



Fostering with UnitingCare West Frequently Asked Questions

What is foster care?

Foster care is the care of a child or young person who is not able to live with their own family. Foster care aims to provide children and young people with a safe and supportive home where they can form meaningful relationships and can be supported to grow and develop to their full potential. Children and young people in foster care are aged from 0 to 17 years and are often in the care of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support (DCPFS).

For more information go to 'About Fostering Fact Sheet #1'.

What type of placements do you offer?

UnitingCare West's Futures Foster Care Service provides long term foster care placements for children and young people who have high and complex care needs due to for example their experiences of abuse, trauma and/or intellectual or physical disability, and/or medical care needs.

For more information go to 'About Fostering Fact Sheet #1'.

What type of foster care can I provide?

UnitingCare West's Futures Foster Care Service currently provides long term foster care placements and respite care. Our long term carers are known as 'primary carers'. Foster carers can apply to provide one or more of the following types of care:

- Respite - Gives full-time foster carers, parents or guardians a regular break, often for one or two weekends a month.
- Long term - For children who cannot return to their biological family for an extended period or when it is anticipated that the child will be unable to be reunited.

We will work with you to identify the placement type that would best suit you and the children or young people currently in our care or being referred to our service.

For more information go to; 'About Fostering Fact Sheet #1' and 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

Who can become a foster carer?

Foster carers come from diverse walks of life in terms of age, background, sexual orientation, relationship status and experience. If you are over 18 and can offer a child or young person safe, nurturing and child-centered care, we welcome your application. All applicants undergo a comprehensive assessment and approvals process.

UnitingCare West's Futures Foster Care Service welcomes carers from all backgrounds, cultures and experiences - married, single, or same-sex couples, with or without children, divorced or de facto. Experience working with children and young people with trauma backgrounds, disability and / or medical needs is desired but not essential every foster carer is required to continue to develop their own knowledge and skills by completing initial training and ongoing learning and development as a foster carer.

For more information go to 'Becoming a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #2'.

I have never had children of my own. Can I apply to be a foster carer?

Yes. Although we need people who can care for and relate to children and provide a secure and nurturing home environment, these people might or might not be parents or have provided care for other people's children. It is not essential that you have previous experience caring for children and young people with trauma backgrounds or disability and medical care needs, however some experience is preferred. Our assessment process will help determine your suitability to become a foster carer.

I'm retired and would like to become a foster carer?

If you want to help and make a difference to the lives of children and young people, then we welcome your enquiry about becoming a foster carer as you may be able to provide some form of care. Please speak to us about your interest in foster care. Given the nature of caring for children and young people with high care needs, such as daily washing and dressing, it is imperative that foster carers be of sound health. All foster carers are required to undergo a medical review as part of their initial assessment. This is not limited to age but relevant for all foster carers.

I don't own my own home. Can I apply to be a foster carer?

Yes. Renters or people living in units or apartments can apply to be a foster carer. We will work with you to ensure your home meets the home safety standards for foster care (e.g. childproofing, one room per child, smoke alarms, accessibility eg wheelchairs and other equipment if applicable).

Ideally, you would own your own home or have a long term lease agreement, and have a spare room for a foster child to provide stability and give them the privacy and space to feel safe.

For more information go to 'Becoming a foster carer Fact Sheet #2'.

Do I need to have any particular skills or experience to become a foster carer?

Not necessarily. However, given that UnitingCare West provides foster care placements for children with complex care needs due to trauma history, disability and/or medical needs, it is an advantage to have some experience, although not essential. Foster carers need to have the ability and capacity to learn and apply what you have learnt. Some mandatory learnings are required, such as first aid, therapeutic crisis intervention and manual handling prior to commencing foster care, however most training and skills development takes place once a foster placement has commenced, as training pertains specifically to the particular needs of the child or young person in care.

For more information go to; 'Becoming a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #2', 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #3', and 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

What supports will I receive?

Foster carers are constantly supported in their role by the Futures foster care service. You will be part of a professional team working towards nurturing the child or young person in your care. Carers also have access to after-hours emergency support 365 days a year. We have a team of dedicated case workers, whose job is to support our valued carers every step of the way.

