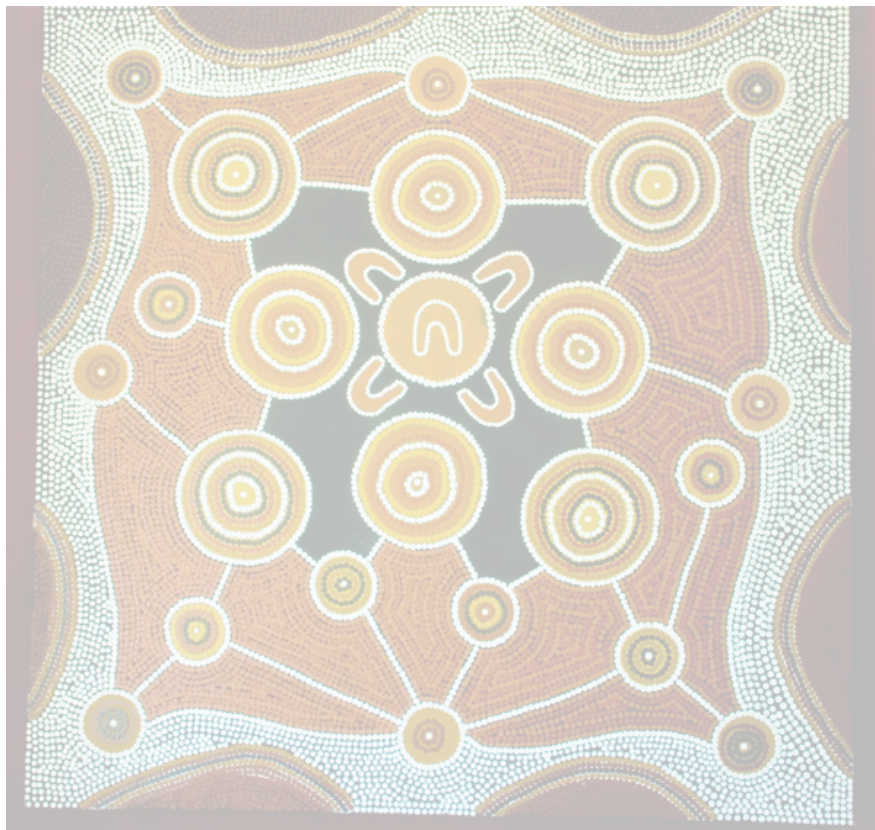




# Foster care Information Pack

For anyone considering  
becoming a foster carer

umfc



© Making Two Worlds Work

## Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians and Elders past and present, who have raised children, taught them about the world around them and gave them the gift of culture and language. We recognize our part in bringing fairness to our Indigenous brothers and sisters and creating a community where all children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, can 'grow up strong'.

# Supporting foster carers



## Foster Care Information Pack

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## Dear prospective carer,

Thank you for your enquiry about becoming a foster carer.

We hope this information will assist you in understanding the role of a foster carer, the children and young people who cannot live with their families and the process of becoming a foster carer.

Prior to being accredited as a foster carer, every applicant will have to complete a health check, national police check, a Working with Children Check and referee checks. You will also be asked to write your life story and complete pre-assessment training. We will come to your home to make sure it is safe and has enough space for a child and there will also be three to four interview sessions. This process is done at your pace, and we work around your family's needs.

If you would like to take the next step towards being a foster carer, please complete the 'Application to become a Foster Carer' form and return it to the Carer Management Team or confirm your interest with us. Please use the enclosed self-addressed envelope if you received this pack via mail and send to:

**Carer Assessment and Support Team, UMFC**

**PO Box 725**

**WODONGA VIC 3690**

You can also return the form via email to: [fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au](mailto:fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au) or return it in person to either our Wodonga at 27-29 Stanley Street Wodonga or Wangaratta office at 36 Mackay Street, Wangaratta.

