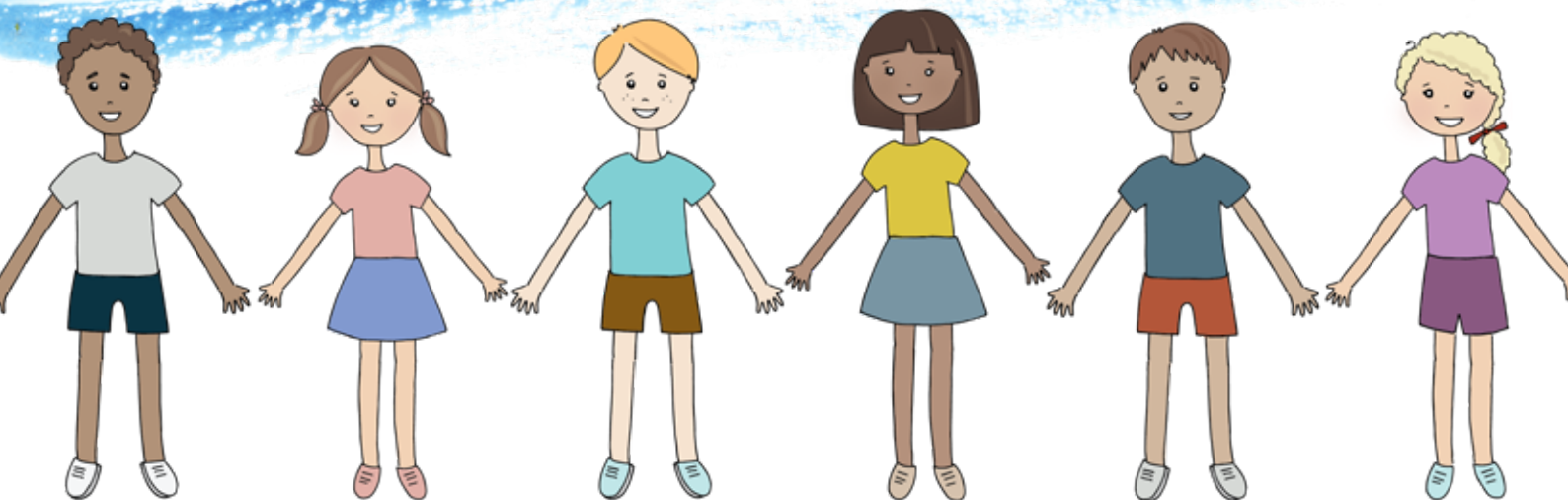


Country Foster Care

Help for your foster care journey



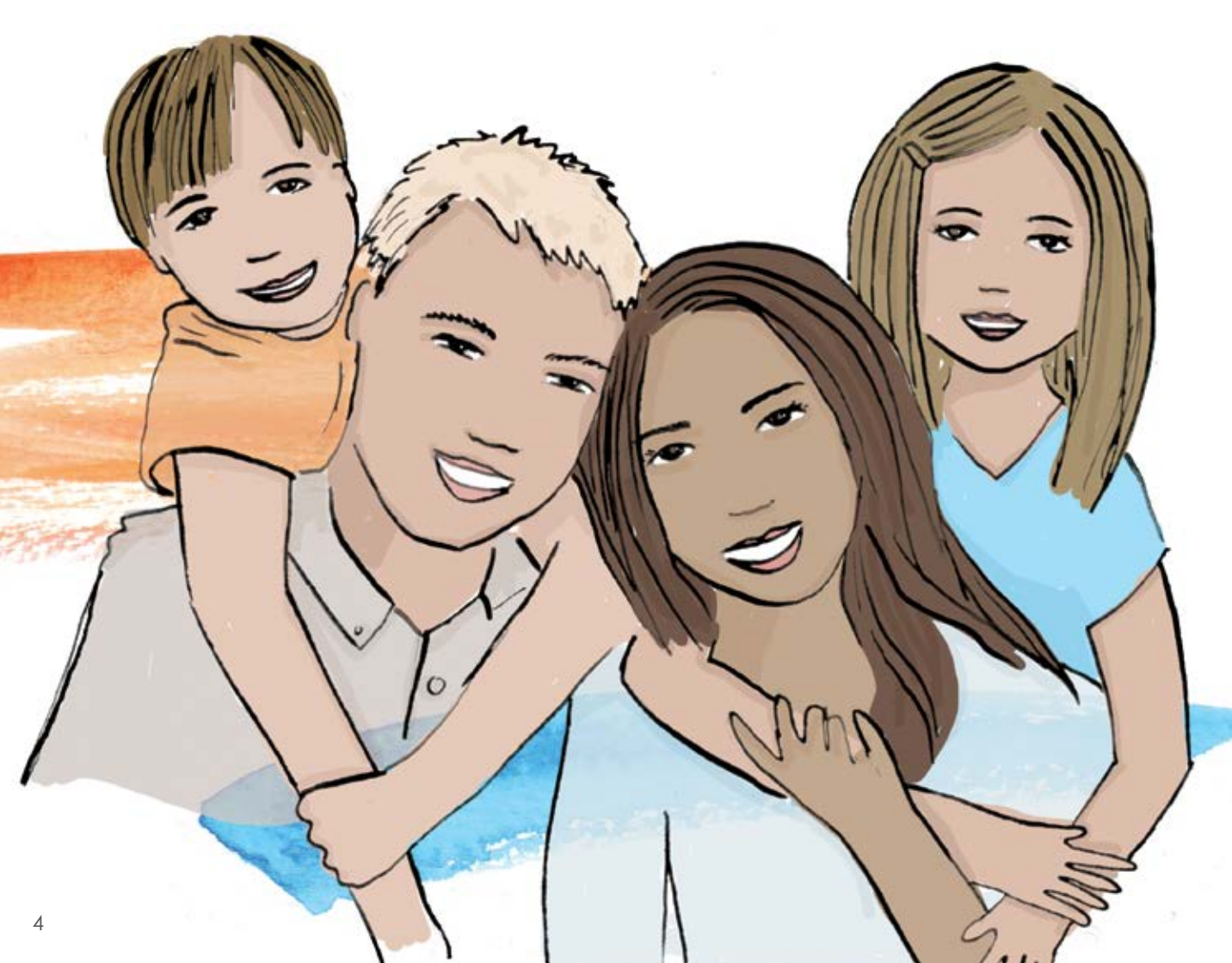
Thank you for your interest in
becoming a country foster
carer with ac.care

Anglican Community Care Inc
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ac.care started in 1986 because there was no foster care service for teenagers in Mount Gambier. It was through the care and passion of local community members who advocated and fundraised, that they achieved a government funded service. This meant young people could stay living in their community.

Since this time and into the future, we focus on quality care for children and young people when recruiting foster carers. We do not make judgements based on race, religion, marital status, gender or sexuality.

We are proud of you and your family wanting to be foster carers and appreciate your compassion and drive to give children high quality homes filled with love. We are also proud of your ability to adapt to the ever changing system that is out of home care and to be able to adjust to new legislation, such as the Children and Young People (Safety) Act 2017. Change is the constant when we work and volunteer in the child protection system because we need to constantly seek ways to improve, be flexible and always look for the best outcomes for children. Our role at ac.care is to support you in your care of these children and we will always be looking at ways to improve our support to you.

Recently, we have started to provide carer profiles for children to see prior to being placed. This means children are now able to start to become familiar with their new placement before they arrive. This new initiative demonstrates a great child focused commitment by carers and ac.care.

I look forward to meeting you and thank you for caring for children and young people in our country communities.

Yours sincerely,



Shane Maddocks, CEO



About ac.care



ac.care is a non-government organisation (NGO) with charitable status, started by country people in 1986 because there was no teenage foster care service in Mount Gambier, South Australia.

Today we provide community services to the South Australian country communities of the Adelaide Hills, Limestone Coast, Murraylands and Riverland.

The work of ac.care includes:

- Aboriginal services
- Community Centres in Millicent and Mount Gambier
- Emergency Relief
- Family Relationship Centre in Mount Gambier
- Family support/counselling services
- Financial counselling/low interest loans
- Foster care recruitment and support
- Therapeutic Strength Based Care homes for children and young people who are waiting for foster care placements

We work in our communities and with each other to these values

- Compassion
- Adaptability
- Relationships
- Excellence



What is foster care?



An opportunity for children and young people, who can no longer live at home with their parents or families, to live in a safe, nurturing and stable environment.

