

Foster Care Association of Victoria Position:

For some foster children, Child Protection make a case plan decision that a return to their birth family is not possible. Under these circumstances some foster carers choose to undergo an assessment process to shift the nature of their fostering role to become that of a permanent parent. It is important when considering such a transition, that you fully understand the responsibilities are for the life of the child, and you discuss the matter fully with your CSO and with a DHHS Permanent Care Team.

THE BASICS

- Transition of a foster care placement to permanent care is never automatic. Legislation and Best Interests Principles require full exploration of the child's extended family network before a decision to place with anyone else can be made.
- Whilst your role as a foster carer provides invaluable support for children, your family may not match the needs of a child on a permanent basis. Other potential permanent carers may be assessed as a more suitable match for the permanent care of the child.
- An application for a Permanent Care Order (PCO) may be complex and stressful. Birth parents have the administrative right to appeal the DHHS permanent care case plan decision and the legal right to contest a DHHS application to a Children's Court for a PCO.
- Permanent carers are usually required to arrange, support and supervise access visits with birth family members (for example, parents and siblings) in accordance with any conditions of the PCO.
- While there are guiding timelines for a child's transition to a permanent care placement, these can be significantly delayed depending on many things. For example, the sensitivities of these decisions may require internal review, Court hearings may become protracted, there may be number of potential carers being assessed, or there may be an inability to locate a suitable permanent carer.
- Long term fostering of a child does not necessarily guarantee a foster carer will be successful in an application for permanent care. Foster carers may find the permanent care assessment process is more demanding and comprehensive than they expected.
- The granting of a PCO means the carer is no longer a foster carer for that child, but is named on the order as the Custodian and Guardian of the child. This means the carer has all the rights and responsibilities for the decision making and care of the child. The carer must still follow any conditions of the PCO, usually in relation to family contact. The PCO ends DHHS involvement with the case.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- A PCO lasts until the child is aged 18 years, or marries. However, the connection with a stable family unit is for life. Is this the commitment you and your family are willing and able to make?
- Permanent carers manage all responsibilities for the child, including (but not limited to) ongoing contact with birth family, the challenges of adolescent development, any special medical or dental needs, the need for counselling and therapeutic support, educational difficulties and meeting cultural requirements.
- Child Protection and the services they provide will no longer be available to the child. Will the loss of these services and supports positively or negatively impact on the child and the overall stability of the placement?
- Community supports – think about whether you have linked in with or identified the support services offered through mainstream services that may be required to meet the current and future needs of the child.
- The financial impact on your family – think about whether you have considered the likely costs, including the state and federal government reimbursements and parenting payments available. Have you identified and accounted for costs currently being covered by your Community Service Organisation (CSO) or DHHS? Think about how this can impact on your family.

The peak body for Permanent Carers is PCA Families

<http://www.pcafamilies.org.au/>

PCA Families acknowledges that there are diverse pathways to permanent care and adoption for many families, which may include kinship care and foster care. PCA Families is an inclusive service which embraces this diversity and works in support of all families permanently caring for children through adoption, placement and the out of home care system.