his journey with his carers is a useful way for those who are considering caring for children to understand the impact of developmental trauma. This story is integrated into the Step by Step 2016 foster carer assessment process so you will likely hear more about Matthew's Story during the training and assessment process. Matthew's Story is available in a 20-minute video format at <https://vimeo.com/164792632>

We have also included a story below from a young person who has graduated from care with CareSouth. We believe it is important and relevant to gain an understanding of the experience of being in care from the perspective of a child or young person.

A Young Person's Perspective

Jess (not her real name) is 18 years old and has been in foster care for the past decade. In that time Jess has had at least a dozen foster care placements.

Jess recalls some of these placements fondly and remembers feeling loved, safe and secure – the things she craved the most. But other placements weren't such good experiences. Jess's most treasured possession is a stuffed tiger with one eye missing. She carried it with her into each new home and it helped her to settle in to her new surrounds.

Throughout all the change and upheaval Jess has remained resilient. Jess recently finished her HSC and now wants to work in the Community Services sector so she can help other children and young people navigate the foster care system.

When Jess was assigned a creative writing task for her HSC she chose to write about her experience in foster care. This is her story:

As I walked in the smell of mint and rosemary permeated my nostrils. My hands started shaking uncontrollably. My head began to pound and I had to remind myself to breathe. My heart was beating so fast it made this feeling worse. Everything was so overwhelming, my emotions couldn't catch up. The tiled floor I stood on was dazzling white and shiny, I could see my own reflection staring back at me hesitantly. There were picture frames all around of happy smiling people. It was so uncluttered and clean, like nothing had ever been touched. Everything was so bright and different to what I expected it to be. I'm not used to this.

I felt so empty walking in. I didn't have anything with me, no clothes, no photos, no school books, no gifts and no possessions of any kind. The one thing I did take was bad memories, a big suitcase full that wouldn't go away.

A million thoughts were running through my head. Why is my heart beating so fast? I'm so confused. Is it going to happen again?

Unfamiliar faces surrounded me, making me nervous. My sweaty hands started shaking and my stomach felt like it was going to fall out of my butt. The drumming beat in my ears became faster and louder, like an orchestra, with every step I took.

Then the woman spoke.

"Hello Jess, I'm Lorraine, how are you?"

"I'm okay," I replied. "How are you?"

"I'm very well thank you," answered Lorraine.

Feeling apprehensive I shook her hand. Her warm greeting made me feel welcome and secure but I was intimidated by everyone around me.

Walking over to meet the other children made me anxious. Beads of sweat formed on my frightened face. Biting the inside of my lip was the only thing calming these nerves of mine as I had never met anyone in a situation similar to me. One of them was quite young, his adorable freckled face was framed with brown curly hair. The other boy was much older, in his teenage years. He had blonde surfer hair down to his shoulders and a big smile which brightened my mood a little.

"Hey," said the oldest boy happily. "My name is Sam, and this is Chuck, it's great here, you'll love it." "Yeah," said Chuck, "Come check out your room!"

Walking through the hall of the house made me uneasy. Negative thoughts wriggled in my mind and anxiety crashed over me. I was consumed with worry.

"Am I going to like it here? Will they love me? Will I belong?"

Then Lorraine put her arms around me and hugged me tighter than anyone ever had. The warm feeling I got was wonderful. She made me feel so safe, I never wanted her to let me go.

A slight smile formed on my face and turned into a big grin.

carer stories

"I promise you will love it here, you will be safe and I won't let anything ever happen to you," Lorraine assured me.

The hours passed talking to Lorraine and tears all of a sudden clouded her eyes and gently rolled down her cheeks. Knowing my story had made someone cry was upsetting, I didn't realise it could affect someone like that.

Waking up the next day felt so different to how it used to feel. It felt so good, the warm sun touching my face and the sound of the kids' giggles downstairs.

Walking downstairs I saw Lorraine and the boys in the kitchen, they looked so happy and that's what I liked about them.

"Good morning Jess, how did you sleep?" Lorraine asked me.

"Morning Lorraine, I slept really good thank you," I replied.

"Come get some breakfast!" Sam said excitedly.

The smell of bacon, eggs and sausages invaded my nostrils, never had anything smelled so good. I attacked my food like a lion attacks its kill.

"Jess, would you like to come out with me for a milkshake today?" Lorraine asked.

"Yes of course, I would love that," I responded gratefully.

