What is foster care?

Foster care is a unique service to children offered by caring individuals and families.

Our community needs special people who are able to offer caring homes to children and young people.

When children are not able to live at home for various reasons, the first choice of placement is with relatives or someone they know. When this isn’t possible, Lutheran Community Care (LCC) Alternative Care Services rely on individuals and families to open their homes to these children.
Why do children need foster care?

Sometimes parents are unable to care for children due to physical and mental illness, drug and alcohol dependency, domestic violence or imprisonment. Sadly, there are also cases where children have been neglected and maltreated by their parents and need to be protected.

Children may need foster care because there are no friends or relatives able to care for them in a crisis.

Foster care provides a caring home to children while the parent/s and family members receive support to help them work through their problems.

The child may be a baby, primary school aged child or teenager, and some may need special care.

Children generally keep in touch with their birth parent/s, brothers, sisters and other family members while in foster care.

Children can return to live with their family where possible.
What do foster carers do?

• Carers provide a stable, supportive and nurturing home. This helps a child feel safe and secure while separated from their parents.

• Carers provide emotional support and care for a child’s day to day needs.

• Carers help the child communicate and behave in positive ways.

• Carers support the child in their education and recreational activities by encouraging them to try new things and affirm their efforts and accomplishments.

• Carers help the child maintain contact with their parents and extended family and enable them to continue their religious and cultural activities.

• Carers work with the child’s case worker as part of the ‘care team’ to achieve the set goal or plan for the child. They provide important information to the case worker about the child’s progress.

“Being a foster carer is all about providing children with the stability to grow and bloom into the beautiful young people they deserve to be.”

Mel, Long Term and Respite Carer
Who can be a foster carer?

- Carers are everyday members of the community who have a strong commitment to help others, especially children.

- Carers may be male, female, single or a couple. They are usually over 25 years of age. People’s maturity, health and lifestyle are also considered.

- Carers are not expected to be perfect but they do need to relate well to children and be committed to meeting children’s needs.

We need all kinds of carers to care for all kinds of children.
Who can be a foster carer?

- Carers do not have to be employed but they should have adequate financial resources to care for extra children. A foster care subsidy (which is not taxable) is paid to carers, which helps with the cost of caring for foster children.

- Carers should have adequate, safe accommodation for a child. This doesn’t mean that foster carers necessarily own their home. A foster child does need a bedroom, which can be shared with other children if appropriate.

- It is generally suggested that the child being placed is younger than the youngest child in the household. Research has shown this assists families to provide the necessary focus on the particular needs of a child in care.

- Before taking on the responsibility of providing care, it is important that the carer family is in a position to focus on meeting the needs of a child or young person who may be placed in care and that they feel emotionally ready to provide the additional care and support that will be needed.
Why do people become foster carers?

Foster carers are special people who provide a vital service in our community. More and more families are needed to take on this challenging and rewarding role.

Prospective foster carers have often thought about registering their interest for some time before they actually apply.

People become carers for many reasons but the key reason is usually that they love and enjoy the company of children, are child-focussed and believe they have the time and energy to provide a safe and nurturing home for children.

Carers often say they want to help children who haven’t had the opportunities and experiences they had when growing up, or they enjoyed providing similar experiences for their own children’s growth. They feel this is their way of giving something back to the community.
Types of care

**Respite Care** usually takes place over weekends and school holidays. This type of care provides foster or kinship families with a break while the child or young person enjoys a positive experience. It can be negotiated on a regular basis or a once off stay.

**Short Term Care** is required for a period of one week to two years. At the end of short term care, a child or young person may be placed in long term care or be reunified with their birth family.

**Emergency Care** may be needed at any time and on very short notice for an overnight stay or for up to seven days. Many emergency carers are also registered to provide short term care.

**Long Term Care** may be needed when a child is unable to live with their family and needs a stable, safe environment in which to grow up or until they can return to their family. Long term care may be required until the child turns 18.

Many carers choose to become registered for more than one type of care.
Steps to becoming a foster carer

Our Alternative Care Services staff and the LCC Aboriginal Cultural Consultant will answer any questions you or your family may have.

Our contact details are on the back of this booklet.

As part of the initial information and screening process, people interested in becoming foster carers are invited to attend an information session. The session will assist you to:

- become better informed about the significant responsibilities of foster carers
- consider the implications of undertaking the foster carer role, including how it may impact upon your family and friends
- determine what type of foster caring is best suited to your situation e.g. long term, emergency, respite or short term care.
- hear first-hand from a LCC Carer about their insights and experiences.

Information sessions are usually conducted in small groups of other people like yourself, who are interested in becoming a foster carer.

You can decide at any step of the process not to proceed with the assessment. If you have any concerns, please be sure to discuss them with one of our workers. They will help you work through any issues you may have.
Steps to becoming a foster carer

The next step in the initial screening process includes conducting child-related criminal history screenings for all people over eighteen years of age who live in your home. This includes any adult you have identified as being in your home on a regular basis or who may assist you with providing care and support.

You will also be required to undergo a medical check with your regular GP. Contact will be made with Families SA of the Department of Education and Child Development, the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion for screening checks, and with the referees you have nominated.

During an initial home visit, an assessment worker will confirm that your home is safe for children and meet with any people that reside in your household. During this process, a worker will discuss your specific areas of interest as a potential foster carer.

