

Fostering Matters

Your guide to becoming a carer



We are Key Assets

Serving Children, Families and Communities.

We're an international group that has been operating in Australia since 2007.

During this time we have developed a strong reputation as a leader in the child and family welfare sector. As a not for profit we are passionate about delivering outstanding services that enable children and families to achieve their potential. Our purpose is to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. We can draw on our group's wealth of knowledge, international safeguarding and child protection practice, therapeutic models of intervention, academic research and qualitative programs to continually improve care options for vulnerable children and their families. In Australia, we have services in New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. We also provide programs on Norfolk Island and have strong partnerships with our Key Assets service in New Zealand.

When we meet and talk with carers across Australia, New Zealand and the other jurisdictions where Key Assets operates, we hear such powerful stories that inspire people to become carers. We are forever grateful for the positive impact that our carers have on the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our community. The carer journey is not always easy and we understand the challenges faced by foster and kinship carers in shaping a better future for children and young people.

Good caring is like running a marathon, to do it well requires preparation and training, assistance from a support team, motivation to help you in the tough times when you hit the wall and friends, family and coaches to celebrate the wins. We look forward to hearing about your carer journey and the way in which we can support you in creating positive and lasting outcomes for children, young people and families.

Thank you for taking the first step.



keyassets

SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

A photograph of two young girls, one white and one Black, blowing bubbles in a grassy field. The girl on the left is holding a yellow bubble wand. The girl on the right is blowing a bubble. The background is a soft-focus green field with a bright sun in the upper left corner.

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What is fostering?

Our dedicated 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.

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.

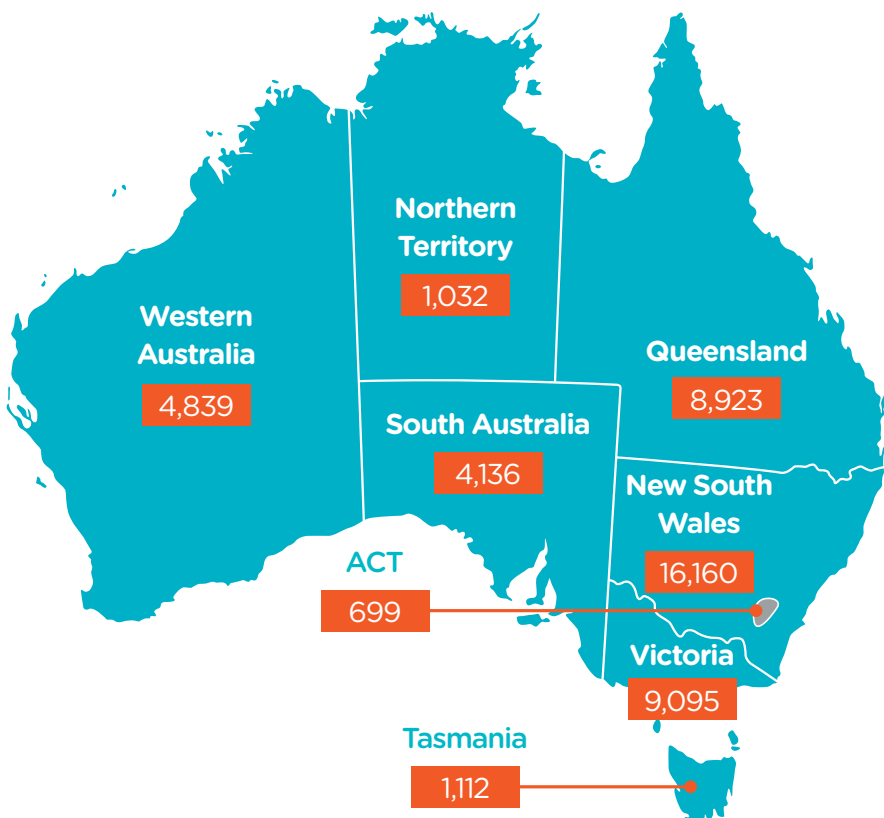
Could I be a foster carer?

Our foster carers come from all types of backgrounds and we welcome carers of any race, sexual orientation, relationship status, 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 meet the individual needs of the child/ren in your care.

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 Child Protection Australia (2019-2020) show nationally, 45,996 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2020—a rate of 8.1 per 1,000 children.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Child protection Australia 2019-20. Child welfare. Cat. no. CWS 78. Canberra: AIHW.

