



**VACCA**

Connected by culture

VICTORIAN ABORIGINAL CHILD CARE AGENCY



# **Our Kids, Our Future It's Our Responsibility**

**Foster Care at VACCA Information Booklet**

# Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency

## About us

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) is the lead Aboriginal child and family welfare organisation in Victoria, protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal children and young people. We provide programs and services to reinforce Aboriginal culture and encourage best parenting practices, and advise government in relation to child abuse and neglect in the Aboriginal community.

We are a statewide Aboriginal community controlled organisation advocating for the rights of Aboriginal children, young people and families, and providing them with services premised on human rights, self-determination, cultural respect and safety.

## Our Vision

Our children, young people, families and communities are thriving – culturally strong, empowered and safe.

## Our Purpose

To strengthen the safety, wellbeing and cultural connectedness of Aboriginal children, individuals and families in their community.

# What is Foster Care?

Fostering is a way of providing a home for children who cannot live with their birth families. Foster Care is often used to provide temporary care when parents are going through a difficult period in their lives.

Where it is in their best interest, children and young people are reunited with their families as soon as possible.

It is the priority of the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency to have children and young people placed in the care of their extended family or with members of their Aboriginal community.



# What is Foster Care?

## Who can become a foster carer?

### Diverse People and families make great Carers!

When it comes to Foster Care, it is not a one size fits all approach. Our diverse pool of foster carers reflects the diversity within the Aboriginal community, and we encourage carers from different backgrounds, experiences and family types.

We are seeking carers who are open to a journey that is both difficult and rewarding; carers who believe that they can make a positive difference in a child's life.

### Anyone over the age of 21 in good physical and emotional health can apply to become a foster carer.

Our Carers are:

- Single, married, de facto or same-sex relationship
- Renting or own their own home
- Working fulltime, part time or stay at home
- From a diverse range of cultures with a diverse range of life experience
- Dedicated to maintaining and supporting children's connection with their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander family, community and culture
- Committed to meeting the needs of the children and young people they care for
- Committed to attending ongoing therapeutic, cultural awareness and other training

## Who needs foster care?

- children and young people from birth to 18 years
- children as individuals or as part of a sibling group

- families under stress needing a break
- parents experiencing personal difficulties
- children needing protection from abuse or neglect when parents are unable to protect them

## Types of Foster Care

### Emergency care

Emergency care provides a secure, safe place for when a child or sibling group has been removed due to concerns of neglect or abuse. Referrals are received 24 hours a day and placements may be made after hours.

### Respite care

Respite carers offer children a place to stay for the weekend or for brief-stays. The children might be living with a foster carer and this gives the carer some time off or they might live with their parents who need some additional support during a difficult time.

### Short term care

Short term placements provide children with temporary care. Their parents may be going through a difficult period in their lives and they will be reunited with them when it's in their best interest. Or they may be waiting for a decision from the Children's Court on their long term future.

### Long term care

Long term placements are when the Children's Court has given a final order and placed a child in care until they turn 18 years old. Sometimes long term foster care placements turn into permanent care arrangements.



# Qualities of Foster Carers

## Do you have the qualities to be a foster carer for VACCA?

- You are dedicated to maintaining and supporting children's connections with their Aboriginal family, community and culture
- 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 understand that a child may lie, steal or display sexualized behavior.
- 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.





# How are Foster Carers Supported?

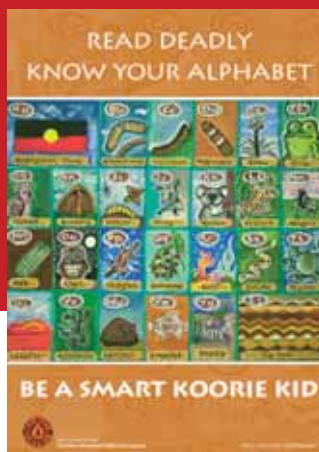
We value the work foster carers do and the contribution they make to the lives of children and young people. Appropriate support for the families who foster is vitally important to a successful placement and the Extended Care team works hard to ensure that carers receive the best possible support.

