

Fostering Matters

Your guide to becoming
a **foster carer**



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Hello...

I'm Jan Rees and I co-founded Core Assets with Jim Cockburn in 1994.

“Key Assets was established in 2007 as part of the Core Assets Group. I am an Executive Director for Key Assets to ensure that the foster carer and the child are at the centre of everything that Key Assets does.

Having been a foster carer myself, I know that fostering can be a life changing experience. My own experiences inspired me to set up Core Assets more than 20 years ago. Since then, I have admired the work of foster carers from all walks of life who have helped bring about positive change to the lives of many children in care.

Understanding and embracing the challenges faced by our foster carers is key to shaping a better future for fostered children. We have found quality support and training to be vital in enabling our carers to foster successfully, providing the best possible outcomes for the children and young people in our care.

I hope that this booklet will encourage readers to consider becoming a foster carer and experience all the rewards that come with it.”

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Jan Rees

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What is fostering?

Our dedicated foster carers look after children and in some cases will work to reunite them with their families. Where this is not possible carers will provide long term family based placements and will help children move onto independent living.

How is fostering different to adoption?

Fostering means that the child or young person in your care will remain the legal responsibility of the local child protection department and/or their birth parents. This is different to adoption, where the legal rights of a child are permanently transferred to their adoptive parents.

Some children may maintain strong bonds with their birth families, which may take the form of regular face-to-face or verbal contact. In some cases, parents may continue to be involved in any important decisions that are made about their child's welfare or education.

Why do children come into care?

Children and young people may come into care as a result of a parent's illness, relationship problems, family breakdown or a situation where their welfare has been threatened.

Many of them will have experienced neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and all will have faced loss and separation from their birth family.

Children in care may express their feelings through difficult or challenging behaviour. Some may be clingy or have tantrums. Others will be withdrawn and find it difficult to build trusting relationships with adults. Even if they seem happy and smiling, their past experiences will almost certainly have an effect on their behaviour and development.

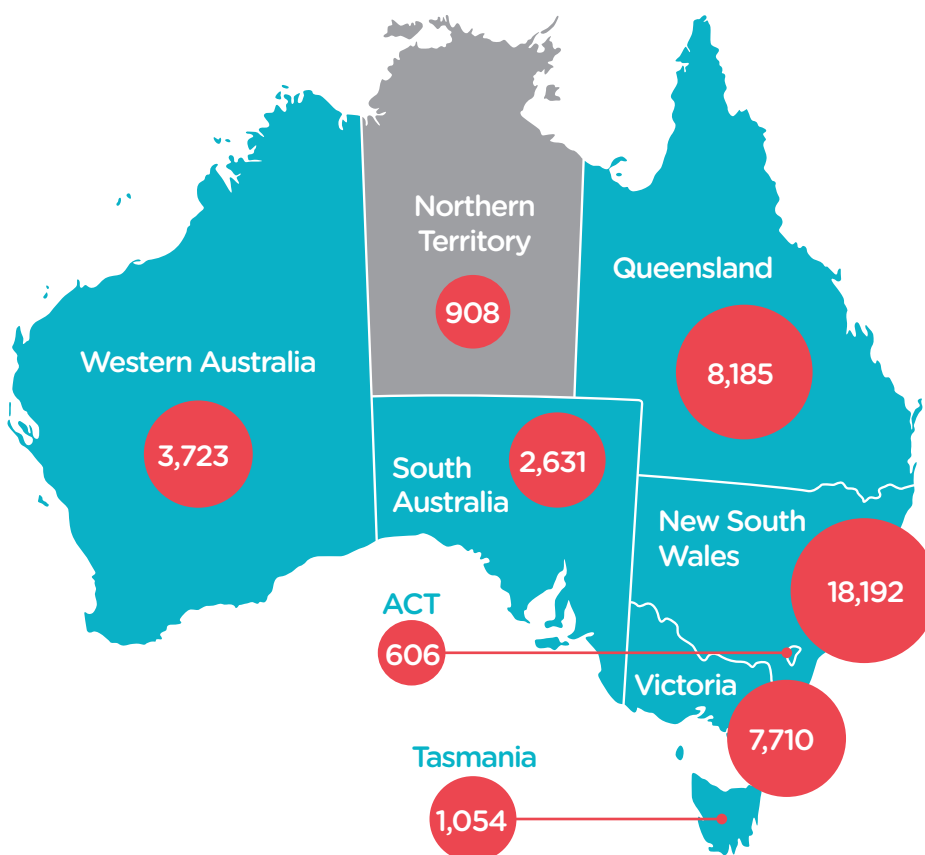
Could I be a foster carer?

