

fostering futures.

Always
connected.



Permanency Support Program

catholiccare

“In a supportive and stable family, young people can learn and grow to their full extent.

This means they can achieve a successful and positive future.”

Maddie, aged 14



Every child has the right to a family and a permanent home. Every single one

At CatholicCare Wollongong's Permanency Support Program (PSP) we're passionate about children's wellbeing and their right to have stable, caring families and positive childhoods so they can thrive and reach their full potential.

We're on a mission to find more people who will make great carers and help turn a child's life around.

Right now, right here in our region, people like you are needed to put your hands up to become carers.



Our top priorities are to find potential carers willing to care for:

- children in an emergency situation
- children of all ages, especially eight and older
- sibling groups
- children with complex needs
- children from Aboriginal and culturally diverse backgrounds

Perhaps you're wondering if you and your family could take in a child you don't know and provide a stable, loving home?

Maybe you've watched the news and are worried about issues affecting young people and their future? Maybe you've asked yourself: what can I do to change things? How can I make a difference to a child or young person?

Read on and we'll help you explore whether becoming a carer is the right path for you and your family. There are different caring roles that suit different families.

What is a permanency Support Program?

Our Fostering Futures Permanency Support Program has been introduced as part of sweeping reforms across NSW in October 2017 aimed at finding forever homes for children and improving the system.

Fostering Futures' priority is to find safe, permanent families for children to give them a sense of belonging, rather than being fostered which can seem more temporary.

These children have had a tough start to life but with the support of agency staff and carers working together as a team, they can reach their full potential.

For children to have permanent families, the priorities are:

1. preservation – this means children remain with their families with extra support in place to keep them safe.
2. restoration – if a child is removed, the main goal is to help them return home to their parents once safety issues are addressed. If they can't live with their mum or dad then relative or kinship care is sought to keep children connected to family.
3. open adoption and guardianship – permanent options for children who can't live with their parents.
4. long term foster care – if restoration, guardianship or adoption is unsuitable for a child or young person, this is the next appropriate permanent option.

What's so good about permanent homes?

For starters, this is a basic right for all children and young people. When children and young people have permanent, secure homes with loving, stable carers, they can:

- form healthy relationships
- have their health needs met
- grow socially and emotionally
- achieve their best educational outcomes
- have a better chance of securing a job in future.

When children and young people achieve positive outcomes, it breaks the cycle of disadvantage and helps them lead fulfilling and meaningful lives.

Why are children removed?

Sometimes families are unable to care for their children due to reasons such as mental illness, substance abuse, domestic violence, poverty and/or homelessness.

For children and young people who've come into care, the effects of abuse, neglect, trauma, loss and grief are far-reaching. Many of these children will struggle with social, emotional and behavioural issues. They may be behind their peers with development, education and health.

But they deserve an equal chance of achieving a good quality life just like every other child. That's why they need nurturing carers who can help them heal and grow.

“We try to provide quality one-on-one time, some time out from their normal routine and perhaps some new experiences.”

Kim & Wayne, Respite and emergency Carers



**“I know I can't help every child but
if I can help one then I know I have
made a difference.”**

Carers Cathy & David



Who can become a carer?

This is where people are needed to step up and rise to the challenge.

- Maybe you've been thinking about fostering a child for a while.
- Maybe you have skills from your work or life experiences that you can use to make a difference to a child, perhaps one with complex or special needs.
- Maybe you want to champion a teenager who needs good role models.
- Maybe you're rattling around in a big home now that your children have grown up and you'd love to care for siblings who want to stay living together.
- Maybe, just maybe, you would be the right carer match for a child or young person in need of a home.

All kinds of people become carers – singles or couples, those with or without children, empty nesters and retirees.

Every family is unique, just as every child who comes into care is unique. The more carers we have, the better chance we have of making a successful match! This means more stability for children and less chance of a placement breakdown.

We're always on the lookout for potential carers who can share their homes and lives and make a positive impact on a child's future for a short time or for a lifetime.

What kind of people can become carers?

We need committed, compassionate people in our local community who:


- understand that raising children is a shared community responsibility.
- are willing to help a child heal from their past trauma.
- support a child's right to spend time with their parents and relatives or be reunited as a family if it's safe and okay.
- can capably support a child's culture and identity.

