

# Become a Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency Foster Carer



**Foster Carers come  
from all walks of  
life**





## VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) was established in 1977 as a state wide Aboriginal community controlled and operated service. VACCA considers that it has the responsibility and the opportunity to promote, advocate for and achieve positive changes in the lives of Aboriginal children, young people, their families and the community. VACCA believes that families that are strong in their community connectedness and culture will be more successful in raising resilient children and young people who are proud of who they are and where they come from.

VACCA has a holistic approach to service delivery. VACCA provides a professional service delivery response that reflects Aboriginal values and promotes the best interest of the child.

### VISION

A community that is strong in culture that value children and young people and recognize the importance of the whole community in raising children and keeping a family together.

### CULTURE

Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us.

For an Aboriginal child, the passing down of culture is central to their development and identity. They rely on others, including their carers, to develop their cultural understanding through experience. It also means understanding the importance of cultural safety and cultural connections as a form of healing.

# VACCA's BELIEFS AND VALUES

## Cultural Identity

- Aboriginal children have the right to identify as Aboriginal without fear of retribution or questioning of their Aboriginality.
- An Aboriginal child's cultural identity fundamental to their overall well being.
- Children's needs are best met in their own family
- Strong families raise strong children.
- The teaching, maintenance and regaining of Aboriginal cultural practices for Aboriginal children are the responsibility of the whole community.
- Children have the right to be safe, to be heard and to be protected.
- Children have the right to optimal life opportunities which include access to education, health, and the development of social and emotional well being.



## VACCA's

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

1. To promote the importance of children and young people's connection/reconnection to their family and community.
2. To strive towards the provision of culturally appropriate and quality best practice models responsive to community needs.
3. To promote a positive affirmation of Aboriginal culture.
4. To build the resilience of Aboriginal families.
5. To enhance VACCA's lead agency capacity within the child and family welfare sector.
6. To promote the Rights of Aboriginal children and young people.
7. To develop partnerships with mainstream services and government.
8. To enhance the communities' capacity to address the broader systemic issues that impact on child and family well being.
9. To provided high level advice and advocacy to government on legislation, policy, program development and practice.
10. Develop the Aboriginal Child Welfare Services capacity to deliver enhanced outcomes for children, young people and families.

# What is Foster Care?

Foster care is care provided by people in their own homes for children and young people who cannot live with their families.

Where it is in their best interest, it is the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency's priority that children and young people are reunited back into their extended family and community as soon as possible.

## Who can become a foster carer?

Foster carers come from all types of backgrounds and families. What is important is that foster carers can provide a safe and nurturing environment for children and young people who need care and can go on a journey that is both difficult and rewarding and believe that they can make a positive difference in a child's life. This includes an acceptance of individual diversity and difference. They must also be able to work as part of a team.



## Who needs foster care?

Foster care may be required for Aboriginal children or young people whose parents /carer are finding it difficult to cope and require a break or for children who have been subjected to abuse.

Children and young people may enter foster care individually or as a sibling group. They may have a disability and may display emotional or behavioural difficulties or mental health problems.



## Qualities of Foster Carers

**You may use the following checklist to help you decide whether you have the qualities to be a foster carer for VACCA.**

- ✓ You genuinely like and enjoy children and can remain enthusiastic about them even when they are difficult.
- ✓ You understand that looking after children from another family is different to looking after your own children.
- ✓ You appreciate that fostering will have an impact on your own children and wider family.
- ✓ You do not expect children to be grateful for the care you show or demonstrate through your actions.
- ✓ You can accept that a fostered child or young person may take time to respond to the care you offer.
- ✓ You can accept that a child may reject or strongly disagree with ideas, views and feelings that you hold.
- ✓ You can understand that a child may lie, steal or display sexualized behavior.
- ✓ You can allow and encourage a child to have feelings of affection for others.
- ✓ You can accept and deal with anger from children.
- ✓ You have a good sense of humor.
- ✓ Your marriage, partnership or support network of friends and family can withstand the pressures associated with fostering.
- ✓ You can when necessary reach out to others for support.
- ✓ You are willing to share your life experiences with others.
- ✓ You can accept that things in your house might be messed up, moved or broken.
- ✓ You can accept failure in yourself and others.
- ✓ You can be pleased with small steps of progress.