Our foster carers come from all types of backgrounds and we welcome carers of any race, sexual orientation, income and home ownership status. We're looking for people who can provide a safe, caring and supportive environment for children and young people.

Fostering a child or young person is a big decision and takes high levels of commitment and patience. You'll need an enthusiastic approach, bags of energy and a genuine desire for making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people in care.

You'll also need to be over the age of 25, have a spare bedroom in your home and be able to commit to fostering full time.

In return, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're making a real difference to children who desperately need stability in their lives.



The most recent statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW, 2013 - 2014) show that, as of 30 June 2014, there were 43,009 Australian children living in out-of-home care. This is an increase of 8.6% from the 39,621 children in out-of-home care on 30 June 2012.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015. Child protection Australia: 2013-14. Child Welfare series no. 61. Cat. no. CWS 52. Canberra: AIHW.

Operational regions

Who are we?

By working together with foster carers we can offer children and young people a brighter future.

Key Assets Australia is a non-governmental, not for profit, fostering agency. We are a part of Key Assets and the Core Assets Group. We have provided tailored foster care services for children and young people for over two decades. We have cared for more than 35,000 children across our 11 global offices in Europe, Canada, United States, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

What's in a name?

Key Assets reflects our belief that foster carers are the agents of change for children cared for out of home and therefore each is a key asset. We believe children are our tomorrow and as adults we should be cherishing them and helping them to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy life and achieve goals. All adults have a positive contribution to make in encouraging children to achieve their potential.

Furthermore we believe that in seeking to improve these outcomes or key development assets, a child or young person's strength and resilience will grow.

Our mission:

to provide solutions for individuals and organisations that help them achieve

Our vision:

to make a positive and lasting difference for children and families



Fostering with us

How do we work?

At Key Assets we have a unique approach to fostering that encourages foster carers and professionals to work together in the best interests of the child. We call this Team Parenting®.

Our small, dedicated teams of childcare professionals build trusting relationships with carers and offer them the support and training they need to provide stable and successful placements for the children and young people they look after.

What kind of support will I receive?

Fostering can be a rewarding yet demanding journey, but don't worry; you're not alone. We'll support you every step of the way.

You'll receive regular visits and contact from a dedicated and qualified social worker or key worker. For children and young people identified as having more complicated needs we'll also provide continuing support of an education officer, support worker and therapist to help promote the needs of the young person in your care.

We offer fostering allowances, 24/7 support and the opportunity for you to enhance your skills through ongoing training opportunities.

You'll also receive a wealth of extra benefits, including paid respite, access to carer support groups and organised family activities.

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To see Luke smile
and at peace is
worth everything.

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Claire and Steve's story

Claire and Steve became foster carers after realising they had the time and space to care for a sibling group.

Our lives as sibling group foster carers began after we saw an advertisement in our local newspaper by an agency just starting up in Australia, looking to recruit new foster carers. They were called Key Assets.

We had been talking a lot about looking into fostering and it was just by chance that we saw this particular ad, it must have been fate. The following day we called the number and arranged to meet a social worker to have an informal chat.

We knew that we had a lot to offer children who were unable to live with their birth family. After raising our own children, we decided we'd love to help brothers and sisters stay together, so we started looking into fostering sibling groups.

As first time carers, we knew there would be difficult times ahead, but the wrap around support network offered by Key Assets gave us the confidence we needed. So when ten year-old Alice and her little brothers Peter and Joe came to live with us in May 2014, we were ready to face the exciting new challenges ahead.

Our first 12 months together were a rollercoaster of emotions to say the least, and we had many highs and lows. That's where Key Assets came in – they listened and gave us advice on how to deal with specific behavioural issues, all of which were new to us. They even gave us some much needed respite so we could look after ourselves as well.

Caring for a sibling group takes an incredible amount of energy and patience. To start with, there are three children instead of just one! And then there were the little habits and routines the children had adopted in order to survive. For example, before coming into care, Alice had to provide essential daily care to her little brothers. She used to wash their clothes, prepare their meals, everything. By the age of eight, she had taken on the role of a parent. But now, that's our job. Slowly and step by step, we've been able to reassure her that she doesn't have to play mum anymore, that she can just enjoy being a child.