Once we received your form a member of the team will be in contact to arrange the next steps with you and any other household members. If you have children in the home, we encourage their participation during the assessment process if you are comfortable to do so. This gives you all an opportunity to discuss providing care for a child or young person.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us on 02 6055 8000.

*Yours sincerely,*

**The Carer Assessment and Support Team**

UMFC Care Services Program





## **“It takes a village to raise a child”**

Foster carers can help change the lives of children in our communities every day. They provide safe, nurturing and positive home and family environments for children. These are children and young people who cannot live with their birth families due to concerns for their safety and wellbeing.

Being a foster carer is a challenging and rewarding role. They support some of our most vulnerable children and young people, always working towards the goal of returning a child safely to their family. Foster carers can walk alongside children for a night, months or years.

All children and young people have the right to be safe and looked after. To have food, a warm loving home, go to school, play and be kids. They have the right to know where they come from, and be given opportunities to truly develop into themselves. They should be able to go to cultural activities, play sport, make friends, learn music and dance if they want to.

They deserve to be protected. They should be treated fairly and live and grow up healthy. Foster carers can give vulnerable children these opportunities.

Welcoming a child into your lives gives them the chance to know comfort, develop their identity and have positive relationships. It gives their birth family the time and opportunity to make changes, with they hope they can have their children returned to them. Foster carers play a vital role in building and maintaining connections for a child with their family and community.

As a foster carer you get to see a child grow, learn new skills, build confidence and resilience, laugh and smile. You can see their firsts, provide safety and be a part of their everyday life.

Foster carers can come from a variety of backgrounds. Regardless of race, relationship status, employment, sexuality and religion you can become a foster carer. If you are motivated to support all the needs of children, can provide them with a stable home environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love, acceptance and understanding then you could become a foster carer.

If, after reading this information booklet you have any questions, please contact:

**Carer Assessment and Support Team**  
**Phone - 02 6055 8000**  
**Email - [fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au](mailto:fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au)**



A photograph of a woman with dark hair and a man with short blonde hair, both smiling and holding a baby. The woman is on the left, looking down at the baby. The man is on the right, looking at the baby. The baby is wearing a blue and white striped shirt and is looking towards the camera.

# About UMFC

Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC) is a local community service organisation with a vision for our communities is that every young person and child is cared for.

Together we support our families and communities so that we hear the voices of our children and young people, families and individuals to support them to heal, rebuild and lead meaningful lives.

We support diversity and inclusivity and welcome all people to our service, regardless of race, religion, gender or sexuality.

UMFC is a Child Safe Organisation and is committed to child safety. We want children to be safe, happy, and empowered. We support and respect all children as well as our employees and volunteers. We are committed to the safety, participation, and empowerment of all.

We have carers from Albury, Corryong, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Benalla and Mansfield and many places in-between and look after Victorian children and young people mostly from our region.

## **Statement of Commitment to child safety**

UMFC has zero tolerance of child abuse. All children and young people who access UMFC services have the right to feel and be safe, and to be treated with respect. We are committed to promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety, culturally and/or linguistically diverse cultural safety, and the safety of children with disability. We are committed to providing a welcoming and safe environment and working towards the best interests of children and young people at all times.

# What is Foster Care?

**Foster care is the temporary care of children who are unable to live at home with family or people known to them. Children in foster care are of all ages and come from diverse backgrounds. The reasons children need foster care can vary. It is mostly because Child Protection and the Children's Court of Victoria have assessed them as at risk of harm and there is a court order in place.**

Children in foster care have likely experienced trauma and disruption including family violence, neglect and abuse. They need patient, warm and empathetic carers and secure, predictable, safe homes. Foster carers are trained, assessed and accredited to provide a nurturing and stable family environment for children and young people.