## How are Foster Carers Supported?

We value the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people. Appropriate support for the families who foster is vitally important to a successful placement and the Extended Care team works hard to ensure that carers receive the best possible support.

We provide the following support to all our Foster Carers:

- Access to a member of the VACCA Extended Care Program 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Supervision and support from Extended Care Caseworker.
- Frequent visits and regular phone contact
- 21 nights paid respite per year
- Organized activities for children and young people.
- A comprehensive training program.



# Training Provided for Foster Carers

It is recognized that fostering has become increasingly demanding and complex. VACCA is committed to providing high quality training that is accessible and relevant to all foster carers. Training is viewed as an important element of support to foster carers and training is mandatory.



**Above:** Extended Care workers facilitating the 2 day Nikara's Journey training.



**Above:** Resources for Carers and young people

For non-Aboriginal people VACCA provides a 2 day cultural awareness training to provide knowledge and understanding to assist carers in supporting the best interests of Aboriginal children who are in their care and the significance of ensuring that Aboriginal children remain connected to their family, community and culture. This training is compulsory for non-Aboriginal carers.

**Right:** Carers caring for Aboriginal children participating in the 2 Day Nikara's Journey Training.



# Foster care reimbursement and payments



## About caregiver reimbursement

Foster carers receive reimbursement towards the ordinary day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person. The level of reimbursement depends on the age of the child or young person in their care (see the following table).

The caregiver reimbursement covers items such as food, clothing, household provisions, gifts, pocket money and entertainment. The reimbursement is not considered a 'payment' for fostering. As such, it is not considered a source of income by Centrelink or for taxation purposes. The reimbursement does not pay for the foster carer's time and skills, but simply contributes towards the cost of caring for a child or young person.

The reimbursement is not subject to tax and is not cited as income for any purpose, including yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits, or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

Reimbursements are paid fortnightly in arrears. Foster carers are entitled to carer reimbursements until the child or young person reaches 18 years of age, completes the school year they commenced prior to their eighteenth birthday or gains full time employment if this is beforehand.



## Fortnightly caregiver reimbursement rates for foster care based on age of child or young

	0–7 years	8–10 years	11–12 years	13+ years
Rate per fortnight as at 1 July 2008	\$243.97	\$254.78	\$289.73	\$390.31

## Quarterly educational and health payments

- In addition to the fortnightly reimbursements, payments of up to \$200 per quarter per child or young person (or pro rata depending on how long the foster carer cares for a child or young person) are made to assist foster carers in meeting the educational and health needs of children and young people in their care.
- Where children or young people have higher needs, it is possible that additional funding may be provided by the department or the foster care community service organisation to meet these needs. The decision to provide additional funding is made on a case-by-case basis and depends on the availability of funding at the time.

## Other financial support

At times, foster carers may incur exceptional expenses for items that go beyond day-to-day care. Before incurring such expenses, foster carers should discuss the cost with their foster care community service organisation worker. Whether or not reimbursement of additional costs is provided will depend on the amount of the cost involved, the purpose of the cost, and budget availability. All these matters are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

## Commonwealth Government benefits

In addition to fortnightly reimbursement, foster carers or young people may be eligible for financial support through Centrelink, such as:

- Family Tax Benefit
- Additional Family Disability Allowance
- Youth Allowance.

Foster carers can apply for exemption from the Welfare to Work requirements.

All children and young people on guardianship/custody orders are eligible for personal Health Care Cards and Medicare Cards.



# Steps to becoming a foster carer

The following is a general outline of the steps involved in becoming a foster carer:

You make an initial enquiry and register your interest.  
You receive the Foster Care Information Pack



You participate in an information session held at either the community service organisation or you own home



You lodge the official application form, including life history and screening check forms (police, Working with Children Check, medical, referee checks)



You participate in the community service organization's assessment and pre-service training. The assessment will include a home and environment check and several interviews



The summary report and recommendations is submitted to the approval panel



Approval is granted for a period of 12 months. You will be asked to sign a code of conduct agreement as part of your approval



You receive support and supervision from the community service organisation. You are required to participate in ongoing training and adhere to the community service organization's policy and the minimum standards for home-based care



Approval is reviewed after 12 months and annually thereafter.