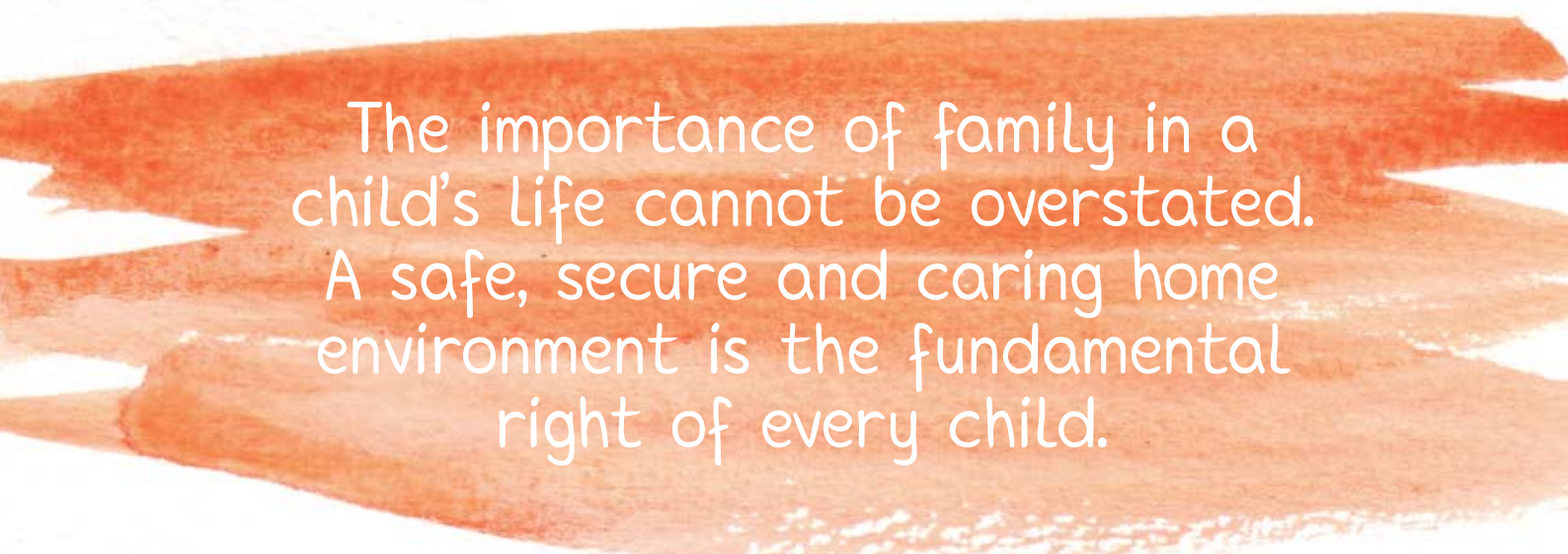
When family difficulties arise every effort is made by government and agencies to support and maintain a child within their biological family. There are, however, times when remaining with their biological family places the child at risk of emotional and/or physical harm. It is then that out of home care becomes necessary.

Out of home care, also known as foster care, is the support and guidance of a child, children and adolescents in a caring family environment. Each caregiver is trained and approved to offer foster care. This form of care is provided for all ages from infancy to 18 years.

Foster care is necessary when a child or adolescent needs protection from abuse or neglect within their own home or surroundings.

Great care is taken to ensure an appropriate match of child to family. Each child has different needs and every family has something different to offer. When a decision to place a child is made the social workers, carers, child and family (if possible) get together to discuss and agree upon a plan for everyone involved. This is to give the maximum opportunity for a successful placement.

The child or adolescent is represented and supported by a Department for Child Protection (DCP) case manager who may be involved in helping the child's biological family to overcome difficult circumstances. Foster carers are supported by ac.care.



The importance of family in a
child's life cannot be overstated.
A safe, secure and caring home
environment is the fundamental
right of every child.

Types of care

There are four types of foster care. Carers may be registered with ac.care for one or more care types, depending on their preference or capacity to care.