● Key Assets operational regions



Fostering a child or young person is a big decision and takes high levels of commitment and patience.

Who are we?

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

Key Assets is a non-government, not-for-profit children's services agency provider with more than 20 years' experience in a range of children's services including supporting foster carers, children and young people in care.

What's in a name?

Key Assets reflects our belief that foster carers are the agents of change for children in care, 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, a child or young person's strength and resilience will grow.

Key to what we do is our culture and core values:

- ▲ Recognising everybody counts and is accountable.
- ▲ Providing high quality and safe services.
- ▲ Achieving excellence through continuous improvement.
- ▲ Cultivation knowledge, innovation and learning.

**Our purpose:
is to achieve positive and
lasting outcomes for children,
families and communities.**

Caring with Key Assets

How do we work?

At Key Assets we have a unique approach to fostering that encourages carers and professionals to work together in the best interests of the child; by implementing our Key Care Team Model and our Practice Framework.

Our small, dedicated teams build trusting relationships with carers and offer the support and training needed to provide stable and successful homes for the children and young people they look after.

What kind of support do we offer?

Caring for children 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. For children and young people identified as having more complicated needs we'll also provide continuing support of a child and young person support worker and therapist to help promote the needs of the young person in your care.

We offer fostering reimbursement, 24/7 support and the opportunity for you to enhance your skills through ongoing training opportunities including Support and Coaching Sessions.

You'll also receive extra benefits, including up to 28 days respite per year, access to carer support groups and organised family activities.



Claire and Steve's story

Claire and Steve started new lives as foster carers when they fostered Luke, a 12 year old boy.

"Our lives as foster carers began a couple of years ago after we saw an advertisement that had been placed 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 decided that we had a lot to offer a child that, through no fault of their own, was unable to live with their birth family."

"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.

In Spring 2008 we became the first carers to be appointed through the fostering panel – we joined the Key Assets family. By May 2008 we had our first placement, we were so excited, our family had expanded by one, a 12 year old boy called Luke with a mischievous sense of humour and a smile to melt your heart."

"Our first 12 months together were a rollercoaster of emotions to say the least, we went from elation to despair and back again quite a few times."

"We had many highs and lows and at times wondered why are we doing this. What we found difficult was that normally when you go out to work and have a particularly stressful day, your home is your haven where you can recharge the batteries and relax. When you foster it's all happening in your own home. That's where Key Assets gave us the support and strength to carry on, to know that things would improve, to give us some much needed respite so we could look after ourselves as well. They listened to us and gave us advice on how to deal with specific behavioural issues, all of which were new to us.

Since then, what a difference. Looking back we realise that it takes time for a child to begin to trust again, they have been through so much in their short lives. We had to learn to deal with rejection; when Luke didn't even want to sit next to me at the dinner table, picked up his chair and moved away, to being criticised and put down at every opportunity.

For new carers it is very difficult to cope with this type of behaviour coming from a child you are putting your heart and soul into helping. Over time we learned not to take things personally, it really wasn't us he was angry at, we just represented the adults in his life that had let him down in the past. Now two years on, at the dinner table I often get, 'Claire, you can sit next to me if you like', and he often helps me preparing the meal and clearing up afterwards. We have learned that consistency and routine play a vital role in caring for Luke, only time and persistence can aid this."

"Luke is now settled and happy and talks of his long term future with us."

"He considers himself part of the family and is treated like one, he often tells us he loves us. We are reaping the rewards of the stressful beginning we all had. To hear his laughter and joy is priceless and to see Luke smile and at peace is worth everything.

We hope that our story gives you a glimpse of the difference you can make to children and their lives. There is no magic formula, just plain old patience, kindness and sincerity."

"To see Luke smile and at peace is worth everything."





Types of care...

All children and young people in care have a plan which determines the type of care they require. Our initial goal is to give children and young people permanency within 2 years. Our goal may change as more information is gathered and as we become more familiar with the family.

Emergency

Emergency placements involve caring for a child or young person who needs somewhere safe to stay immediately, usually for a few nights or up to 6 weeks, depending on the child/ren's need. Children usually have face to face contact with their family 2-3 times a week while in an Emergency placement.

Permanent care

Carers make a commitment to caring for the child or young person until their care order ends at 18 years and can continue to care for the young person informally after 18

Short term or Reunification care

Short term or restoration care is from 3 months to 2 years, until a permanent placement is found or the child is restored to family. Family contact can occur 2-3 times per week and carers are involved in facilitating contact.

