

Foster Care

1940s –

Details

Foster care is a home-based service provided to children and young people up to 18 years of age who are temporarily or permanently unable to live with their families of origin. Foster parents are paid an allowance to help cover the cost of maintaining the foster child. The foster care system was historically managed by the same child welfare departments that managed children's institutions.

The term foster care is still used to describe children and young people's placements in private homes. Other related terms used include "therapeutic foster care", to describe home-based care that emphasises stability and provides additional supports for the child and carers. Kinship care is foster care provided by the child's close relatives.

Foster care was originally known as boarding out, with the language shifting to foster care by the mid-twentieth century. From the nineteenth century, child welfare systems all over Australia had mechanisms to board out children in private homes and pay an allowance to the carer. From 1941, child endowment was paid to foster mothers. In the 1950s and 1960s, research drew attention to the adverse affects of institutional 'care' on children, leading to child welfare departments starting to favour foster care over institutional placements (Protecting Vulnerable Children, p.75).

The Senate's second report from the Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care found that many children in foster care experienced abuse and neglect, and governments failed to ensure that many children in foster care were safe. The Senate heard stories of children being used as slave labour in foster care and suffering sexual, physical and emotional abuse and neglect.

A 1952 description of the foster care system in New South Wales, provided by the Director of the Child Welfare Department, RH Hicks, paints a rosy picture:

'To rehabilitate the family is the first objective of the Department – If we can get the home going properly again, then the children are returned to their parents.'

The best way for a child to grow up is with its own family.

First, our trained social workers do everything they can to help the family, especially if the home is suffering through the ill-health of the mother or the desertion of one of the parents.'

Mr Hicks said that when these attempts fail the children are taken to special State homes, where they are medically examined before being sent to homes with other state wards.

'Because one of the most important influences in a child's upbringing is the spiritual and moral influence of good family life, we try to get foster parents for every child ... In many cases the child may remain with the foster parents for the rest of his childhood. In some cases the parents improve their conditions and have

the child returned to them', he added.

Forgotten Australian Caroline Carroll shared her story of foster care in New South Wales in 2009, a stark contrast from the account given by the Child Welfare Department:

At two years I was placed in my first foster home in Coffs Harbour. My memories of this period of my life are not happy ones. Most days the foster parents drank, they would often become violent, screaming pushing even throwing knives at each other. I would huddle in my bed if it was night or stay well out of the way outside during the day. During this time beatings were common and other punishments such as being locked in the pitch-black garden shed covered in spider webs and crawling with mice and frightened with tales of to the point where I would wet myself and then be beaten.

I don't remember ever being hugged. I know I never felt loved, just lost and bewildered by my life.

I was at this foster home for about seven years and then I was returned to Bidura. My file says "the ward seems quite a good type has not given too much trouble. She is quite bright but shows traces of nervous behaviour. Certainly quite placeable" (Sydney Morning Herald, 2009)

The Bringing Them Home report (1997) stated that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, foster care placements often became 'pseudo-adoptions' as they were very long-term and the child's contact with their family and community were restricted. In the early 1980s, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was developed to keep children connected to their families, communities, culture and country.

From around the 1970s, child welfare departments were increasingly favoured foster care over placements in children's institutions. Efforts were also made to maintain contact between the child or young person in foster care and their family.

Foster care placements typically end when the young person turns 18. At this time, the state withdraws all formal support to the young person. In Victoria, the Home Stretch Campaign was launched in 2019, to extend support for 250 young people in foster and residential care to the age of 21. Advocates are pushing for similar reforms in other Australian jurisdictions.

[Click here to see the full Find & Connect glossary](#)

Gallery



TV in a foster home, where three of our wards are sharing in a very happy family life

Description: This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Victorian Children's Welfare Department for 1957. The title is original to the report.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Tasmanian Task Force on Sexual Abuse \(1989\)](#)

The Tasmanian Task Force on Sexual Abuse recommended specialised foster care for children who had been sexually abused.

- [Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care, Parliament of Australia \(2003 - 2005\)](#)
- [Inquiry into the Abuse of Children in Foster Care, Queensland \(2003\)](#)
- [Inquiry by the Auditor-General into Out of Home Care, Tasmania \(2011 - 2012\)](#)

Related Glossary Terms

- [Domestic Service Assistance Scheme - Tasmania \(1947 - c. 1989\)](#)

Children qualifying for accommodation under the Domestic Service Assistance Scheme were sometimes placed in foster care.