The priority in foster care is for children and young people to return to their families. This is referred to as reunification. In most cases, children need temporary or short term care, but sometimes they need long term care, which can be for years. The length of time is determined by the Children's Court. A child can live with a foster family for many years, then go live with birth family if they come forward and are assessed as suitable. So foster carers must be prepared to support and love a child and say goodbye. Foster carers are a part of a team bringing joy and stability to a child's life.

## **Permanent Carer and Adoption**

On occasions the Children's Court of Victoria determine it is not possible for a child to return home. The aim then is to find a stable, permanent placement for these children and young people through a process called '**permanent care**'. Permanent care is not foster care and UMFC does not assess permanent carers. People looking to become "forever families" should consider whether foster care is right for them. For more information on becoming a permanent carer please reach out to the Permanent care Program team at the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

# What is Foster Care?

Foster carers can become permanent carers, however this is not guaranteed. The Children's Court must be satisfied there are no suitable family members available to care for the child; the child has been settled with the foster carers for some years; and the foster carers have been assessed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing as suitable.

Adoption services are delivered by Adoption Victoria within the Department of Justice and Community Services. Unlike permanent care, children who require adoption have not likely had Child Protection services involved in their lives. For more information of adoption please explore Adoptions Victoria.

## What support can I receive?

Support offered to foster carers include:

- **home Visits**
- **24/7 Support**
- **training and development**
- **mentoring**
- **social activities**
- **financial reimbursements**



# Types of Foster Care?



## **Respite care**

Planned temporary care of a child or young person living with a full-time foster or kinship carer such as one weekend a month or during school holidays. This is to provide full-time carers and the children with a break and build positive experiences and relationships for the child. It can be a regular arrangement or as needed.

## **Emergency care**

Immediate care for a child due to concerns for their safety. As these arrangements are urgent, there is usually very little notice before a child or young person is placed with the carer. They can often occur in the night and information about the child and their home life may be limited.



## **Short term foster care**

Limited in time, ranging from overnight up to about six months. Children and young people requiring short-term care are often reunified with their parents or may be placed with extended family at the end of the foster care arrangement.

Short term care may be needed because of:

- An emergency e.g. illness or other family crisis.
- Intervention by Child Protection, where a child is removed from their parents to ensure their safety and well-being.

The foster carer has an important role in promoting the child's contact and connection with their family and community.



# Types of Foster Care?



## **Long term foster care**

A long term placement is needed when a child or young person cannot return home for some time. It may cease when a permanent care order is made, when they can return to birth family or when the child or young person reaches adulthood and becomes independent. Unless specified by the Children's Court, children in long-term care maintain contact with their families supported by the foster carers.

## **Therapeutic foster care**


Therapeutic foster carers are provided with additional specialist training and work closely with a team of professionals. This enables carers to develop skills and knowledge on how best to support children and young people who have experienced complex trauma.

## **Voluntary care**

Voluntary care is available when a parent or carer makes arrangements directly with UMFC. They may not be able to care for their child at home due to illness or unforeseen circumstances or need respite. There is no court order involved.







Can you become a foster carer?

***“I need more information. Is this even possible for my situation?”***

Foster carers are just like you and they do extraordinary things. Foster carers come from all walks of life and have different backgrounds, genders, relationship status, ages and experiences. We welcome foster carers from all backgrounds; you can be male, female, and/or identify with the LGBTQIA+ community. We also ask you have the time and energy to build connections with children and have a strong support network.

Most importantly, foster carers possess the qualities of patience, flexibility, openness to learning, an ability to nurture, a good sense of humour, sense of fun, empathy, playfulness and curiosity. Foster carers and their families experience a sense of satisfaction and achievement.

### **Age**

Minimum age to become a foster carer is 21 years. There is no maximum age but if you would like to provide long-term care then it is expected you will be healthy, well and active until the child is able to live independently and at least until they are 18 years old. You also need to have a valid driver licence and vehicle.