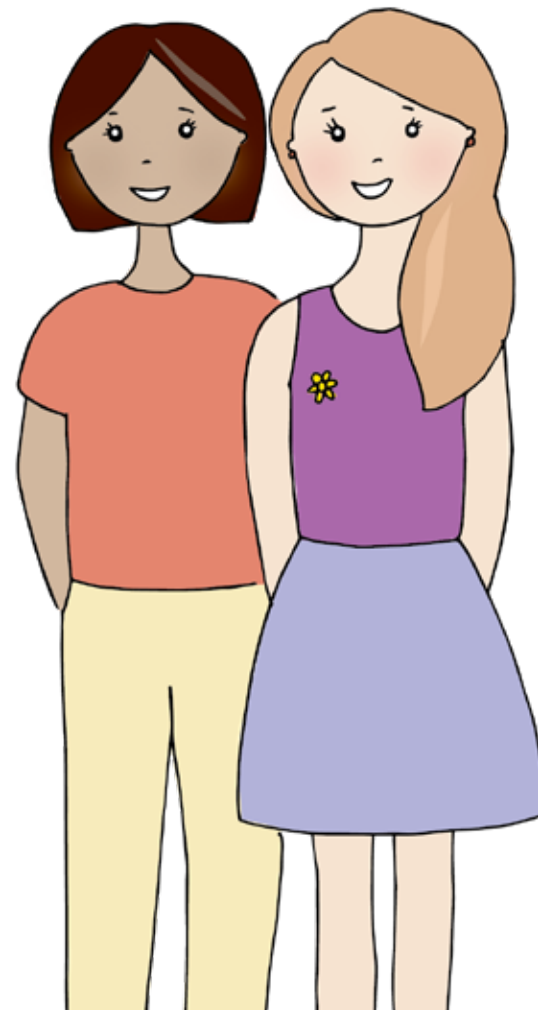
1. Emergency Foster Care

Emergency foster care occurs when placements are arranged as a result of a family emergency or crisis. The placement may last from one night to a maximum of seven nights and is provided on a 24-hour, seven days a week basis for all age groups - ie, from infants to teenagers up to 18 years of age.

There are many reasons for emergency care including family conflict, child/ren subjected to physical and/or sexual abuse or neglect, parents being hospitalised through injury or illness.

Emergency foster care is a resource that works towards preventing complete family breakdown. It provides relief to children and parents from stressful situations at home. It allows social workers time to assess the situation at home.

Children in emergency care may return to their biological family. If not, children will be placed in short-term care. The emergency carer may be asked if they would be prepared to continue the placement. Carers always have the right to say 'no'.



2. Short Term Care

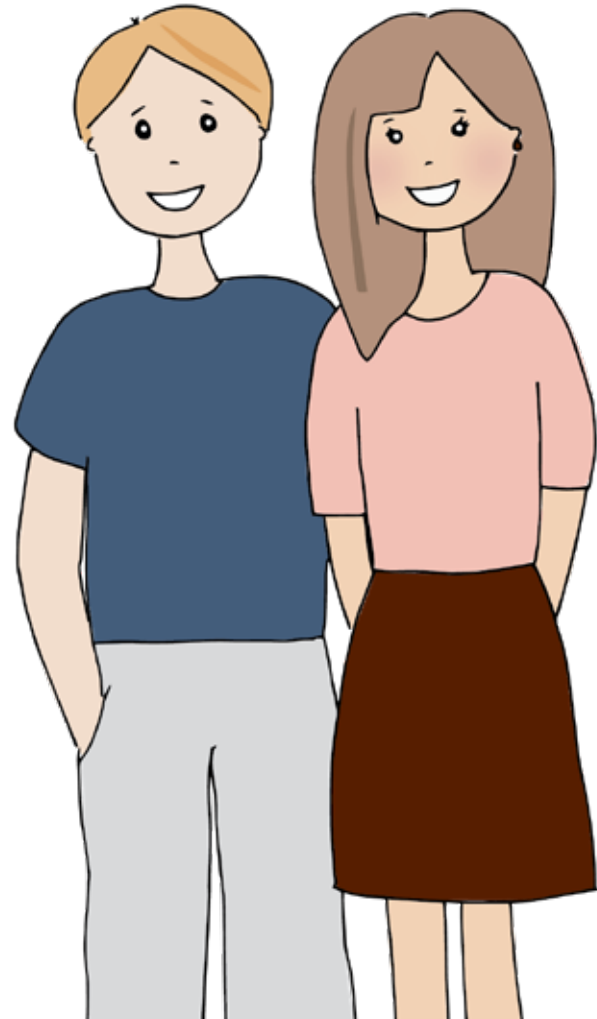
This occurs when placements continue on from an emergency foster care placement and may extend for 12 months. The prospect of the child being reunified with their biological family during this period is assessed. Foster carers are encouraged to assist in the process.