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. This might be for weekends or a few weeks but we really need people who are flexible to meet the need of the children and carers.

Children with disabilities

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



The journey to become a carer...

Receiving this booklet is just the first stage in the process to becoming approved as a 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.

1

Call us or log onto our website keyassets.org.au to register your interest in caring with Key Assets.



3

You will be required to attend Shared Lives part 1 which is orientation training that covers all responsibilities and obligations of being a carer and part 2 which is an induction.

2

A Key Assets worker will visit your home to answer any questions and help you to make an informed decision about becoming a carer with Key Assets.



You'll need to provide us with:

- ▲ We will provide a medical questionnaire for you to complete.
- ▲ 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.

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

- ▲ Ex-partner references, if appropriate to do so, are required when there is shared care of a child under 18 years.
- ▲ National Police Clearance and background check on all adult members of the household and any adult regular visitors.
- ▲ All adult members of the family and regular visitors

to the household will need to apply for a Working with Children Check through the Department of Justice.

- ▲ Standard Safety compliance check on your home.
- ▲ If you have lived overseas we may undertake an overseas criminal history check.

4

Your suitability will then be assessed by a qualified assessor 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.



5

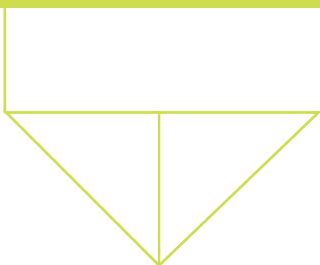
Once your assessment and all relevant checks and references are completed, we'll present your information to an authorisation panel. You'll also attend the panel and they will make a recommendation to the Key Assets Director who makes the final authorisation decision.



6

If you are authorised, we will begin to match a child to your experience and best fit for your family.

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



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 prefer to place a child in a home where he or she will have their own bedroom but will assess if it is appropriate for children to share, for example a sibling group.

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

It is possible for foster carers to work as long as you are available to meet the needs of the child.

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 children and 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. There is currently a shortage of foster carers particularly for older children and for children who have high and complex needs and sibling groups of 3 or more children.

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?**

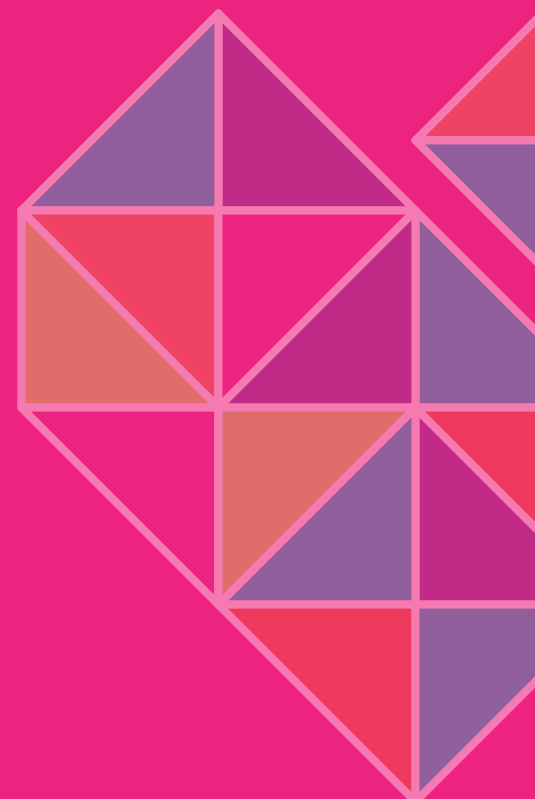
No, Key Assets only provides foster care for children and young people who are living in Australia and more importantly in your local area. Because of our global network we are able to draw on international, as well as local, knowledge in Out of Home Care and apply this to our local services. Key Assets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

Q8. **Do all children have contact with their family members and significant others?**

Contact with family is important for all children as it helps them to form their identity and learn about who is in their family. Contact visits with family members forms part of the court order and can be several times a week when children first enter care or if their plan is to be restored to family. All carers are required to demonstrate a commitment to children and young people having contact, where deemed to be safe and appropriate. Carers are involved in contact and where appropriate supervise children attending contact visits.

Q9. **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.



Mandy's story

Mandy already has two grown-up children of her own, she now fosters 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 it 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”.