We're seeking:

- change agents who recognise they can have a positive impact on a child or young person, even if they only care for them for a brief time.
- supportive, resilient people who won't give up, despite the challenges and bumps along the way.
- people who understand that there is nothing more fulfilling or meaningful in life than being able to care for a vulnerable child and give them the secure, nurturing, loving home they deserve.

To help children who've experienced trauma and may have challenging behaviours, we need people with this great toolbox of qualities including:

- resilience
- empathy
- patience
- flexibility
- commitment
- acceptance
- warmth
- openness to lifelong learning
- and a sense of fun and humour is really important too!



“Fostering children is extending your family and learning how to be tolerant, more resilient and showing more kindness and compassion. It can be difficult at times but the journey is worth it.”

Carers Tim & Linda

What types of care would suit my family?

When children are removed from their families due to safety issues, the court needs to decide the best permanent caring option for their future.

Sometimes children are unable to live at home for a short period or for the long-term. Depending on your own family and circumstances, you might be suitable to provide:

- **Immediate care** – often provided at short notice in an emergency situation for a limited time while a permanent home is found.
- **Restoration/short-term care** – lasting from a couple of months up to two years until a child can be safely returned home to their family or a permanent home can be found with relatives or other carers. Short-term carers play an important role in supporting strong connections with family so children can be restored.
- **Guardianship** – taking on legal responsibility for a child or young person who can't be restored to their parents.
- **Open adoption** – a child or young person becomes a legal member of their adoptive family and all parental decision-making and care is transferred to the adoptive parents.
- **Long-term care** – where the above options are unsuitable, some children will remain in long-term care.
- **Part-time/Respite care** – provides a break for carers or family members to re-energise. This may be a regular or occasional weekend or holiday respite. Respite carers also act as important role models and mentors to children and young people.



What's the difference between adoption and guardianship?

Adoption and guardianship are two pathways for children to have permanent families.

Adoption means a child becomes a legal and permanent member of an adoptive family who take on all the parental responsibility for the child's upbringing.

Today's open adoption is different from the closed adoptions of the past where people did not have information about their origins and identity. Instead children today are supported to have an ongoing relationship and connection with their parents, siblings and extended family.

Adoption orders are made by the Supreme Court in New South Wales. Some of the key principles regarding adoption:

- it must be in the best interests of the child, both in childhood and later life

- adoption is a service for the child rather than the right of an adult hoping to adopt them
- the child or young person must be supported to know and have access to their family and culture.

Guardianship means that a child or young person remains in the care of their legal guardian until they turn 18 or the court changes the order.

Guardianship orders are made by the Children's Court for children in foster care who cannot be returned to their family for safety reasons.

The guardian has full care and responsibility for ensuring the child's emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs are met until they turn 18. This includes making decisions about health and education, and managing contact with their parents, family and others.

The guardianship order states family visits are to occur between the child and their parents and other relatives.

Spending time with family

CatholicCare strongly advocates for children to have ongoing contact with their family even when they can't live with them. Where it is considered safe and appropriate, this might include having family time with their parents. It also includes spending time with grandparents, siblings and other significant family members and can be supported through face-to-face visits, phone calls and letters.

Keeping Aboriginal children connected to families and kin is essential so they can explore their identity and retain their culture. They need to be supported to spend time with extended family and community, and it is important that they have opportunities to go on Country and learn about traditions and spirituality through the stories of the Dreaming.

We are committed to working closely with Aboriginal community members and organisations to support any Aboriginal children who come into care. Children's cultural needs are supported until they can be moved to an Aboriginal agency and carers as soon as possible.

We also work hard to keep children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds connected to their communities and culture. We endeavour to place children with carers from the same cultural background but where that is not possible, we provide guidance and plans so carers can support a child culturally.

Embracing a child's relationship with their family and cultural connections is an important part of being a carer.

Am I up to the task of caring for a child who has experienced trauma?

We won't sugar coat it. Looking after someone else's child has its ups and downs. Let's face it, parenting can be a rollercoaster ride! Add trauma to the mix and these kids have had an unfair and harrowing start to life.

Our job is to help you understand the impact of trauma so that you know how to support these children as they heal from their past experiences. When we understand trauma, we learn not to judge children by their behaviour and we look for their underlying feelings.



What do we mean by trauma?