If the initial assessment screening meets the requirements you will be invited to participate in further formal assessment and training processes. Over several weeks, you may be visited at home numerous times and your family may be encouraged to attend a variety of training activities so that the agency can learn about your lifestyle and circumstances. Consideration of your parenting skills and experience and affinity with children are important aspects of the assessment. This information later enables us to place children with you who best fit your lifestyle, your family and your circumstances.

Upon meeting the competencies required, your Assessment Worker will prepare a comprehensive assessment report that will be submitted to Families SA Carer Registration Unit of the Department of Education and Child Development. The Department may require further information or in certain unusual cases decline the application.

There is no doubt that the foster care assessment is a very rigorous process. We appreciate your understanding about our responsibility to ensure that we are providing the highest level of quality care for the children and young people who are placed in our care.
Steps to becoming a foster carer

1. **Attend an information session**
   With Families SA or with foster care agency

2. **Contact**
   You contact our agency and we register your enquiry

3. **Information pack**
   We send you an information pack for potential foster carers

4. **Registration of Interest**
   You register your interest in becoming a carer using the registration of interest form

5. **Information exchange session**
   You participate in an ‘information exchange session’ with your family and agency workers

6. **Carer application**
   You complete an ‘Application to become a foster carer’ form

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**Checks**
Checks are undertaken regarding your:
- health
- accommodation
- background and criminal record
- personal references
- Families SA check

**Assessment**
You participate in assessment sessions

**Training**
You complete a training course

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**Decision**

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**Application is Approved**

**Matching**
When a child or young person is matched with your family, you decide whether to accept the placement

**Ongoing training**
Our agency provides ongoing training

**Ongoing support**
Our agency provides ongoing carer support

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**Application is Not Approved**

**Review**
If your application is not approved you can request a review within 28 days

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Training for foster carers

Training is a part of both the assessment process and for ongoing support to assist you when children are placed in your care. During the assessment process, your training will need to have covered the following topics:

- Foster Care in Context
- Bonding and Attachment
- Grief and Loss
- Abuse and Trauma
- Identity and Birth Family Contact
- Responding to Challenging Behaviour
- Teamwork
- Maintaining Cultural Connections
- The Story Continues
- Child Safe Environments (CSE)- Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
- Safe Care of Infants (SCI)- Compulsory if registering for care of 0-2 year old
- Caring for Aboriginal Children (optional)

- First Aid (completed via a First Aid Registered Training Provider)

It may be identified that you need additional training prior to taking a placement. If so, this will be discussed with you by your assessment worker.

Once you become a registered carer, your learning and development is an ongoing process with training provided for support. You will be required to attend training to refresh your skills or update topics such as CSE and SCI.

If you would like assistance in a particular area, your placement support worker will be able to help you by linking you into suitable counselling (Marte Meo supportive communication skills training) or advanced training opportunities.
What support can I expect?

Lutheran Community Care Alternative Care Services highly values the critical role of foster carers and the contributions that their families and friends make to the nurture of children and young people.

We are therefore very committed to supporting them in a variety of ways by providing:

- additional support from the LCC Aboriginal Cultural Consultant if you are caring for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child

- professional development and ongoing training opportunities to enhance skills in child development, discipline and managing challenging behaviours

- regular contact and visits to review the progress and wellbeing of the child/young person in your care

- support group meetings

- after hours support services

- LCC carer events planned throughout the year to enable you to connect with other carers

- professional counselling if needed.
Information collection and storage

- During the screening and assessment process required to become a foster carer you will be asked to provide very detailed information about yourself and others living in your home. All information collected, whether or not you decide to proceed with becoming a foster carer, will be kept by LCC Alternative Care Services for two years, as required by the Department for Education and Child Development, Families SA.

- Before providing information to us you should ensure that you have advised and gained the consent from each adult concerned with the process. It is important that they are aware that it will be recorded and stored for two years.

- It will be necessary for us to seek information about you from other sources such as your doctor, nominated personal referees, Screening Unit of the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion and Families SA to help determine your suitability as a foster carer.

If you have any questions or concerns about the collection and storage of information please contact our office and we will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.
Is foster caring right for you and your family?

Deciding to become a foster carer and sharing your home with another child can be a big decision to make. To help you decide if foster caring is right for your family, involve the family members in discussions about the following types of questions:

- Why do you want to become a foster carer?
- How will your children feel about sharing their room, toys and your time?
- Do you feel you have the time and space in your home for another child?
- Think about the way you manage your own children’s behaviours. Do you do this in a positive way, without use of physical punishments?
- Do you think you could support a foster child’s relationships with birth family members, even if you disagree with their lifestyle?
- Do you think you could support a child in being reunified with their birth family?
- Do you think you could financially support having another child in your home?
- Are you able to provide a culturally safe environment for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child?
- How will you ensure that family and friends do not smoke in the home?
- Are there changes you would need to make to your home to make it suitable for a foster child? Are you willing/able to make these changes?

When you have discussed these and other questions with your family, contact an Alternative Care Services worker to assist you with any queries you may have.
What's the next step?

If you would like to take the next step toward becoming a foster carer contact us at:

Lutheran Community Care

Alternative Care Services
PO Box 2137
Magill North SA 5072
Tel: 08 8337 8787
Email: fostercare@lccare.org.au
www.fostercare.lccare.org.au