Information Pack for Potential Foster Carers

Part of Step by Step Assessment Tool

Original materials written by Paula Hayden and Louise Mulroney
Revision by Louise Mulroney

Updated 2010 version

Step by Step (2010) was developed by the Association of Childrens Welfare Agencies and issued in partnership with the Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care Secretariat (NSW)
Introducing *Step by Step* Assessment Tool

This booklet is part of *Step by Step*, a resource package to assist foster care agencies in assessing potential foster carers.

**The total Package contains a range of resources**

Information Pack for Potential Carers

A resource for people making enquiries about being a carer that can be adapted to the particular needs of your agency.

Manual for Assessors (*only available in hard copy*)

A detailed outline of the assessment activities undertaken with applicants.

Applicant Booklet

A collection of handouts and worksheets used by the applicant during the assessment interviews.

Five different versions of this booklet are provided for use in a range of situations.

The versions are:

* Aboriginal
* Adolescent
* Cross-cultural
* Disability
* Generalist

Assessment Record

A tool for recording and analysing information gathered in the assessment process.

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**Key**

- This symbol marks booklets that can be downloaded as a pdf file from [www.acwa.asn.au/stepbystep](http://www.acwa.asn.au/stepbystep)
- This symbol marks booklets that can be downloaded as a word file (able to be altered and/or containing forms that can be completed on computer) from [www.acwa.asn.au/stepbystep](http://www.acwa.asn.au/stepbystep)
- This symbol marks booklets that are available on the *Step by Step* CD

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**Additional printed copies**

For additional hard copies of *Step by Step*, contact

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Acknowledgements

The development of *Step by Step* has been a collaborative effort involving a very wide range of agencies and foster care personnel. Since its initial development in 2003, hundreds of people have been involved in providing feedback and guidance in the use of *Step by Step*. This has included personnel from many states and territories in Australia, particularly NSW and Victoria.

In 2006, *Step by Step* Victoria was produced by Victorian Department of Human Services.

In 2007, *Step by Step* Aboriginal Assessment Tool was published after extensive consultation with Aboriginal agencies and practitioners.

*Step by Step* (2010) builds on these editions and so continuing thanks is extended to all those who were involved in them. ACWA very sincerely acknowledges all those who have been so generous in sharing their time and expertise to ensure *Step by Step* continues to be a useful and credible tool in a wide range of settings.

In particular, we acknowledge personnel from the following organisations who took part in the extensive consultation and pilot process throughout 2009 that has culminated in this new edition.

- Aglicare, Canberra and Goulburn
- Anglicare, Sydney
- Anglicare Victoria
- Allambie Youth Services
- Barnardos Australia
- Berry St, Victoria
- Biripi Aboriginal Medical Corporation, Taree NSW
- Burrung Dalai Out of Home Care and Family Support Service, Kempsey NSW
- CareSouth
- CatholicCare, Hunter-Manning
- CatholicCare, Sydney
- CatholicCare, Wollongong
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Victoria
- Connecting Carers, NSW
- Hunter Aboriginal Children’s Services, Newcastle NSW
- Lifestyle Solutions
- Life Without Barriers
- Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation, NSW
- Oz Child, Victoria
- St Joseph’s Cowper Sisters of mercy, Grafton NSW
- South Coast Medical Service Aboriginal Corporation, NSW
- Stretch-A-Family Inc
- Wesley Dalmar Childrens Services
- Westcare, Salvation Army, Vic
- Youth Care, United Protestant Association
- Uniting*Care* Burnside

A special thank you to Paula Hayden, whose passion and commitment to ensuring that kids in foster care are well cared for, continues to inform and drive the development of resources such as *Step by Step*. 
How to use this Information Pack

This pack should be mailed to people who

> have made an initial inquiry about being a foster carer
  and
  
> meet the essential preliminary criteria required to proceed with an application
  (assessed during the initial inquiry – see 1.1 of the Assessment Record “Record
  of First Inquiry”).

It includes

> Sample covering letter

> Registration of Interest form

> Text for material to send to person enquiring about becoming a foster carer

Additional material may be sent to the enquirer.

Material in this pack must be adapted to ensure it reflects your agency’s requirements and policies. Some of the requirements will not apply to your agency.

It is supplied as an example of what type of information is important to give to potential carers prior to their completion of an application form.

Dotted lines _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ in the text highlight when you need to include agency specific information.
Dear

It was great to get your inquiry about being a foster carer. We hope that your conversation with our worker was helpful.

Enclosed you will find information to assist you in understanding the children and young people who need foster care and the process of becoming a foster carer.

Prior to approval as a carer, every applicant is required to be involved in an assessment process that includes approximately five face-to-face sessions, training and background checks including criminal records.

If, after reading the enclosed information, you would like to take the next step toward being a foster carer then please complete the “Registration of interest” form attached to this letter and return it to Lisa Harvey, 31 Vivian Street, Inverell, NSW 2360.

A worker from our agency will then be in contact with you to arrange an initial information session with you. This gives you and other members of your household and workers from our agency an opportunity to exchange information about how you might provide care for a child or young person.