Related Legislation

- [State Children Relief Act 1881, New South Wales \(1881 - 1901\)](#)
- [Children's Protection Act 1892, New South Wales \(1892 - 1902\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1896, New South Wales \(1896 - 1901\)](#)
- [State Children Relief Act 1901, New South Wales \(1901 - 1923\)](#)
- [Children's Protection Act 1902, New South Wales \(1902 - 1923\)](#)
- [Infant Protection Act 1904, New South Wales \(1904 - 1923\)](#)
- [Neglected Children and Juvenile Offenders Act 1905, New South Wales \(1905 - 1923\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Act 1923, New South Wales \(1923 - 1939\)](#)
- [Infants' Welfare Act 1935, Tasmania \(1935 - 1961\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Act 1939, New South Wales \(1939 - 1987\)](#)
- [Aborigines Protection \(Amendment\) Act 1943, New South Wales \(1943 - 1969\)](#)
- [Child Welfare Act 1960, Tasmania \(1960 - 2003\)](#)
- [Child Welfare \(Amendment\) Act 1961, New South Wales \(1961 - 1987\)](#)
- [Child Welfare \(Amendment\) Act 1966, New South Wales \(1966 - 1987\)](#)
- [Children \(Care and Protection\) Act 1987, New South Wales \(1987 - 2010\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Protestant Orphan School \(1850 - 1886\)](#)

The introduction of foster care led to the closure of the Protestant Orphan School.

- [Randwick Asylum for Destitute Children \(1858 - 1915\)](#)

The foster care system, also called boarding out, was developed to stop children being placed in large dormitory-style institutions like Randwick Asylum.

- [State Children's Relief Board \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
- [State Children's Relief Department \(1881 - 1923\)](#)
- [Thirlmere Babies' Home \(1907 - 1913\)](#)

- [Cicada Home \(1911 - 1930s\)](#)

- [Children of the State Department, State of Tasmania \(1918 - 1934\)](#)

The Children of the State Department managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Santa Marina \(1919 - 1930?\)](#)

- [Child Welfare Department, State Government of New South Wales \(1923 - 1970\)](#)

- [King Edward Home \(c. 1930 - c. 1985\)](#)

King Edward Home appears to have been a receiving home for girls who were moving between foster placements, or whose placements had broken down.

- [Social Services Department, State of Tasmania \(1934 - 1961\)](#)

The Social Welfare Department managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Corelli Babies' Home \(c. 1945 - c. 1970\)](#)

- [Child Welfare Division \(c. 1953 - 1980\)](#)

The Child Welfare Division managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)

The Social Welfare Department managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Department for Community Welfare, State Government of Tasmania \(1983 - 1989\)](#)

The Department for Community Welfare managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Department of Community and Health Services, State of Tasmania \(1993 - 1998\)](#)

The Department of Community and Health Services managed the foster care system in Tasmania.

- [Department of Health and Human Services, State of Tasmania \(1998 - current\)](#)
The Department of Health and Human Services managed the foster care system in Tasmania.
- [Department of Communities Tasmania \(2018 - 2022\)](#)

Related Archival Series

- [Boarding Out Registers \(Ward Registers\) \(1 August 1923 - 31 December 1936\)](#)
- [Applications and Adoption files for State wards \[Dependent Children and Adoptions Branch, Department of Community Services\] \(1940 - 1961\)](#)
- [Ward maintenance files \[Maintenance Branch, Department of Community Services\] \(1942 - 1960\)](#)
- [Dependent Children Register Cards \(c. 1945 - 1972\)](#)
- [Record Cards of Infants in the Care of Foster Mothers and Nursing Homes \(1947 - 1961\)](#)

Resources

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- [Les Batchelor interviewed by Caroline Evans for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 7 February 2012
- [David Bartlett interviewed by Caroline Evans for the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project](#), 22 June 2011 - 24 June 2011
- [Caroline Carroll interviewed by Karen George in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \[sound recording\]](#), June 2010 - August 2010
- [Debra Chandler interviewed by Lyn McLeavy in the Bringing them home oral history project \[sound recording\] \(2001 - 2002\)](#), 16 May 2000
- [Ken Merton interviewed by Lesley Alves in the Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants oral history project \(28 October 2011\)](#), 28 October 2011
- [Patrick Sephton interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens in the Bringing them home oral history project \(2001\)](#), 2001
- [Protecting Children: An Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Foster Care in Queensland](#), January 2004
- Ombudsman Tasmania, [Listen to the children: Review of claims of abuse from adults in state care as children](#), November 2004
- [Government neglect: how foster care ruined a young boy's life](#), Stateline Tasmania, 2003
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- [Forgotten Australians: Tony's Story](#), Forgotten Australians: life stories, 2011

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