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 therapeutic and cultural 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.



# 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.

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.

## 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 VACCA case 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:

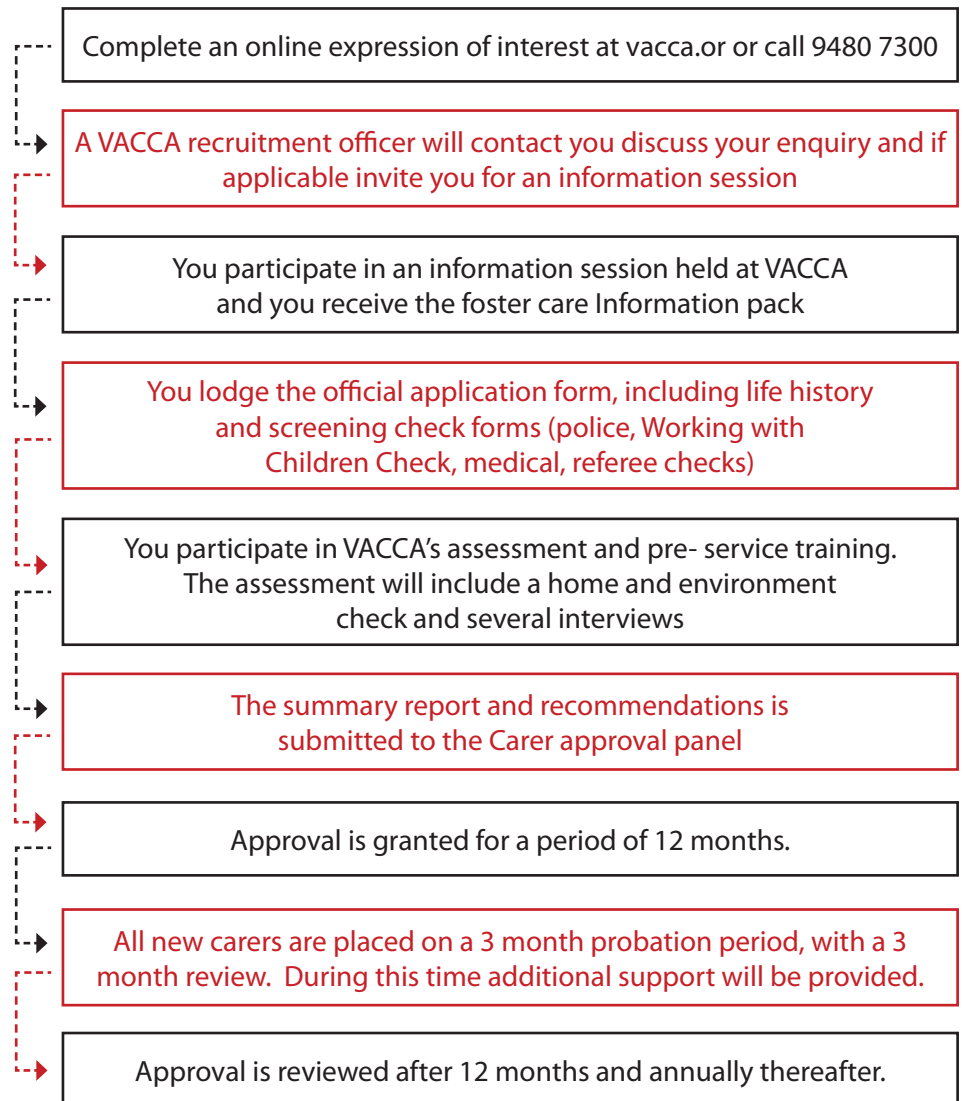
- Family Tax Benefit
- Additional Family Disability Allowance
- Youth Allowance.

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:





## Contact Information

Thank you for your interest in becoming a foster carer with the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency.

For further information or to enquire about the next step, please phone VACCA on **(03) 9480 7300** or visit our website on **[www.vacca.org](http://www.vacca.org)**

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