Thank you again for your interest in being a carer.

Yours sincerely

Attached: “Registration of interest” form
Registration of interest in foster care

I have

> read the “Information Pack for Potential Foster Carers” and

> would like to be contacted by a worker from your agency to arrange an Information Exchange Session.

1. Your name

   first name

   last name

2. Your address

3. Phone

   Home

   Work

   Mobile

4. Email address

5. Please complete for all members of your household
   (include all people who regularly stay overnight)

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<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of Birth</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Relationship to you</th>
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6. What language(s) do you speak at home?

   ____________________________________________
7. Are you of Aboriginal background?  
(mark one) ☐ Yes ☐ No  

8. Are you of Torres Strait Islander background?  
(mark one) ☐ Yes ☐ No  

9. Have you previously applied to any other agencies to foster?  
(mark one) ☐ Yes ☐ No  

If yes, please provide details and the result of the application.


10. What type of care are you interested in applying for?  
(mark any you are interested in)  
☐ respite care  
☐ temporary or short term care  
☐ long term care  

Please return to  

Lisa Harvey  
31 Vivian Street  
Inverell  
NSW  
2360
About fostering

What types of foster care are there?

Respite care

This involves care provided for regular short stays (e.g., one weekend a month). It gives families a break and provides a positive experience for the child. Respite foster carers are asked to make a commitment of 12 months.

Temporary or short term care

Temporary care is limited in time, usually overnight to twelve months maximum. At the end of temporary care, the child may return to their family or be placed in long-term care. Temporary care may be needed because of

- an emergency e.g., illness or other family crisis
- intervention by NSW Department Human Services (Community Services), where a child is removed from their parents to ensure their safety and well-being.

Long term care

This is care for children who cannot live with their families and need a family to grow up until their family circumstances change or they turn 18.

What are the criteria for being a carer?

Note: The criteria in the following material will not apply to all agencies. It has been supplied only as an example.

Age

21 and over, though it is expected that carers providing long-term care for a child will be able, if necessary, to continue care until the child is able to live independently.

Marital Status

Single people: With or without children

Married/defacto couples: Must have been living together in a domestic relationship and/or married for a minimum period of 3 years.

Age of Child of Applicant

If an applicant has a child, the age of the child placed must be at least 2 years less than the age of the child of the applicant. (Research has shown this assists in ensuring that the foster care family can provide the necessary focus on the particular needs of the child in care.)
**Fertility (where infertility is an issue)**

To be eligible to do long term care, an applicant must have finished their involvement with a fertility program for a period of not less than 12 months. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of their infertility and an understanding of the impact of infertility upon each of them as an individual and as a family.

**Health**

An applicant’s health (both physical and mental) shall be such as to ensure he or she is able to undertake the task of fostering. For applicants for long-term care, this may involve raising the child to adulthood.

**Religious beliefs**

The child/young person’s existing religious/cultural beliefs need to be respected and upheld by the carers, including diet, cultural tradition, and community connection in respect to Aboriginal children/young people. Carers religious beliefs cannot be forced upon the children/young people without their consent, they must be given the opportunity to make their own decision.

**Financial Resources**

In general, applicants who provide long-term care should have adequate financial resources to allow for one full-time parent at home for at least the first twelve months after placement to allow the development of a relationship between carer and child.

Applicants for temporary care may be employed full or part-time if they are able to provide adequate time to the child or young person in their care. For example, it may be possible to work part-time and still care for a school aged child, but this may not be possible if the child has particular needs, or is very young.

A foster care allowance is paid to carers to cover most of the additional costs of caring for a foster child.

**Accommodation**

Applicants should have adequate, safe accommodation for a child. This does not mean that applicants should necessarily own their own home. A bedroom must be available for a foster child, though this can be shared with other children if appropriate.

**Residence**

Applicants must live in the following geographic area Inverell and Armidale

**Caring skills**

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to undertake the special responsibilities involved in caring for a foster child. Carers must be able to

- demonstrate attitudes and connections consistent with being a good carer
- demonstrate personal resilience
- demonstrate personal teamwork
- provide child focused care
- provide a safe environment that is free from abuse.

**Involvement with the agency**

Applicants must be willing to participate in training and the assessment process. Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to work with Pathways in order to meet the changing needs of a child or young person. This will involve a willingness and ability to communicate with the agency and participate in planning and reviewing of the child’s care and their work with the Agency.

**Birth family contact**

Applicants must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origins, culture and past experience of the child or young person in their care. Applicants must demonstrate an acceptance of the agency’s commitment to ongoing contact between the child and his/her birth parents and a willingness to facilitate such contact.

**Care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people**

Our agency has a commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with carers who share their cultural background. Carers who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander may be asked to provide proof of this (eg, a letter from a Land Council) and details of the community to which they belong if they wish to provide foster care for a child from their own cultural background.

**Discipline of children or young people**

Carers are expected to work closely with agency staff in developing appropriate discipline strategies for the particular child or young person in their care. Foster carers are not allowed to use any physical force to discipline foster children.