It made me feel so special that Lorraine asked me to join her. The fact that she was interested in me was the best feeling. Sitting down with Lorraine and talking was incredible. I dug my fingers into the blueberry muffin she bought me. I hungrily bit off a chunk. It tasted like sunshine after rain. Like air conditioning on a hot day. Like the barely remembered kisses from my mother.

I told Lorraine so much about myself; what I loved, what I wanted to be when I was older, what my dreams were. She told me about herself too. We had bonded in such a short amount of time. I loved the fact that someone finally cared about me and what I was passionate about. She held my hand and told me it was going to be okay.

Maybe this time it would be.

Now I belong.

Carolyn & Ian

Lily (not her real name) was 19 months old when she came to live with CareSouth foster carers Carolyn and Ian. The couple, who are keen to formally adopt Lily, dreamed of weekend bike rides and friends' birthday parties for the bubbly youngster. But first they had to help her reach key milestones like walking and talking. They also had to teach Lily how to hug.

https://youtu.be/RD1sPEZ_MYs

Annette

Retired single parent Annette has provided all types of foster care but more recently has focused on short-term care as she believes she can help more children this way.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=hEbKF4hjcgQ

Tim & Kim

Young couple, Tim and Kim, are fostering teenage siblings. Along with their young son, they now have five kids. As secondary school teachers, they were both clear that they wanted to foster older kids. The couple recognise that being young they appreciated all of the support available from CareSouth, especially the caseworkers.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wABFvbDmCE

carer Assessment FAQS

Will I have to do tests?

An assessment process takes place to help you and CareSouth make an informed decision together. At each stage in the process you will be given feedback.

What will the assessment interviews cover?

Being a carer is such an important role. You will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to caring for a child or young person.

What does the medical check involve?

Your physical and emotional health is important as a carer. We will ask you questions about your current and past illnesses and any medical problems, any use of drugs (prescribed and unprescribed), and smoking habits.

What does the Home Safety check involve?

You need to be able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable, including taking out appropriate insurances. CareSouth recommends that each carer has Home and Contents insurance, and Comprehensive Motor Vehicle insurance. Please talk to your insurance company to clarify what if any effect this has on your policy.

Who should our references cover?

You will be asked to provide the names of two unrelated people you've known for at least two years who can comment on your experience and ability to care for children, as well as your personal character. We also ask to speak with your children and someone from within your existing support network.

What do the background checks involve?

Background checks are completed for all members of the household 18 years and above, including other family members or significant people in your life. All checks are reviewed to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in your care.

Can I appeal if my application to be a foster carer is unsuccessful?

You are entitled to be given reasons if your application has been unsuccessful and have the decision reviewed.

Is Caring for a child or young Person Right For you?

A Checklist

- ☒ Are you loving, caring, kind and respectful to children and young people?
- ☒ Are you able to respond and empathise with the grief and loss that a child or young person has experienced?
- ☒ Are you able to set boundaries and house rules so that children and young people know what is expected of them?
- ☒ Are you able to help a child or young person talk about and maintain connections with their family, and other significant people in their life?
- ☒ Are you open to learning about ways to best meet the needs of the child or young person in your care?
- ☒ Are you able to listen and provide hope, support and encouragement to a child or young person?
- ☒ Are you able to work as part of a team to achieve best outcomes for children and young people?
- ☒ Are you tolerant, flexible, and adaptable? Are you able to learn new things, experience new situations and be prepared to have days that don't always work out as you had planned? Are you able to take things one day at a time and work towards long-term goals?
- ☒ Are you understanding, patient and able to persevere? Are you able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and appreciate how a child or young person is feeling or understand the reasons for their behaviour? Are you able to hang in there and appreciate that things often do take a while to change?
- ☒ Is now the right time for you? Are you able to provide a child or young person who is unable to live with their family with the time and energy they need, without neglecting your own family?
- ☒ Are you able to provide a stable home right now? Are you in a stable relationship? Do you have the time to devote to a child or young person?
- ☒ Some carers work full-time, some part-time. Are you able to be there after school or during the day for little ones?
- ☒ Do you have space in your home? Are you able to provide a bedroom for a child or young person?

You may already have what it takes to care for a child or young person. If you've given it plenty of thought, talked it through, and you have the time and the space (a spare bedroom), we can provide the training and support you need to make a very real difference.

you may have
thought about
fostering for
some time. It
starts with
a call to our
friendly team.

What Next?

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

Now that you have read this
information pack, you should have
a better idea on whether caring for
a child or young person is the right
choice for you and your family. If you
feel ready to proceed, or should you
require any further information in
order to make your decision, please
give us a call on **1300 554 260**.

EVERYDAY CareSouth

caresouth.org.au