### **Relationship Status**

People who are single or in a heterosexual, same-sex or other relationship, are all welcome and needed as foster carers. UMFC values diversity and recognizes how important it is for children to see independence, love and commitment. The primary criteria is being able to provide a safe and stable home environment for children. Spouses or partners (including new partners in the home) must also submit an application and be fully assessed. Non live-in partners must undertake all background safety checks. They must also be included in the assessment if they are to have contact with the child.

# Can you become a foster carer?

## **Children in the home**

If you have children, it is recommended you care for children the same age or younger than the youngest in your family. Experience has shown this assists the foster care family to focus on each child's developmental, social and emotional needs and it mirrors how biological children are naturally introduced into the family.

If you do not have children, that is perfectly fine. You will need to demonstrate some experience in taking care of children. This can include children of family members or friends, through work and volunteering.

## **Growing your family**

People who are about to or are currently trying to grow their family through surrogacy, fertility, permanent care or adoption are able to register their interest to become a foster carer. However it is recommended these avenues are explored before starting the foster carer assessment process.

Foster carer applications can be assessed to provide respite, emergency or short-term care during this time but not long-term foster care. This will only be considered once you are no longer actively considering or involved in a fertility or surrogacy program, or you are no longer involved in adoption or permanent care processes. This means you have been assessed as suitable permanent carers, the child has been matched and all legal processes are completed.

Growing your family is not a barrier to becoming a foster carer however welcoming another child is a big change to your life. Another child in the home may create disruption and be a risk to the stability of a long-term placement. It can also change the dynamics in the home and reduce your time and capacity to support a child in care. The main consideration is to whether the carers could appropriately maintain a foster care placement in the event that another child were to enter the household.

# Can you become a foster carer?

## **Health**

The physical and mental health of you and your partner will be assessed to confirm you are fit and able to undertake the role of fostering. For long-term care, this may involve raising a child to adulthood. Children in care have experienced trauma which can come out as behaviours of concern, developmental delays and big emotions. This can mean there are times of stress, strain and challenge. It is also a role that requires energy, patience, empathy and resilience. We need to be sure applicants are physically and emotionally capable of caring for an active child or young person.

## **Financial resources**

Foster carers can be employed full or part-time, unpaid workers, students, retired or those not working. You will be required to demonstrate you have adequate time, flexibility, financial stability and suitable accommodation for a child or young person in their care. It is possible to work and still be a foster carer, but this may not be possible if the child has particular or additional needs. Carers receive a care allowance from the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to contribute to the range of day-to-day costs of caring for a child.

## **Your home**

Foster carers need to have adequate, safe accommodation for a child that provides a natural family home environment. Your home must meet the standards of the 'Step by Step Victoria Home and Environment check'. This does not mean you must own your own home but we do ask you have stable housing. A bedroom must be available for a child, though this can be shared with other children if appropriate. Sleeping arrangements must be age appropriate and meet the child's individual needs including privacy and safety. There should be space for play and an area to study if school aged.

# Can you become a foster carer?

## **Residence**

Foster carers must reside in the following in the area of North East Victoria, starting from Mansfield up to the NSW Border including the regions in and around Benalla, Wangaratta, Wodonga, Corryong and surrounding communities. People located on the NSW side of the border region can also submit an application to become a carer with UMFC. As the governing/funding body is Victoria based, all children in care fall under Victorian legislation. Our offices are located in both Wangaratta and Wodonga.

## **Involvement with services**

Applicants must be willing to participate in training and the assessment process. Foster carers must demonstrate a capacity to work with UMFC in order to meet the changing needs of a child or young person. This will involve a willingness and ability to communicate and work with UMFC, multiple services and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. They must also participate in the planning and reviewing of the child's care. There will be times when foster carers will need to complete important paperwork which can be supported UMFC workers.

## **Supporting the child and their family to maintain contact**

Foster carers must demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the origins, culture, community and past experience of the child or young person in their care. They will need to support and promote a child's religion, gender expression and help them to form positive identities. Applicants must also demonstrate a willingness to facilitate contact and connections between a child in their care and that child's family and community.