In a nutshell, trauma triggers a fear response in the brain and sends people into survival mode. We're all hard-wired that way from primitive times. Trauma triggers different responses in different people – ever heard of fight, flight or freeze?

This means the child who steals food from other children's lunches at school might be in survival mode because they were neglected when younger. That's a response to past trauma; it's not because they are naughty or greedy.

Think about the young person who lies to avoid getting into trouble because they were previously punished with physical abuse. Lying protects them. They need guidance and kindness from people like you

so they know they are safe and can move out of survival mode.

We're here to work as a team with carers to help you learn new ways of caring and parenting and support you through the challenges. This is why lifelong learning is so important for carers!

Once you start to see things through a trauma lens and respond appropriately, you can help a child in ways that will have a lasting impact and help them heal from their trauma and loss. You'll understand that there is not a quick fix and that issues will take time and patience to resolve.

We have people just like you who have pondered the same questions and are now providing excellent care. We salute these carers who are doing incredible work with children and young people and helping them reach their potential!



“It changes you as a person, you grow with them. To see where they have come from and where they are now.”

Carers Deb & Nathan



“They mean everything to me and I just want them to be happy and have the best opportunities in life.”

Carers Deb & Nathan

The Process

Are you keen to find out more? You can take it one step at a time to decide whether this is the right journey for your family.

Step 1: Call us on 0418 783 956 or email us at fosteringfutures@catholiccare.dow.org.au and we'll start by conducting an initial inquiry where we ask you some questions. We'll then send you an information pack.

Step 2: Read the information pack and return the registration of interest form.

Step 3: If you're suitable and eager to proceed, we'll make a time to come and meet you and your family and provide application paperwork at an Information Sharing Session (ISS).

Step 4: Send in your application paperwork and we'll process your background checks. This includes medical, Working With Children Checks (WWCC), police, referee and Community Service checks.

Step 5: Complete introductory Shared Lives training to help you understand more about becoming a carer.

Step 6: If everything's on track and suitable, we will conduct an assessment which is a series of interviews to determine if you meet the competencies to be a carer.

Step 7: Once the assessment is completed and if you are authorised to become a carer, then we look at carefully matching a child or young person to your family.

What ongoing support is provided?

We value our carers and understand that it takes a team effort to support children who've experienced trauma and may be developmentally behind their peers. We provide:

- training, both face-to-face and online options
- case manager support
- regular home visits
- a care allowance for the child's day-to-day financial needs
- collaborative case planning
- after hours crisis support
- access to a team psychologist
- connection to other carers and support groups
- events and dinners

How old do you have to be?

People must be aged between 25 and 70 to apply to become a carer with CatholicCare.

Do you have to be an Australian citizen?

If you are not an Australian citizen, we will ask for proof of permanent residency.

Do you have to own your own home?

You can be renting or own your own home.



Do I need a spare room?

Children must have their own bedroom although where appropriate a room can be shared if siblings are close in age and of the same gender.

Can I continue working if I'm a carer?

We recognise that many people who wish to become carers may work part-time or full-time for various reasons, however it is important that you can devote adequate time to caring for a child or young person. With young children especially or children of

any age coming into care for the first time in an emergency situation, it is important that a carer is available to meet their needs.

Will I be paid to be a foster carer?

Carers receive a fortnightly tax-free care allowance to pay for the child's day-to-day needs. The allowance is not a salary but a financial contribution to cover the living costs of the children in your care. Additional costs, such as specialist visits, may be discussed with your case manager and included as part of an approved case plan for each child or young person.



**“It's the greatest
reward and love
you will ever
experience.”**

Carers Tim & Linda

What does the assessment involve?

The assessment includes background checks, training and a series of interviews to explore aspects of your life to determine whether you meet the competencies to be a carer. This also helps you make an informed decision about becoming a carer. The assessment process is rigorous because high quality carers are needed to help children heal from trauma, grief and loss.

Applying to be a carer is a bit like applying for a job – it's a two-way process to determine a person's suitability and match for the role.

Why choose CatholicCare?

At CatholicCare we provide social and emotional support throughout life's journey to people in the Illawarra, Shoalhaven, Macarthur and Southern Highland regions.

We work with the whole community by:

- Providing stability and nurturing children's potential
- Offering specialist support to strengthen relationships
- Working together with families
- Offering support to maintain quality of life and independence



Contact Us

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