

9.1 General Foster Carer Assessment

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Policy

Foster Care Partnership Policy 2012

Policy - Employees of the Department as foster carers for children in the care of the CEO 2012

Policy - Management of Swimming Pools and Other Bodies of Water for Foster Carers 2012

Purpose

To guide child protection workers in the roles and processes involved for the assessment of a person who is interested in becoming a general foster carer.

Legislative Authority

[Children and Community Services Act 2004 - Section 79 Power of the CEO to arrange placement](#)

[Children and Community Services Act 2004 - Section 82 Payment for care under a placement arrangement](#)

[Children and Community Services Regulations 2006 - Regulation 4 Approval of carers](#)

Standards

[Better Care, Better Services - Standards for Children and Young People in Protection and Care](#)

Practice Requirements

- A child must not be placed with a general foster carer until they have been approved under Regulation 4 of the Children and Community Services Regulations 2006.
- A person who applies to become a general foster carer is assessed against five competencies under the Regulations. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) must be satisfied that the individual:
 - is able to provide care for a child in a way that promotes the wellbeing of the child, promotes the child's family and interpersonal relationships, and protects the child from harm
 - is able to provide a safe living environment for a child
 - is able to work cooperatively with officers, a child's family and other people when providing care for a child
 - is able to take responsibility for the development of his or her competency and skills as a carer
 - is a person of good character and repute.
- The assessor must make a recommendation regarding: the age range of children they will care for; care type - emergency, respite, short term, long term or for a specific child; maximum capacity of children to be cared for; and whether they can care for children with physical and/or intellectual disabilities.
- Once a foster carer has been approved, the senior child protection worker placement services (SCPWPS) or the child protection worker must ensure that the Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement is discussed and signed by the foster carer and the worker prior to a child being placed.
- If the Department is aware of any person having been charged with, or convicted of, a [Schedule 1 or 2 offence](#), or any other offence that the Department assesses as inappropriate for them to carry out child-related work, the Screening Unit must be notified. The Screening Unit must then notify the Working with Children Unit. While this is a general provision, it must also be observed in department casework practice with foster carers and department employees, including any charges or convictions relating to abuse in care.
- Where the case management for a child in the CEO's care is transferred to another district, the foster carer (and associated files) must also be transferred to the receiving district.

Process Map

Child protection workers may wish to refer to the General Foster Carer Assessment Process flowchart available in Related Resources.

Procedures

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Fostering is an arrangement where a family or an individual cares for other people's children in their own home. Foster carers are volunteers who are willing and able to open their homes and include these children as part of their family. The children generally keep in touch with their birth parent(s), brothers, sisters and other family members. Age can range from 0-17 years. All children in foster care are in the care of the CEO of the Department.

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A prospective foster carer (state-wide) may request an information pack through the Department's website, via telephone or mail, or by attending an information evening. Information evenings in the metropolitan area are advertised on the Department's website. They are held on a monthly basis, or may be more frequent. Information sessions are held periodically in some country districts.

An information pack is sent out to all people enquiring about fostering. The pack includes information about fostering and an Expression of Interest form. Potential applicants are asked to complete the Expression of Interest form and return it to Fostering and Adoption Services.

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The Expression of Interest form is examined by an assessor from Fostering and Adoption Services. The assessor will telephone the person to discuss their interest in fostering. If appropriate, the assessor will arrange a home visit if the person resides in the metropolitan area.

The home visit is an introductory meeting to begin the assessment process and to provide information to the interested person about fostering. Any interested person is entitled to lodge an application. The assessor will complete the Practical Checklist (Form 715), the Initial Home Visit or Phone Contact form (Form 247), and discuss the screening and assessment processes. It is helpful if the assessor sights the person's identification documents and witnesses his/her signature in the Record Check Consent Form (Form 395) at this initial home visit.

If the person lives outside the metropolitan area, the assessor will complete the interview by telephone using the Initial Home Visit or Phone Contact form (Form 247) and Practical Checklist (Form 715).