# Can you become a foster carer?



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

If a child coming into care is Aboriginal, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle hierarchy requires Aboriginal children, wherever possible to be placed with Aboriginal extended family. If that is not possible, the child may be placed with Aboriginal carers from the child's community and within close proximity to the child's natural family.

If a child is unable to be placed with extended family or stay within the community, UMFC has a legislated commitment to placing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people with carers who share their cultural background.

Discussion will occur with applicants who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, to understand the community to which they belong to enable appropriate placement matching where ever possible.

When a suitable Aboriginal carer is not available, Aboriginal children may be cared for by culturally safe non-Aboriginal carers. Those carers do additional training to help them understand some of the particular issues relating to caring for Aboriginal children and demonstrate how they will maintain a child's connections with culture and community.

# Financial supports

Foster carers receive a care allowance which contributes to the day-to-day costs of caring for a child or young person. There are payment levels which are dependent on the age of the child or young person and the complexity of their needs. The care allowance contributes to costs incurred by a carer in the course of providing home-based care for children, including (but not limited to):

- **Accommodation, clothing, food, utilities, telephone and internet.**
- **Basic personal items for the child such as toiletries and toothbrush.**
- **Transport required as part of a regular routine, including to and from school, professional appointments and access where appropriate.**
- **Entertainment, social activities and other things – pocket money, hobbies and club memberships, outings, toys, photos, gifts, treats.**

It is not considered a 'payment' and as such, is not considered a source of income. It will not affect your tax return, applications for benefits or applications for loans from financial institutions. The allowance does not pay for the carer's time or skills, but simply contributes to the cost of caring for a child or young person.

Foster carers who face exceptional expenses at times that go beyond day-to-day care can discuss the cost with their UMFC worker.

## **Commonwealth Government benefits:**

Foster carers or young people may also be eligible for financial support through Centrelink, such as Family Tax Benefit, Youth Allowance, and Additional Family Disability Allowance.

Foster carers can apply for exemption from Welfare to Work requirements. All children and young people on Guardianship/Custody orders are eligible for personal Health Care and Medicare cards.

For more information visit:

<https://services.dffh.vic.gov.au/support-carers>



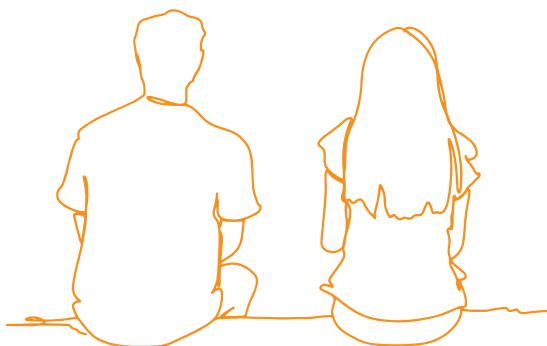


# What is the criteria for being a carer?

## **Caring skills – demonstration of five key competencies**

Assessment of potential foster carers is based on five key competencies identified as essential when undertaking effective foster caring:

- safety: providing a safe environment that is free from abuse
- attitudes and connections: values, beliefs, cultural practices and current circumstances will enable good care to be provided to children
- personal resilience: demonstrating personal readiness to become a carer
- child-focused nurture: promoting the positive development of children in care
- working with others: the ability to work as part of a team.



# The assessment process



1. Call or email the Carer Assessment and Support Team to **Complete an Initial Enquiry Form**. We will arrange an **initial information sharing session** either online or in your home. This session gives you and the people in your household an opportunity to meet with us and answer any questions you may have. We will check in on you four weeks after your initial enquiry.

2. **Submit your application to be a foster carer and life story** along with providing referee details, completing the health checklists, and the authority to contact your General Practitioner.

