

A young child with curly hair is smiling broadly, looking upwards and to the right. They are wearing a white collared shirt. An adult's hands are visible, gently holding the child's hands. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery.

CARE

with

foster
care

Information for
potential carers

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What is

foster care?

More than 350 new foster families are needed across NSW each year for children and young people who do not have a permanent home. If there was ever a time to start caring, this is it.

CareSouth needs local families and individuals to become emergency, respite or restoration carers. We need people who can build trusting relationships with families and work alongside us to return children and young people home safely. We also need families and individuals who are interested in fostering to adopt children or young people in their care.

CareSouth carers are everyday people from all walks of life. They are young couples, couples who identify as LGBTIQA+, single people, have children or young people of their own, or are retired.

If you are responsible, warm-hearted and patient, you can make a positive difference for a short time or a lifetime. We provide training, ongoing 24/7 support and a tax-free allowance, to help you support those who need it most.

We hope you find the information in this booklet useful. Our team is ready to answer all your questions on **1300 554 260** or you can drop into one of our local offices.

Join the CareSouth family and show how much you care.

Why choose CareSouth?

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, frequent chances to meet up with other foster carers, clinical services, and a tax-free allowance.

Based in Southern and Western NSW, and completely not-for-profit, CareSouth is a progressive, bold and innovative regional 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 achieve this by being a team of carers, caseworkers and professional clinicians (psychologists, speech pathologists, nurses, and occupational therapists), and offer a range of community initiatives through our hub spaces.

We work collaboratively with the Department of Communities and Justice and other important community stakeholders.

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

Our footprint

CareSouth offers services in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Eurobodalla, Southern Tablelands and Western NSW.



What types of care are there?



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 and young people to strong carer families who can provide short or long-term care to help them and their families turn their lives around. Every child or young person is carefully matched to a suitable family.

There are many different types of care needed.

Emergency Care is needed when there are concerns for a child's or young person's immediate safety.

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. It is usually planned in advance.

Long-term 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. During this time, we may work with families to restore a child or young person to their parents or extended family where possible and safe to do so.

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 when they cannot live with their parents. This care is provided by someone who has an established positive relationship with the child or young person. They will have legal responsibility until 18 years old.

Adoption is a way of providing a forever family for a child or young person who can not be restored to their parents or live with a relative or kinship carer. This is always 'open adoption' and involves supporting children and young people to remain connected to their family and cultural heritage.

Our team is ready to answer all your questions to help you to decide the right option for you and your family.



Caring for tweens and teenagers

There is a huge need for carers for children and young people from 8-18 years of age. While 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 an older child or young person is often more of a mentoring role; you can engage with them in shared interests and activities that provide a positive experience and learning opportunities. The compassion you show and how you advocate for a teen at school, in sport and in 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

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

Give us a call after you have read the info pack.

3 First Visit

We will arrange a time for us to come and see you at your home.

4 Information Session

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

5 Carer Application

You complete our carer application form and the required checks.

the process?

1 Training

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

2 Assessment

Checks are done on your health, home, background, and personal references.

3 Decision

We support you with the most suitable type of care and match for your family.

4 Joining Your Family

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

5 Ongoing Training & Support

You will be supported and provided with tailored training to meet the individual child's 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 their needs 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 or young person's physical and emotional needs. Other important responsibilities include:

- Working as a team – a child or young person has the best chance of having their 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 or young person'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 family, where appropriate
- Displaying a non-judgemental attitude, having respect and understanding towards the child or young person's 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 or young person's progress
- Gathering material for the child's Life Story Work and helping them to keep it up-to-date
- Reporting incidents as required
- Following the Code of Conduct and Carer Agreement
- Attending monthly caseworker visits
- Supporting gender/sexual identity
- Participating in annual placement reviews.





Support for our carers

Our commitment to you

At CareSouth, we value our carers as team members. We are committed to supporting our carers and their families in several ways including:

- Regular contact with a consistent, experienced and skilled caseworker
- Timely and responsive support
- 24/7 on-call service
- Carer views and opinions listened to and taken seriously by staff
- Including carers in case discussions 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
- Clinical services, including psychology
- Respite for carer families
- Concerns and complaints dealt with in a timely and effective manner.

Education and training can help you understand what is 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 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 family.

All carer applicants are required to complete the 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 and young people 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 and young person development, caring for a person with disability, managing challenging behaviour, supporting birth families with family time, maintaining a child's or young person's culture, Life Story Work, meeting educational needs of children and young people, and managing contact between children or young people in care and members of their families.

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

Carer allowance

Foster, Relative and Kinship carers are volunteers. However, there are a number of allowances and payments available to help you ensure a safe and comfortable home for the child or young person 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 do not 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 or young person'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's or young person's needs. If you need more specific information about the amount you can expect to receive to cover a child's 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 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 a predictable environment, 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 certain behaviours. 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 a lot 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 family. Acknowledging a child's and young person'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.

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 or young people 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.

Carer assessment

FAQs

Will I have to do tests?

Conversations take 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 for more details about your life.

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. It is recommended that each carer has Home and Contents Insurance along with Comprehensive Motor Vehicle Insurance. You may find it helpful to chat to your insurance company about your existing policy.

Who should our references cover?

You will be asked to provide the names of two unrelated people you have known for at least two years who can comment on your experience and ability to care for children or young people, 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 16 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.

Checklist

Is caring for a child or young person right for you?

- ✓ 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 the 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 have 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.



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What's next?

You may have thought about fostering for some time. Our team is ready to answer all your questions on **1300 554 260**.