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical punishments eg hitting. It is very important that foster children are disciplined in a way that sends a strong message to them that they are cared for in spite of their behaviour. Experience has shown that hitting or other physical punishment is not effective in dealing with these children. Children in care because they have experienced abuse in the past usually have not experienced consistent caring parenting.

Our agency has a behaviour management policy which guides carers on how they can appropriately discipline children.

**Health and hygiene standards**

Carers are expected to confirm to guidelines designed to ensure that children are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include practicing of universal
infection control and ensuring that there is no smoking within the home. Training is provided to carers about health and hygiene standards.

**Application to other agencies**

Applicants must advise of previous applications to become a carer with other agencies in Australia and overseas and the outcomes of those applications. Applicants will be asked for permission for this agency to contact others to whom you have previously applied.
What is the process of becoming a carer?

Becoming a carer involves a number of steps. You have taken the first step in making your enquiry. If you have called us we have registered your enquiry.

We would like you to read this pack carefully. If you are still interested in applying to be a carer, send us the Registration of Interest form attached to the covering letter. When you do that we will arrange an initial “Information Exchange Session”.

The “Information Exchange Session” gives you and the people in your household an opportunity to meet with workers from our agency and an experienced carer.

After this session you can decide whether you wish to continue the process of becoming a carer by participating in a training program and a series of assessment interviews. The assessment interviews are not something you pass or fail. We work with you to discover together whether fostering is a suitable option for you at this time.

Once you have been approved as a carer, you will be approached when a child or young person is matched with the type of care you can provide. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised for you and your household if you accepted the placement of that child or young person. Sometimes it is possible for you to meet the child or young person before you make the decision about taking that placement.
Flow chart of the assessment process

Contact: You contact our agency and we register your enquiry

Information Pack: We send you an “Information Pack for Potential Carers”

Registration of Interest: You register your interest in becoming a carer using the “Registration of Interest” form

Information Session: You participate in an “Information Exchange Session” with your family, agency workers and an experienced carer

Carer Application: You complete an “Application to become a Foster Carer” form

> Training  > Assessment  > Checks
You complete a training course
You participate in assessment sessions
Checks are undertaken regarding your health
> Health
> Accommodation
> Background and criminal record
> Personal references

DECISION

Application is Approved
Carer Agreement: If your application is approved you will be asked to sign a Carer “Code of Conduct” Agreement

Matching: When a child or young person is matched with your family, you decide whether to accept the placement

On-going Training: Our agency provides on-going training

On-going Support: Our agency provides on-going carer support

Application is not Approved
Appeal: If your application is not approved you can appeal the decision
Details of the assessment process

Does the assessment process involve doing tests?

No, the assessment process is designed to enable our agency and you to make an informed decision together. At each stage in the process you will be given feedback. This may include identifying issues that may impact on your ability to provide foster care.

What will the assessment sessions cover?

Because being a foster carer is such an important task, you will be asked about many aspects of your life relevant to being a foster carer. In particular, we will look at your ability to

- draw from and apply your own personal experiences to the tasks of fostering
- provide good quality day to day care for children and young people
- provide a safe and nurturing environment
- work with other people, particularly staff from our agency and other organisations and birth parents.

What does the medical check involve?

During the assessment,

- you will be asked to complete a Health checklist
- your doctor will be asked to complete a Medical Questionnaire.

The purpose of these checks is to determine if you have the physical and psychological health to undertake the task of fostering. Questions are asked about

- physical health
- emotional health
- current and past illnesses and medical problems
- use of drugs (prescribed and unprescribed)
- smoking.

If any medical issue arises that may affect your suitability to foster, it will be discussed with you fully to help us work out together its potential impact on children or young people in your care.

What does the accommodation check involve?

This is a check to ensure that you are able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable. The check is carried out by a member of the assessment team.
What should our references cover?

You will be asked to provide the name of two unrelated people who have known you for at least two years and can comment on your experience and ability to care for children and your personal character. We may also speak to other people who have contact with you.

What does the criminal check involve?

When you have completed a formal application to become a foster carer (not just registered your interest) and with your permission, our agency checks the criminal record of all people in your household 14 years or above. Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify you or a family member from being a carer family. However, any criminal convictions that affect your ability to care safely for a child or young person will mean your application is not able to proceed.

Specifically you will be asked to

> make a “Prohibited Employment Declaration” that you have not been convicted of which prohibits you from applying to be a foster carer a serious sex offence

> consent to check to allow screening of your criminal and work record in relation to sexual misconduct and acts of violence involving children.

Can I appeal if my application to be a foster care is not approved by your agency?

Yes. You are entitled to be given reasons why your application has been rejected and have the decision reviewed. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except for personal references which may be treated as confidential.

Background about your agency

Pathfinders are an Armidale based Non Government Organisation servicing the New England region. We have many programs across New England including a Youth Refuge, Residential Out of Home Care Units, Supported Independent Living Units, Family Support Service, Youth Accommodation Services, Family Referral Service and Non Placement Support Services.

Pathways have established Out of Home Care Residential units in Armidale and Inverell and are in the process of moving into Intensive support and generalised Foster Care.