3. We will arrange for you to participate in a face to face or online **training program** called 'Shared Lives'.

4. Next steps is to undertake **safety screening checks** including a Home and Environment, National and International Police and Working with Children Checks.

5. You will complete a series of **assessment interviews** with members of the Carer Assessment and Support Team who will write your assessment report. If you have children, they will also be included in the interviews.

6. Once an assessment report is written it will be presented to an **Accreditation Panel**. The panel members will consider your application and decide whether caring is right for you.

7. The final step after accreditation is a member of the Carer Assessment and Support Team will conduct your **on-boarding/induction** where you will complete Shared Lives, Part 2.

# Preparing your life story

As part of the application we ask you to provide a summary of your life in the form of a life story. This will be kept private and confidential.

Your story, your experiences, your challenges, strengths, grief and loss, relationships and your general attitude to life shape the you care for children. Reading your story helps us to get to know you and understand why you are the person you are today.

Some people find the life story part of the assessment a bit scary but it can be as long or short as you like. Spelling and grammar does not matter, what matters is giving us a summary of your life so far. Please provide us with enough information including the highs and lows, the good, the bad, and your reflections on your life experiences.

Below are some questions relating to different stages of your life and while it is important to address the questions, please feel free to provide further information or use a different format. If you do not feel confident writing down your life history, you may record an oral version of your story using video or other digital format.

## **Ages 0-5 years**

- When and where were you born? (if known)
- Who lived in your household?
- What was home like during this time?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?

## **Adulthood**

- Describe the significant relationships with partners you have had (e.g. length of time, reason for ending)
- What losses and trauma have you experienced in your life (e.g. with family, relationships, health, infertility)
- What other significant events have shaped your life?

## **Ages 5-12 years**

- What was it like to live in your household at this time?
- What are some of your strong memories of this time?
- What was your experience of school like?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?

## **If you have children**

- What have been the rewards and challenges of parenting?
- Have you ever lived apart from your children? What was that like?

## **Ages 13-18 years**

- What was it like living in your household during those years?
- What did you enjoy about school? What was difficult?
- What were the most significant relationships for you during this time?
- What significant events happened in your family at this time?



# 'Shared Lives' pre-assessment carer training

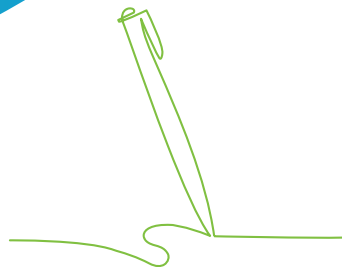
**All potential foster carers need to do pre-assessment training where you will learn:**

- the process of children coming into care
- the role of a foster carer
- the importance of family inclusion
- appropriate care and behaviour management of children affected by developmental trauma
- the importance of children staying connected to their culture
- impact of caring on a carer's life and family
- the need for a carer to be supported and to work within a team.

Shared Lives training can be completed online via self-paced modules, in a group setting or one-on-one with a member of the Carer Assessment & Support Team. Let the team know which option works best for you.



# Background and safety checks



***“They need to check it’s safe and if i’m cut out to do this.”***

**All foster carers must demonstrate they can provide a safe environment for children.**

Competency A. Safety:

- **home and environment check**
- **disqualified carer check**
- **health checks**
- **personal reference checks**
- **other community service organisation check**
- **Working with Children Check (WWCC)**
- **National Police History Check**
- **International Police Check.**

# Step by step assessment interviews

The assessment interviews are conducted over 3-4 sessions and take around 2-3 hours each. They are usually conducted in your home at a time that suits you and your family. Interviews are not something you pass or fail and we discover together whether fostering is a suitable option for you at this time.

