

**Information:**

For further information and an introductory kit on becoming a foster carer, go to:

[www.fosterabrighterfuture.com.au](http://www.fosterabrighterfuture.com.au) or call the

**Foster Care Hotline on 1800 013 088**

**Recruitment:**

Each Community Service Organisation (CSO) recruits caregivers directly, using a range of recruitment strategies to raise awareness of their need for foster carers. Additionally, the Department of Human Services (DHS) funds the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare to raise community interest in foster care and recruit carers through the Foster Care Project. This project provides a 24-hour foster care recruitment hotline (refer above) that provides general information on foster care and refers people to their local CSO.

**Legislative Requirements:**

Prospective caregivers must have a satisfactory police check, and are required to obtain a free 'Working with Children' check that includes a criminal records check for offences involving children. Working with Children checks must be renewed every 5 years. (Refer also: Working with Children Check Fact Sheet).

**Training & Assessment:**

All potential home based caregivers are required to undergo assessment and attend pre-service training to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide high quality care to the children and young people they look after. Training is provided by the CSO which:

- Is responsible for the approval of people as caregivers
- Supports and supervises them when a child is placed in their care
- Provides ongoing training in partnership with DHS

A common, state-wide, competency based assessment and pre-service training package known as Step-by-Step is used by all CSO's for the training and accreditation of foster carers across Victoria.

Sometimes CSO's offer joint training for their carers and those from neighbouring agencies.

The Post Placement Support Service (PPSS) also provides a range of training and support options for caregivers, teachers and child care professionals. Workshops are provided on the following topics:

- Professional Development (for teachers and allied health professionals – how to best meet the needs of children being raised in out-of-home care).
- Mirror Families – creating extended families and lifelong, supportive relationships for children in the care system.
- Bring fun Home – creative options to increase connections and enhance relationships.
- Working with Families where there is Mental Illness.
- Creative Memories – a 'hands on' workshop offering the tools and ideas to create a beautiful album or journal to preserve photos, documents and other memorabilia in an attractive, safe and logical way.
- Opt-In – optimistic thinking skills for children who have experienced trauma.
- Sexuality and Identity Issues.
- Learning Difficulties.
- Waiting Families – Inter-country Adoption.

Refer to the PPSS website for training calendar and full details: [www.ppss.org.au](http://www.ppss.org.au).

### **Age Limits for Becoming Permanent Carers:**

There is no screening for permanent carers based on a set age, however age is considered as part of the assessment process, and relates to issues around health and fitness. In addition, the legal regulations around applications for Permanent Care Orders require that applicants have the '*capacity to provide a secure and beneficial emotional and physical environment during a child's upbringing until a child reaches social and emotional independence*'. In practical terms, this means until the child is at least 18 years of age.

The ageing parent(s) capacity to fulfil the role of Permanent Carer(s) will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and will be based on a determination of things like:

- Capacity to care for the child in the long term;
- Length of time the child has been in the family;
- The child's position in the family;
- The views of other 'siblings';
- Existing supports which are in place.

The thing to remember is that children placed in permanent care have experienced many losses, and placing them with permanent carers who are significantly older than the usual parenting age exposes them to risk of further loss through illness, frailty, or even death of their parent/s before they are independent adults.

A good outcome is where carers in the 'grandparent' age can continue to have a significant and supportive role in the child's life, but not necessarily as the primary carers.

### **Fertility, Adoption and Foster Care**

Prospective carers cannot be considered for foster care accreditation until such time as any fertility and adoption processes are complete. Prospective carers must be able to demonstrate a significant degree of finality and resolution about fertility issues as part of the assessment and accreditation process, and this cannot occur if they are still undergoing active fertility treatments or adoption processes.

By ending fertility treatment and ceasing any adoption process, the prospective carer/s can start dealing with the realities of not being birth parents and begin to address the grief and loss that coming to terms with this is likely to bring.

Once this healing is underway they can then look to the prospect of caring for children in an out of home care context.