3. Long-term Care

When it is unlikely that a child will return to their biological parents they are placed in long term care. Long-term placements generally involve a clear decision to cease working toward reunification with the child's biological family. The goal of long term care is to ensure a stable, secure and happy family environment for the child. Connection with the birth family, where possible, is also included in the goal.

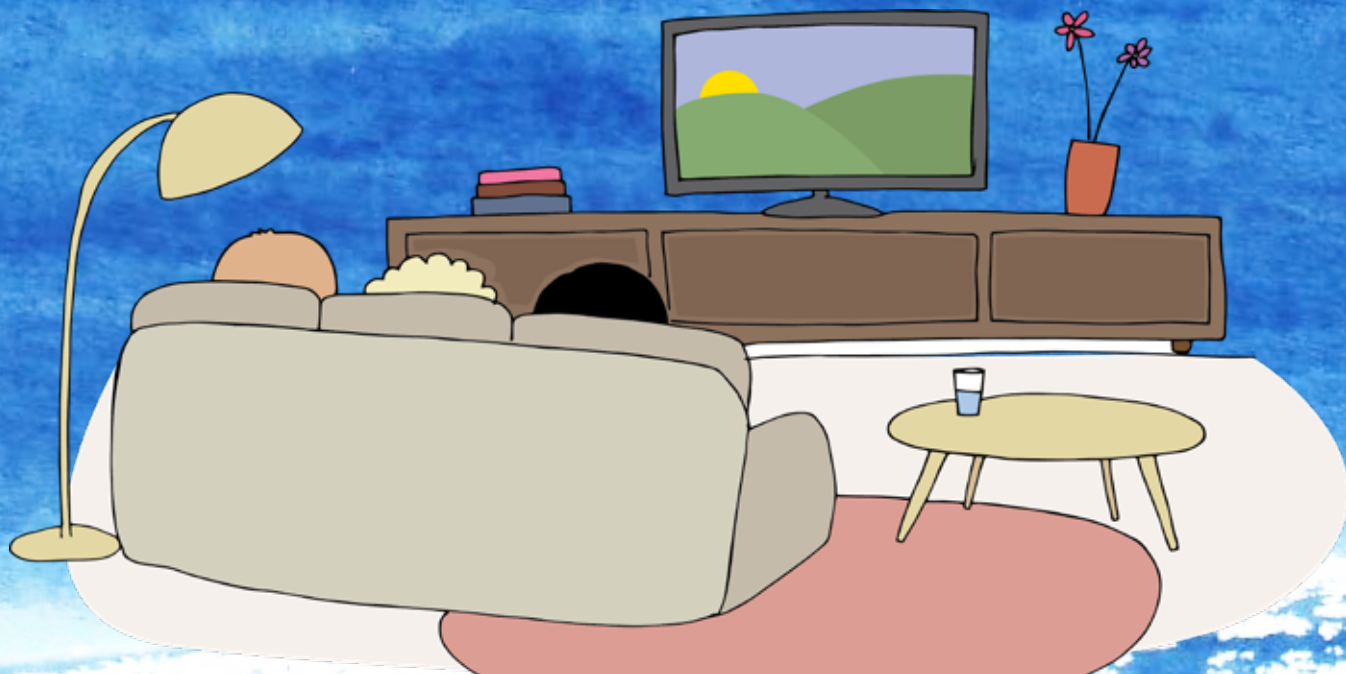
4. Respite Care

Respite is the care of children being cared for by short-term or long-term carers, providing weekend, school holiday or long weekend respite for carers. Respite care also provides short-term care for children in families involved in the Reunification Service.



“To see the child respond to the structure and stable life I provided made it worthwhile for me.”

- Foster Carer from the Limestone Coast.



Take time to ask yourself...



Take some time to consider these qualities before you decide to embark on the journey to become a foster carer.