The first time we saw the three of them playing together at the park it brought tears to our eyes. Alice had spent her whole life bringing up her brothers; she had never even been to a playground before. Now we could see her becoming a child again.

Fostering a sibling group isn't always easy, but it is worth it. Like all foster carers, we get to see the progress the children are making in our care. Since coming to live with us, their confidence has grown immeasurably. But what's even more satisfying is watching their relationship with one another blossom.

Without us, it's highly likely that the children would have been separated and sent to live in separate foster homes. By keeping them together, we're helping to nurture those sibling bonds and keep their family connection alive.

The relationships we have with our brothers and sisters are some of the most important relationships of our lives. By fostering a sibling group, we're helping these three children to grow up with the support of not just us, but one another too.

It's incredibly rewarding and I can't imagine doing anything else.

Types of foster care...

Children come in to foster care for many different reasons. We have a range of foster care placements which reflects this, offering each individual child the specific support they need.



Emergency

Emergency placements involve caring for a child or young person who needs somewhere safe to stay immediately, usually for a few nights.

Long Term

Long term placements offer a child or young person a stable foster home. You will provide them with the security of a long standing placement and may care for them until they reach adulthood and are ready to move out of the foster home and live independently.

Short Term

Short term care involves caring for a child or young person for a few weeks or months while difficulties at home are resolved or other plans are made for their future.

Children with Disabilities

There are many children and young people with disabilities in Victoria who need a foster family. This can include children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, autism, sensory impairments or a combination of these.

Children seeking Asylum

There are children and young people who have entered this country without any family and are applying for asylum in their own right. They have often travelled long distances and need a safe, stable and supportive home in which you will support them to adapt to life in a new country.

Respite

Respite foster care offers a short stay to a child or young person, who lives with their own family or foster carers, to give them a break.

Transition Placements

There are children and young people where the plan is to return home to their birth or wider kinship family. These foster placements aim to help prepare the child for the move back to their family and supports can also be provided to the birth or kinship family as the child transitions home.

The journey to become a foster carer...

Receiving this booklet is just the first stage in the process to becoming approved as a foster carer. The diagram shows the 'journey' that you will follow, however, it is only once we receive your application form that you will enter the assessment process.

You will be required to attend orientation training which covers all responsibilities and obligations of being a foster carer and then you will fill out an application form.

Call us or log onto our website www.iwanttofooster.com.au to register your interest in fostering with Key Assets.



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A Key Assets social worker will visit your home to answer any questions and help you to make an informed decision about fostering.

The assessment process takes an average of 3-4 months to complete.





Your suitability will then be assessed by a qualified social worker who will carry out a full assessment. They will visit your home 4-8 times to collect information about you, your family and any skills and experience you have that will help you with fostering. The information obtained forms the basis of an assessment report. Key Assets Victoria uses the 'Step by Step Victoria' Assessment tool.



If you are authorised, we will begin to match a child to your experience and preferences.



Once your assessment and all relevant checks and references are completed, we'll present your information to a Fostering Panel. You'll also attend the panel and they will make a recommendation to the Key Assets State Director who makes the final authorisation decision.

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You'll need to provide us with:

- A medical examination completed by your GP
- Three personal references that will be interviewed as part of the assessment process and asked to provide written references. If you are in employment, we'll also ask for a reference from your employer
- School references will be completed for all children living in the household
- Ex-partner references are required when there is a shared child under 18 years old.

The following checks will be carried out during the assessment process:

- National Police Clearance, Child Protection Check and Background check on all adult members of the household and any adult regular visitors
- All adult members of the household will need to apply for a Working with Children Check through the Commission for Children and Young People Office
- Standard safety compliance check on your home

- If you have lived overseas we may undertake criminal history and child protection checks in the relevant country.

All information about you as a prospective carer is held on file. All information can be viewed on request except for references from external agencies (such as personal references) which are provided in confidence and cannot be accessed.

Once you are approved... some frequently asked questions

Q1. Could a child I foster share a bedroom with one of my own children?

Some agencies will allow this, especially for younger children. At Key Assets however, we will only place a child in a home where he or she will have their own bedroom (unless they are a same sex sibling group).

Q2. Can I still go out to work and be a foster carer?