Each child or young person in foster care has unique care and support needs, as such specific training is provided as part of each foster placement.

For more information go to 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

Is there any financial support?

Being a foster carer is not a paid job but is an immensely rewarding role! Foster carers receive a monthly reimbursement towards the cost of caring for the child in their care. This reimbursement is based on the child's individual needs. The reimbursement is reviewed annually and therefore subject to change. The reimbursement is not considered to be a payment and, as such, is not treated as income by Centrelink or for taxation purposes. You would need to already have sufficient income to meet your own basic needs to become a foster carer.

Who else is involved in the foster care partnership?

A care team consisting of the foster carers (long term or respite), UnitingCare West's Futures Foster Care service staff, and Department for Child Protection and Family Support case managers meet on a regular basis to ensure that the child, and their carer, are receiving the support they need. This is called the 'care partnership'.

Children in care living with complex needs also have many others involved in their care, such as schools, medical specialists, therapists (eg physio, occupational, speech), psychologists, counsellors, and behaviour management teams. As a foster carer, you would need to be able to work collaboratively with a vast array of professionals and service providers in a way that promotes the best interests of the child in care.

For more information go to; 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #3', and 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

Will I have direct contact with the child's biological parents?

Maybe. You might have direct contact with the child or young person's biological family. The nature of the contact will depend on the circumstances surrounding the child's going into care and your ability and capacity to support the contact. Any decisions around initiating and maintaining family contact is guided by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support as the child's legal guardian. Many of our primary carers have developed positive relationships with the biological families of children and young people in their care and this is hugely beneficial for all involved, especially the children and young people themselves.



What makes a good carer?

Being a foster carer (respite or long term) for a child or young person with high care needs is both rewarding and challenging. Foster carers need to be able to consistently meet the simple and complex needs of the child or young person in their care.

Good foster carers tend to be people who are patient, resilient, flexible, self-aware, compassionate, caring, strengths focused, able to work as part of a care team, committed, and able to develop own skills and knowledge. Foster carers also benefit from having a good sense of humour.

Good foster carers also have an ability to respond therapeutically to promote healing, which can be obtained through training and ongoing support.

For more information go to; 'About Fostering Fact Sheet #1', 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #3', and 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

Why should I foster through UnitingCare West?

We are an inclusive organisation and welcome foster carers from all backgrounds, cultures and experiences. We work with people and communities so those most in need can belong and thrive.

Our extensive foster care experience means we understand the needs of our foster carers and the importance of providing both practical help and professional support. Each foster carer works closely with an experienced case worker. We offer ongoing training to our foster carers to help develop skills.

We provide 24 hour support, seven days a week including an after-hours service for emergency situations.

Peer support is available through the Futures Carer Advisory Group and our community of foster carers.

For more information go to; 'About Fostering Fact Sheet #1', 'Becoming a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #2', 'Roles and Responsibilities of a Foster Carer Fact Sheet #3', and 'How we Support You Fact Sheet #4'.

Do you have any tips on discussing becoming a foster carer with my family and friends?

We know that it is important to have the support of family and friends when you are considering becoming a foster carer. Your family and friends may be highly supportive or they might have some concerns. Here are a few tips which may help you:

- Listen to their concerns, and be willing to consider them.
- Ask questions about their concerns, and listen to their reasons given.
- Accept their right to have concerns.
- Give them time and space to consider the idea.
- Share further information when they are ready.
- Speak to other foster carers or a Futures case worker about the concerns and how you might be able to address those concerns

For further information on the process for becoming a foster carer with UnitingCare West go to the 'Foster Carer Application and Assessment Process Flowchart'.

Are YOU ready to become a foster carer with UnitingCare West?

To find out more about the assessment process, please refer to the Fact Sheet 'Becoming a Foster Carer' or for more information, contact the Futures Foster Care service on 08 6279 1800 or email futures@unitingcarewest.org.au

www.unitingcarewest.org.au