- Can I understand that looking after children from another family is different from caring for my own children?
- Am I flexible, patient and co-operative with government departmental procedures and could I accept decisions and actions that I do not agree with?
- Could I appreciate that fostering a child may impact on all members of my family in different ways?
- Can I accept that children may take time to respond to the care I offer?
- Do I understand a child may reject me or strongly disagree with my ideas, views or feelings?
- Can I understand that children may lie, steal or display sexualised behaviour?
- Can I deal with anger from children?
- Do I have a good sense of humour?
- Will my marriage, partnership, family and support network understand my commitment to foster caring?
- Can I reach out to others for support when I need it? ac.care offers 24 hour 7 days a week access to foster care support staff.
- Will I be able to accept that connections with birth families will be retained where possible?
- Can I accept that things in my house may be moved, stolen, broken or untidy?
- Am I able to accept limitations on myself and others?
- Do I respect what children and young people offer our society?
- Do I understand that I will not be the children's legal guardian?
- Will I advocate for a child?

How ac.care supports carers



24 hours a day | 7 days a week | 365 days a year

Foster care is about the children. To provide the best possible care for the children, foster carers need support from time-to-time.

ac.care considers our support services as flexible and comprehensive, with the ability to adapt to the needs of foster carers, children and young people.

ac.care's support for foster carers includes:

- Access to ac.care's Out of Home Care (Foster Care) team, available to foster carers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Consultation with a qualified and experienced ac.care social worker.
- Regular visits and contact from your ac.care placement support worker.
- Opportunity to meet, in a group setting, with a clinical psychologist.
- Support group gatherings and meetings.
- Experienced help with children and teens who present challenging behaviours.
- Social activities organised for foster carers and children.
- Comprehensive training.
- Support in negotiations with schools regarding educational needs for children or teens.
- Support with communication between you and government departments or other agencies.




“Never believe that a few caring people can’t change the world for, indeed, that’s all who ever have.” -

Margaret Mead



The journey to become a foster carer



As a registered ac.care foster carer you have a unique opportunity to make a difference in a young person's life.

It can be a long road with twists and turns before you reach your final destination, because the welfare of vulnerable children and teenagers is paramount and remains the focus at all times.

Flowchart of assessment process for foster carers.

Contact: You contact ac.care and we will record your enquiry.



Information Packs: ac.care sends you an "Information Pack for Potential Foster Carers".



Registration of Interest: You register your interest in becoming a carer by using the "Registration of Interest" form.



Information Exchange: You participate in an "Information Exchange Session" with members of your household, facilitated by ac.care.



Carer Application: You complete an "Application to become a foster carer" form.



Assessment Activities

Safety Checks

- Home safety check
- Health checks
- Referee check
- Agency check (*if applicable*)
- Working with Children Check (*DCSI Child-related employment screening clearance*)

Pre-Approval Training

- Shared Lives, Shared Stories
- Child Save Environments
- First Aid
- Infant Safe Care

Assessment Sessions

- Attitudes and connections
- Personal resilience
- Child focused nurture
- Working with others

Conversation with your children

Conversation with members of your support network

Assessment Report: An assessment report with ac.care's recommendations is submitted to the Department for Child Protection for consideration.



Review and Background Checks: The Department for Child Protection will review the assessment report and conduct child protection history checks on relevant members of your network.



Decision: The Department for Child Protection makes a decision regarding the approval or non-approval of your application, and may ask for additional information to inform that decision.



Notification of Decision: ac.care will be notified of the Department for Child Protection's decision and will provide you with the decision in writing.



Matching: When a carer household is approved, ac.care begins discussions about arranging a suitable placement of a child/ren with your family.



On-going Training: ac.care provides on-going training.



On-going Support and Review: ac.care provides on-going carer support and conducts a review of your approval annually.



Common questions answered



Why does it take time to be approved as a foster carer?

The care and protection of children cannot be taken lightly. ac.care need to build a complete picture of the prospective carer family. Time is also required to allow families to totally commit to the decision. Often families reconsider throughout the process. Each phase of the process presents new challenges which, when fully digested, can test the potential carer's resolve to be a foster carer.

Without foster carers where do the children go?

Prior to considering foster care, extended family placements are investigated. Where no foster placement is available or possible, children may reside in Residential Care facilities, staffed by trained workers. In extreme cases children have been placed in commercial care, where rotating shift workers reside with children in hotels, bed and breakfasts or caravan parks.

Can I adopt a foster child?

No, however, some carers with long-term placements can be approved as Other Person Guardians. Each case is assessed by the DCP to ensure what is best for the child.

Can the biological family come to my home?

Not without the carer's approval. Although rare, any breaches need to be reported to the DCP case manager or Crisis Care (phone 131 611 after hours). Biological parents, particularly those who are participating in a reunification process, will generally abide by DCP procedures.