“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 has the skills necessary to support them when providing care. We will provide you with development opportunities that will enable you to continually increase your knowledge, skills and confidence. You will receive regular support and coaching sessions with your allocated social worker.

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 a fostering course.

2

This is followed by a program of 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.

Carers share their experience with family contact

Jane and I had been together for six years when we decided to foster. It had never really occurred to us until one night we saw a program on a gay couple who fostered.

I began the search to find a fostering agency who would accept us, and I found Key Assets. After the recruitment process and training, Key Assets called to tell us they had a 4-year-old who had been through several failed placements and asked if we were we up for a challenge? We dived in head first!

The moment Mary arrived, Jane and I educated ourselves quick smart on kids with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and reactive attachment disorders.

Building a relationship with someone who rejects attachment has been hard work but is important for her development.

Key Assets offered around the clock support and we used this to give the best care and guidance we could for Mary.

Five years later Mary is thriving. She is doing well at school, forming strong relationships with our family and friends, and is now building a connection with her biological family.

Jane and I eventually realised that the only way for Mary not to feel 'removed' from her family was for us to make them an extension of ours.

Our job is to love Mary despite her past, in the present and the future. Her family hears from us directly what is happening in Mary's life, and we get better insight into what Mary's past life looked like.

This has been so helpful to us because we get first-hand information on little pieces of the puzzles that we weren't able to put together for Mary.

Her family are happy with her progress and we now care for them as we do for her. Mary has integrated so well into our family life and is now building relationships of her own, like with my parents who have just applied to become her respite carers.

We have since taken on a very lively 3-year-old boy, James, who has been in foster care since birth. We have contact with his maternal grandmother and his father every month. On one occasion, we took a

short weekend holiday and stayed at a caravan park near his biological family. This allowed James to spend some quality time with his half siblings and grandmother. They are all lovely people and care for James deeply, but health issues and family circumstances have meant he was placed in care.

Mary has taken time to adjust to James and they had their differences at first, but now she fusses over him like a little mother. James and Mary have found common ground and are now just like any other brother and sister.

These kids didn't choose their life, they are where they are because of circumstances in their past family life. Their parents have lost the opportunity to fight for them, so we fight for them. We have a home with rooms and the determination to fight for their happiness. We love them and want the best for them, for their sake and their families.





What is Reunification?

Reunification involves working together to achieve a shared goal of reuniting children with their birth families. The success of this can be greatly achieved through the key care team – carers, children, birth families and Key Assets working together to ensure that when children return home to their parents, this is a safe place for them.

The role carers play in reunification

Two pre-school-aged siblings were placed with Key Assets carers after concerns were raised of parental substance misuse and domestic violence.

While originally orders were made for the children to be placed in care until the age of 18, one parent appealed the decision and final orders were changed with the goal of reunification when the parent had demonstrated capacity to implement key changes.

At Key Assets, we understand the importance of preserving families, and educating all of those involved in building positive relationships that support growth and development for children.

During reunification process, carers play a vital and highly involved role, continuing to care for and support the children whilst meeting with the parents and facilitating regular contact during the transition period, until the family can be reunited. Key Assets Child and Family

Social Worker, Claire Jones says at times it can be challenging.

“Working with this particular placement, at times, it was challenging. There can always be a clash of personalities and disagreements but overall, all parties worked in the best interest of the children, always keeping them at the forefront of their care.”

When asked about the qualities or abilities reunification carers require, Claire says the most important ability is to be able to work as a team and seek support when needed.

“Carers need to be an advocate for children in care. Children are likely to have experienced great adversity and may not know their rights or be confident enough to voice their opinions and hopes.”

“The ability to work as a team and ask for help when needed is very important, and so is having the ability to listen, communicate and understand the role of the

family members and professionals involved in the child’s life.”

“It’s also important for reunification carers to promote and support contact with the birth family as well as the community and be patient and committed to the children even through the more challenging times.”

This family is now being supported with reunification support through the permanency service.

Reunification should be a great achievement and accomplishment Claire says.

“Knowing that you have cared for these children, provided a loving, stable and safe home for them until they’re able to be reunited with their family is great.”

“Reunification is not an option for all families but when it is, it should be supported from the beginning by all parties,” Claire says.



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 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.

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."

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.