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An application package is left with the interested person at the home visit. If the person lives outside the metropolitan area, the forms are posted to them to be completed and returned to Fostering and Adoption Services.

The package includes the following:

- Form 719 - Foster Carer Application (one form per applicant)
- Form 395 - Record Check Consent (for each adult household member)
- Form 711 - Authority to Release Medical Information (one form per applicant)
- Form 718 - Foster Carer Applicant's Health Questionnaire (per couple).

The person submits these forms to Fostering and Adoption Services if they choose to proceed with their application.

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Once the application is received, Fostering and Adoption Services will send out a standard letter to the person acknowledging receipt of the application and other documentation.

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5. Health assessment

After the application forms have been received, Fostering and Adoption Services will request a medical report from the applicant's medical practitioner.

This information is reviewed by the assessment team before further assessment commences. Any information of concern is discussed with the medical practitioner and with the applicant if the medical practitioner agrees to this.

The applicants' capacity to foster with the identified health issues is determined by the assessor after consideration of the information provided by the medical practitioner. Further medical advice, including specialist reports, can be obtained if necessary to make this decision.

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6. An assessor is allocated

An assessor from Fostering and Adoptions will be allocated to undertake the assessment. The assessor will open a 'Manage Carer' in Assist.

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7. Screening

The Department's Screening Unit is responsible for screening all prospective general foster carers. The applicant(s) and any other adults that live in the home must have completed a Form 395 - Record Check Consent. Children 10 years of age and above that live with the applicant(s) should be listed in the applicant(s) Form 395 - Record Check Consent as a household member.

Criminal and department screening is completed once the Form 395 - Record Check Consent has been submitted. Any adverse information is discussed with the authorised officer. This information can be discussed in a general manner with the applicant(s) but it cannot be disclosed to any other party.

If the applicant already has a WWC card, the details and a copy of the card need to be submitted to the Screening Unit.

In exceptional circumstances, an Executive Director can determine approval for engagement of an applicant prior to an advice letter being issued by the Screening Unit. A submission should be provided which must include an accurate summary of the applicant's criminal record history including offence, conviction date, penalty and spent conviction status (if relevant). The submission must also outline any mitigating circumstances, such as any relevant change in lifestyle and/or personal circumstance since the time of the offence that indicate a positive change in behaviour and support the engagement of the applicant as a general foster carer with the Department.

The draft submission needs to be forwarded to the Coordinator, Screening Unit prior to submission to the Executive Director in order to ensure accuracy of criminal history information details.

Referees

The assessor will contact a range of referees to obtain a clear picture about the applicant, particularly covering their child rearing years if applicable. At least two referees should be contacted for a single applicant and up to six referees for a couple. The number of referees contacted will depend on the need to clarify specific issues and on the quality of the information provided. The assessor should ensure the applicant selects a range of people including family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours etc. At least one referee should be unrelated to the applicant.

A telephone interview will take place using Form 416 Referee Questionnaire for Foster Carer Applicants. The referees will be asked to provide evidence to support the applicant's ability to meet the competencies as set out in the Regulations. Wherever possible this information is confidential, however this cannot be guaranteed due to Freedom of Information legislation.

The assessor will need to contact all adult children connected to the applicant(s). However, if there are numerous, then the assessor is required to use their judgement as to how many need to be contacted if the reports from several are positive.

If additional support or advice is required, the assessor should contact Fostering and Adoption Services. If the applicant is currently working in, or has previously worked in any child related field,

then a supervisor or employer should be contacted.

Working with Children Check

The applicant must apply for a WWC card when it has been determined that they are likely to be approved as a foster carer. In the case of a couple, both will require a WWC card. This is at the last stage of assessment, and before the applicant is recommended by the General Foster Care Assessment Panel.

The assessor must ensure that the WWC application form has been signed by an officer from the Department (Level 5 or above) and provided to the applicant(s) to lodge at an Australia Post Outlet. Note: Section 6 of the WWC application form must be completed.