Foster carers providing care to a child with more extensive or complex support needs will be required to be home full time.

Q3. Can I choose how long I want children and young people to stay with me?

Before you are authorised as a carer we will have discussed the different types of placements that are needed for our young people. You can decide which types of placement would suit you best. If you would prefer emergency or temporary placements you do need to be aware that it isn't always possible to know at the beginning of a placement exactly when a child will move on.

Q4. Can I choose which age group or sex I would prefer to foster?

Yes, you can. However, you are far more likely to have continuous placements if you are willing to take children of all ages. In Victoria there is currently a shortage of foster carers particularly for older children and for children who have high and complex needs. Key Assets will not be able to proceed with your enquiry if you are unable to consider children who are over the age of 5 years.

Q5. How much will I know about the child/young person before they are placed with me?

We discuss every placement with our carers and it is your decision as to whether to take a young person. We will provide you with as much information about the young person and his/her background as possible, including any difficult behaviour and how to manage them. However, you do need to be aware that sometimes we have very little information, especially in an emergency. We would always, however, seek to find out information as quickly as possible.

Q6. As Key Assets is part of an international organisation do you place children from outside of Australia with foster carers in Australia?

No, Key Assets Victoria only provides foster care for children and young people who are living in Australia and more importantly in Victoria. Because of our global network we are able to draw on international, as well as local, knowledge in Out of Home Care and apply this to our local services. Key Assets VIC is a Victorian community services organisation associated to an international network.

Q7. Will I be taxed on my allowances?

The foster care allowances are exempt from taxation and are not cited as income for any purpose, including yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits or when applying for loans from financial institutions.



“

I knew you loved me when you kept telling me - you were really proud of me.

”

Mandy's story

Mandy already has two grown-up children of her own, in 2011 she started fostering with Key Assets and is currently caring for two young sisters.

Mandy is a single mother to her two children, Sarah and Mason. Sarah is 23 and Mason is 21 and they both still live at home with Mandy, along with Mandy's mother who is 76 years old.

The family had two new additions, 2 sisters that Mandy fostered with Key Assets, upon her approval to become a carer in 2011.

Mandy describes her family as close, affectionate and musical. She says they are all extremely trusting of each other, laid back and work as a team together.

Thinking back on her time before being a foster carer, Mandy remembers her life being a simpler time, much quieter with less mess. She previously worked in a pharmacy and in aged-care. She came to

a point in her life where she was tossing up between continuing with aged-care or attempting foster carer. After reading books and having discussions with friends about the topic she decided to enquire about fostering with Key Assets.

She explains how she found foster care very tough in the beginning...

“I soon learnt that if you are able to persevere for long enough, the rewards you get back are priceless.”

Speaking about the foster children that came into her care, “the first one it took over 3 months for her challenging behaviours to settle, and the second more than 8 months.”

Mandy feels the most important aspect of fostering for her is around providing a home with unconditional love. She said it's amazing when you begin to realise how much you can mean to them.

“The biggest reward is to see them grow and the change in their personality, behaviour, mannerism in such a short time and to see their confidence grow.”

Mandy knew that she was making a difference when her youngest foster child said “I knew you loved me when you kept telling me you were really proud of me”.



Learning and development

Skills and knowledge for success

We are committed to ensuring that everyone involved in caring for a vulnerable child or young person has the skills necessary to support them safely and securely. As such, we will provide you with learning and development opportunities that will enable you to continually increase your knowledge, skills and confidence.

Why is training so important?

Children and young people who are fostered have often led complex and traumatic lives. It is crucially important that you are able to constantly improve your own understanding of safety and welfare issues in order to provide them with the best possible support.

We ensure that our training courses and learning materials are accessible, relevant and compatible with the different levels of a foster carer's knowledge and experience.

Ongoing training opportunities

The training we provide will not only keep you up to date with national concerns and issues surrounding children and young people, it will also benefit your own development as a carer. Through these courses we want to explore the views, opinions and experiences of you and other carers, help you to overcome possible difficulties and challenges that you may face in fostering, as well as learning new skills through finding mutual support from others. We want to increase your own professionalism as a carer and ensure that your enthusiasm for fostering is refreshed.

1.

You will first start your training with us as part of the assessment process, during which you will attend an orientation fostering course.

2.

This is followed by a program of local area inductions and post-approval training.