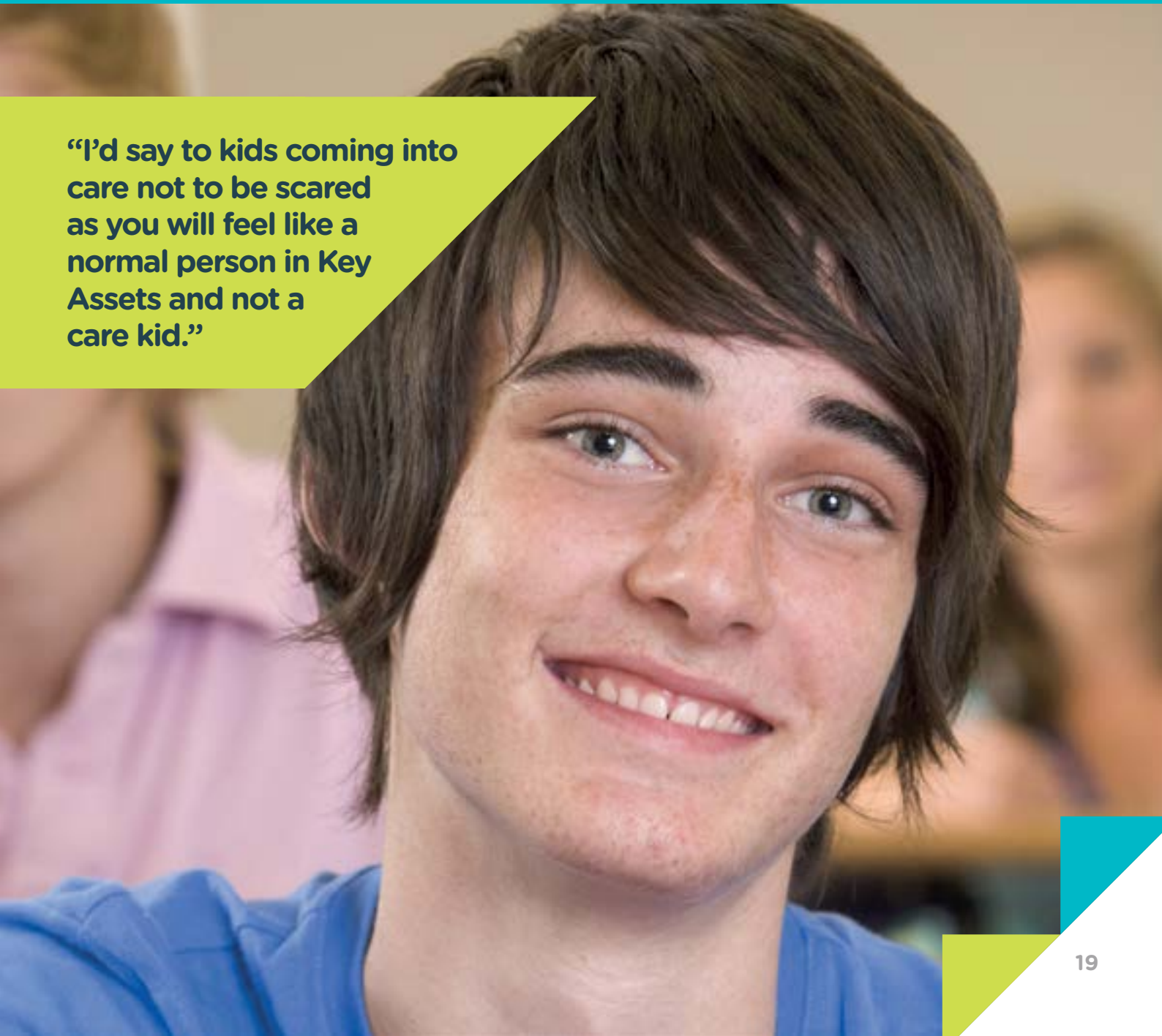
I'm in foster care because my mum and dad didn't look after me well, it wasn't safe for me to live with them and so I was put in to foster care. I was very angry and I found it really hard to trust adults which made my behaviour difficult sometimes. The more I moved the more I felt angry and let down.

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 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 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!

"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."



What next?

Children living in your community need your help.

Are you ready to
take the next step?

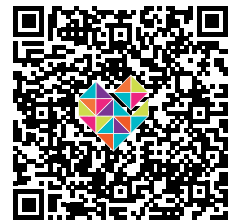


Yes

I am ready to talk to a
member of the team

Visit our enquiry page and answer a
few questions and one of our friendly
team will be in contact to discuss the
application process with you.

www.canifoster.com.au



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