Other adult household members who will commonly or regularly provide care for or undertake activities with the child in care are considered under the Working with Children (Criminal Record Checking) Act 2004 (WWC Act) to be 'employed' by the Department in child-related work. Examples include looking after the child while the carer is not at home, transporting the child to school or activities, or assisting the child with activities. These adult household members will require a WWC Check if the applicant is to be recommended as a carer.

As part of the carer assessment process, the 'duties' of other household members (what they will be doing with the child) must be clarified. The assessor will need to explore with each adult household member their proposed involvement in providing care for the child. If they will not be providing any care or support to the child, this needs to be recorded in the assessment.

Adult household members that will not be caring for, supervising or undertaking other activities with the child do not require WWC Checks, but still require Criminal and Client and Child Protection checks through the Department's Screening Unit.

A negative notice will preclude an applicant from being approved as a general foster carer.

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8. Stage One assessment – country applicants

A Stage One assessment is completed for country applicants when all application forms, medical reports and referee reports have been completed. Form 395 Record Check Consent is submitted to the Department's Screening Unit. All information is summarised and a report is sent to the relevant country office.

The assessment process will involve gathering evidence to support the prospective foster carer to demonstrate their ability to meet the five competencies set out in the Children and Community Services Regulations 2006.

The number of meetings will vary depending on issues and circumstances that arise. The assessment is competency based and relies on the quality of evidence obtained for the assessment. The goal is to obtain sufficient evidence to determine the applicant has met the competencies.

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9. Preparation training

For all metropolitan applicants, completion of Fostering with Skill and Care (preparation training for prospective carers) is a mandatory requirement. Training will provide further opportunities for applicants to demonstrate their competence. Applicants will complete a participant workbook and attend 19 hours of workshops.

Country districts will provide training using a similar working guide called Fostering with Skill and Care.

Refer to the Foster Carer Training resource document.

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10. Report and recommendation of the assessor

The assessor will complete a report, which outlines the applicant's evidence supporting their competence, and makes a recommendation.

The report is completed using Form 414 General Foster Carer Assessment Report – and should be 25 pages or less using Arial Font size 11. Exceptions can be made where the applicant is not recommended or the assessment is particularly complex.

The assessor should provide substantial evidence for each of the five competencies within the assessment as outlined in the General Carer Assessment Manual (resource document). The report should include analysis of each competency and any relevant issues including the steps the applicant has made to address the issue and evidence of the applicant's degree of insight.

The assessor will need to ensure that the applicant has read the report, including the recommendation (with confidential material excluded), before it is presented to the Foster Care Assessment Panel (the Panel). The applicant can discuss any issues with the assessor and correct misunderstandings. The assessor is required to give a professional opinion regarding their suitability to foster, which may be in conflict with the applicant's view.

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11. Foster Care Assessment Panel

The assessor will forward a copy of the completed report to the Panel. A copy is also provided to the relevant district senior child protection worker placement services (SCPWPS).

The Panel will make their recommendation and forward it to the Director, Fostering and Adoption Services or to the relevant country district director. The director will make the decision regarding the applicant's approval and this is recorded in the 'Manage Carer' component in assist.

For further detail on the Panel process, refer to Chapter 9: General Foster Care Assessment Panel and Approval Process.

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12. Informing the applicant of the decision

The applicant is advised of the decision verbally by the assessor and then in writing by the Director, Fostering and Adoption Services or the country district director.

If the applicant is approved as a general foster carer, Form 293 Certificate of Approval will be provided.

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13. Handover visit

The assessor and the SCPWPS should conduct a handover visit with the foster carer as soon as practical. At the visit, the assessor and the SCPWPS should discuss the foster carer's role and the support networks available to them, such as a "buddy".

The foster carer will be provided with the Resources for Foster Carer File, which includes a number of resources such as the Foster Care Placement Partnership Agreement. The agreement should be discussed and completed with the foster carer along with any issues identified by the Panel, such as further training requirements.

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