A member of the Carer Assessment & Support Team will talk through your life story and have a series of conversations with you covering the following areas:

## **Conversation B. Attitudes and Connections**

1. Motivation to be a foster carer
2. Support networks
3. Financial stability
4. Cultural respect and understanding
5. Aboriginal cultural awareness and knowledge
6. Attitudes to the family of children in care

## **Conversation D. Child focused nurture**

12. Providing nurturing care
13. Understand developmental trauma
14. Promote a child's positive self-image
15. Promote a child's identity
16. Meet day-to-day needs
17. Manage behaviours
18. Impact on own children (if applicable)

## **Conversation C. Personal Resilience**

7. Attachment
8. Trauma, grief and loss
9. Dealing with stress
10. Relationship with partner (if applicable)
11. Desire to have a biological child (if applicable)

## **Conversation E. Working with others**

19. Work with service providers
20. Promote educational engagement
21. Support family contact
22. Commitment to on-going development and learning



# Accreditation Panel

An assessment report based on the conversations and interactions you have had with the Carer Assessment & Support Team will be presented to the UMFC Accreditation Panel. During the assessment process you will be advised by your assessor of any concerns so you can talk these through and there are no surprises. You will have the opportunity to read your report and make any comments before the report goes to the panel. The members will decide if you and your family are suitable for foster care.

If approved the panel will decide on your accreditation details such as the type of care (respite, emergency, short or long-term care), ages and genders of the children and the number of children you are able to care for at any one time. The panel will also identify any special conditions attached to the accreditation such as additional training or support needs.

The panel may request further information before making a decision or decide it is not the right time for you to be foster carers. If your application to be a foster care is not approved by UMFC you are entitled to be given reasons why and have the decision reviewed by the agency. You are entitled to see all the material collected in the process of assessment, except for personal references which may be withheld.

## Induction/ on-boarding



***“Ahh! They said yes!  
Now what?”***

Once accredited as a foster carer a member of the Carer Assessment & Support Team will take you through the final step of on-boarding and conduct a final home and environment check. Then you will be ready to start caring for children.

After your induction UMFC will contact you when a child or young person requires the type of care you can provide. You will be given all available and relevant information about the child or young person to decide if you can accept the placement. You will have the opportunity to discuss any issues that may be raised for you and your household.

# Becoming a Foster Carer

If you would like to proceed please fill in and return the application form or contact us at the Carer Assessment & Support Team to confirm your interest. We are happy to answer any and all of your questions.

## **UMFC - Carer Assessment and Support Team**

**Phone** - 02 6055 8000 or 0429 552 520

**Email** - [fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au](mailto:fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au)

**In person** - 27-29 Stanley St Wodonga VIC

**Via post** - PO Box 725, Wodonga 3689



## Feedback at UMFC

**Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC) welcomes all feedback. Feedback tells us what's working and what's not, and helps us to make sure we're providing high-quality and suitable services.**

**If you're not satisfied with any aspect of our service, we encourage you to raise any concerns directly with your practitioner in the first instance. At all times, we will try to work with you to achieve a satisfactory outcome.**

**Feel free to leave us a compliment also.**

**See full information around feedback at our [website](#) or scan the QR code below:**



## Privacy and Confidentiality at UMFC

**When you receive a service from Upper Murray Family Care (UMFC), we create a file for you that contains your personal information and keep this secure.**

**We only collect information that is relevant in providing you with the most appropriate service.**

**We do so in accordance with the law and government funding requirements.**

**See full information around privacy at our [website](#) or scan the QR code below:**





Our Vision for our communities  
**Every child and young person is cared for**



You can contact us via:

## Care Services

27-29 Stanley Street,  
Wodonga, VIC  
PO Box 725 VIC 3689

Telephone 02 6055 8000  
[fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au](mailto:fostercareenquiries@umfc.com.au)

[www.umfc.com.au](http://www.umfc.com.au)

We celebrate diversity and are committed to  
inclusion for all as a services and a workplace.  
We are a Child Safe Organisation

Reg No. A5357 ABN 99 081 624 768



An Australian Government Initiative