Can I stay in touch with the foster child when they leave our home?

Only when a prior arrangement between the child/young person, DCP and the carer has been made. Once a child has turned 18 they make that decision themselves.

Can I choose the children placed in my care?

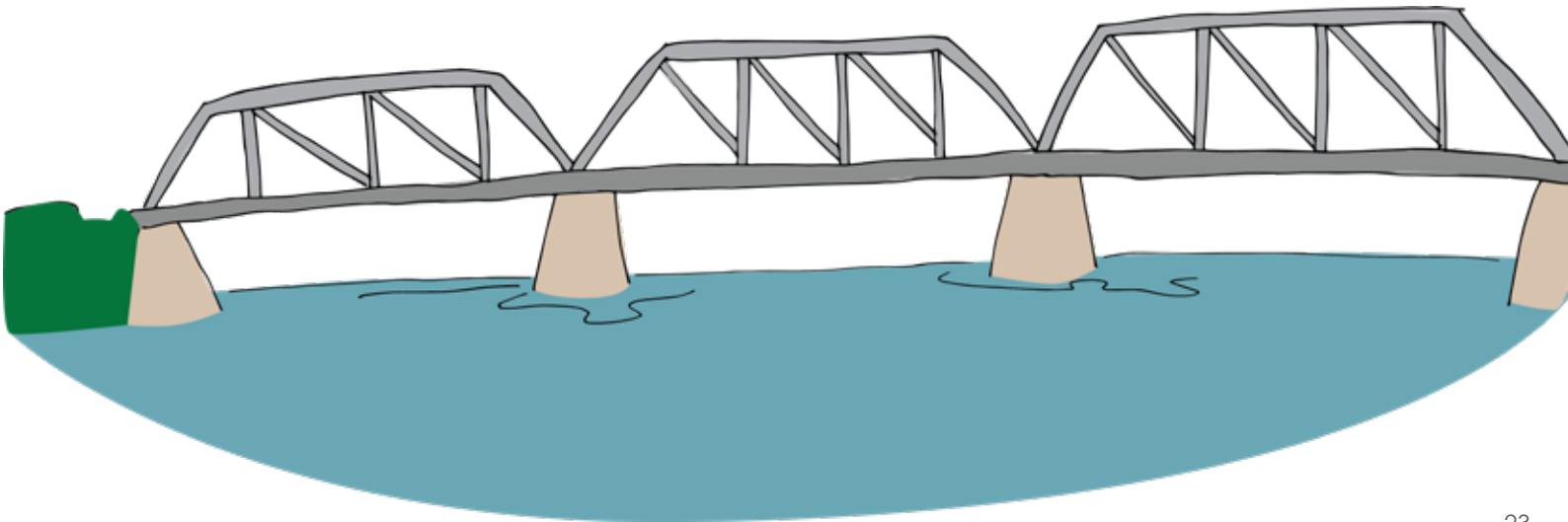
ac.care will contact carers and advise that a placement is available. Carers have the right to accept or not accept the placement. All available information about the child will be provided to the carer about the child. Carers can choose how regularly they wish to take on placements. Carers can specify their preference for age, gender, cultural group or placement type.

Will I receive a wage if I am a Foster Carer with ac.care?

No. Foster caring is a voluntary commitment. In our experience carers get involved in fostering because they receive joy and satisfaction from being able to provide a caring, safe environment for children to grow.

A non-taxable fortnightly allowance is payable to families caring for a child. Carers can also claim family tax benefits for the children in their care, subject to a means test. If carers are receiving unemployment benefits or a pension, the child can also be claimed as a dependent.

“Fostering a child is one of the most rewarding things you could possibly do”
Long term foster carer from the Murraylands.



What to do next?



If you would like to take the next step
towards becoming a foster carer with
ac.care, please contact us at:

Limestone Coast

Mount Gambier
Phone 08 8724 9211

Riverland

Berri
Phone 08 8582 2344

Adelaide Hills & Murray Mallee

Murray Bridge
Phone 08 8532 6303

email: care@accare.org.au
www.accare.org.au





ac.care

opportunities for life ... for country people
est. 1986

For more information please contact ac.care

www.accare.org.au

08 8724 9211

70-72 White Avenue

Mount Gambier, South Australia

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