The training is provided to:

- Help foster carers become better at caring for children
- Improve knowledge, develop and refine skills
- Establish positive values that promote equality of opportunity
- Encourage foster carers to recognise that we care for children in the context of a wider society, and discourage discrimination
- Ensure that foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm
- Encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional development through individual training.

3.

As you become more experienced we will provide you with a program of specialist courses that cover a wide range of subjects to further enrich your knowledge, skills base and understanding.

Some of our courses include:

- Promoting positive behaviour
- Working with teenagers
- Understanding attachment
- Valuing diversity and promoting equality
- Recording
- Managing and promoting contact
- Safe caring.

Fostering poem

f is for having lots of **fun**
O is for **offering** children a place
S is for **sharing** things with each other
t is for **treasuring** the time we have spent together
e is for **every** child is different in **every** special way
r is for **remembering** the first to last day
i is for **ignoring** the bad and remembering the good
n is for **never** forgetting
g is for **getting** everybody to be a family again



Poem by Courtney, Age 11

A child in care

Children foster too

What will life be like for your children in a fostering family?

Becoming a foster carer as an adult can be an experience full of mixed emotions; anticipation, excitement, anxiety and worry. If you have children then all these emotions will be experienced by them as well. Your children will share their home, their parents, their siblings and belongings with the children and young people in placement. They play a vital role in the success of foster placements and we will help you

in supporting them in this role. Key Assets will make sure that your children have easy access to your family's supervising social worker and contact with other young people in the area who are also a part of a fostering family. Many areas have specific support groups where birth children can discuss the issues affecting them and take part in activities together.



Kerrie's story

Kerrie grew up in a fostering family between the ages of 5 and 19, and her parents have cared for over 100 children and young people.

"Fostering for me was an adventure. Like any job it had its ups and its downs. When I say job, I do mean job. A job for me, my brother and sister, not just my mum and dad; we were all involved in various ways.

It was just like having an extended family, with extra brothers and sisters, and having mum at home was a fantastic bonus.

Like any family, some days we all got on and other days we would all fall out. But my strongest memories are of the good times.

Some mornings we would wake up to find a new face peeking out of the bedroom opposite, and then as we got older we would find empty beds where people had decided to leave in the middle

of the night, sometimes with MY clothes and MY CDs!..

The hardest part of fostering has got to be when someone you really like or care for leaves. Don't get me wrong, this wasn't every placement we had, but I can remember a few in particular that felt like I'd lost someone close.

When I was 10 years old we fostered a baby from birth. He stayed with us until he was 18 months old; he was my little brother and we were his family. I think it affected us all when he left. All ended well though and when he moved back to his family we still saw him. This happened with many of the children and young people who stayed with us and mum even still has contact with someone who left us 15 years ago."



"If I could go back now and change anything that has happened in my past I, like anyone, would change some things. But being part of a fostering family would definitely not be one of them."

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I'd say to kids coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person in Key Assets and not a care kid.

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Michael's story

What's it like to be a child in foster care?

My name is Michael and I've been in care since I was eight years old. I'm 17 years old now and I've been with Key Assets since I was 14 years old.

I'm in foster care because my mum and dad didn't look after me well, it wasn't safe for me to live with them and so I was put in to foster care. I was very angry and I found it really hard to trust adults which made my behaviour difficult sometimes. The more I moved the more I felt angry and let down.

I've had a lot of different foster homes some of which have lasted a few days and others a few weeks and months but none which have lasted this long. I think its 'cool' being with Key Assets because everyone listens to you and you get to know all the staff, as well as the other kids and their foster carers. Another kid told me that he felt safe with Key Assets and they put on good activities which are always lots of fun. Key Assets staff are nice people. You don't feel like you are on your own in foster care with Key Assets and the support workers don't have 50 kids to look after which means you get lots more attention and support.

I was a bit scared when I got placed with my foster carers but now I would say enjoy and embrace it, don't worry because carers at Key Assets take notice of you, as do the staff. I'd say to kids coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person in Key Assets and not a care kid. My Key Assets carers didn't tell everyone I was in care and they gave me the choice whether to tell the neighbours or not, it was my choice and I felt like they listened to me. That shows that they put me first!

What next?

If you would like to take the next step towards becoming a foster carer, then contact us at:



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Building 3
195 Wellington Rd
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Tel: 1800 WE CARE (1800 93 3273)

www.iwanttofooster.com.au