

**Njernda** Aboriginal Corporation

# FOSTER CARE PROGRAM

INFORMATION BOOKLET



CARING FOR OUR CHILDREN

CULTURALLY SAFE

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

HELPING CHILDREN REACH THEIR POTENTIAL

WORKING WITH DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS



## Foster Care Recruitment | Family Services

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**NJERENDA** TO KNOW OUR LIVING CULTURE

# Emma Bamblett



**Clan:** Wemba Wemba

**Title:** Caring for our children

**Description:** This painting represents Community caring for our children in out of home care.

The figure in the centre of the painting represents the work of Njernda in ensuring our children are culturally safe, growing in healthy environments and reaching their potential through their engagement with recruiting foster carers, offering training and promoting more Koorie carers to care for our children.

The small figures surrounding the figure represent Koorie kids at different ages and stages. The yellow and green circles represent the foster carers.

The curved shields around the children represent caring, sharing and protection.

The brown and yellow curved lines represent the area where children are living; the Murray River.



## ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This booklet is designed to provide people interested in fostering some general information about our program and the process of becoming a foster carer to help them decide if they wish to continue through the accreditation process.

This information booklet is not a substitute for further education or training, nor does it represent all of the relevant information regarding any aspects of volunteer fostering with Njernda Aboriginal Corporation or partnership with the Department of Health & Human Services in its entirety.

Please be advised that whilst we strongly encourage interested individuals and families to lodge a Registration of Interest Form with Njernda Aboriginal Corporation, assessments of suitability are conducted in line with agency, state

and legislative standards and Njernda Aboriginal Corporation reserves the right to reject applications on these grounds.

*Please note, all information was true and correct at the time of printing as per the Children, Youth and Families Act (2005) and The Disability Act (2006) but may subject to change.*

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## About fostering

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### What is foster care?

Foster care programmes provide safe and supportive homes for children when they are unable to live with their own families. As a foster carer you will become the most important member of a caring team providing support for a child in need. As a foster carer, you may help a child achieve their goals and improve their quality of life now and into the future.

### What types of foster care are there?

#### Respite care

Carers who provide respite have children stay with them in their own home. Respite may be for one weekend a month, one week each school holidays or

more/less frequently as required.  
Generally respite carers care for the same child or children over a long period of time.

### **Emergency care**

Sometimes children enter foster care very unexpectedly or in the middle of the night. Emergency foster carers take children for a few nights whilst other arrangements are being made or whilst court outcomes are being finalised.

### **Short Term care**

Short term care is limited in time, generally up to a few months. At the end of short term care, the child may return to their family or be placed in a longer term arrangement

## Long term care

Long term foster care means providing full time care for a period longer than three months for the same child.

Sometimes, children stay in a long term arrangement for up to two years or even longer.

*Please note that long term foster care is not the same as permanent care or adoption. The goal of foster care generally is to reunite children with their birth parents.*

*Due to the often complex nature of court proceedings, we may not always be able to be definitive in how long a placement is required for.*

## Things to consider:

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**Age:** Children aged 0 - 18 enter foster care. School age children are often our most difficult age group to find foster care placements for.

**Gender:** Equal numbers of boys and girls enter foster care, but often adolescent boys can be very difficult to find placements for.

**Behaviour:** Some children come into care with a diagnosis of a behavioural disorder or other behavioural issues.

**Special Needs:** Children with developmental delays, intellectual disabilities, chronic illnesses or physical disabilities also enter foster care.

*Knowing your abilities, skills and limitations is a good thing. If you are comfortable with the idea of caring for a specific group, such as babies and toddlers only or adolescent boys, then that is ok.*

*The more specific you are about the types of children you are able to care for, the longer it may take to match you with a client. Remember, carers can also always say 'no' to the offer of a placement.*

# Who is suitable to be a foster carer?

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## Age

Carers can vary in age greatly. While there are no set age restrictions for foster carers it is expected that carers will be fit and well enough to care for a child. Your doctor will be required to complete a medical check advising of any health needs that may impact on your ability to foster.

## Marital Status

Carers can be single, married, in a de-facto relationship, or in a same sex relationship.

### **Age of applicants own children**

If an applicant has a child, it is recommended that the age of the child placed is 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 (if applicable)**

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) needs to be at the level that they can undertake the task of fostering. For applicants for long-term care, this may involve raising the child to adulthood.

## Accommodation

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

At times it may also be considered appropriate for a very young child to sleep in a cot in the carers bedroom.

# What skills do foster carers need?

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## Caring skills

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

Carers must be able to

- > draw on and apply personal experiences appropriately in dealing with the tasks of fostering
- > work effectively as a team with staff from our agency and other organisations and birth parents
- > promote the positive development of Aboriginal children and young people in foster care
- > provide a safe environment that is free from abuse.

## Engagement skills

Applicants must be willing to participate in training and the assessment process. Applicants must demonstrate a capacity to work with Njernda/Child Protection 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 needs.

## Managing 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. Foster carers are not generally required to supervise a family contact however 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 assist in making it a positive experience for the child.

### **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 or have a willingness to engage with the community to ensure a child or young person's learning and connection to culture is strong.

Carers who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are asked to provide proof of this (e.g. 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 permitted to use any physical force to discipline foster children. Such methods will likely lead to an investigation into your suitability to remain in our program and could result in criminal charges.

Applicants must demonstrate an ability to effectively discipline children without the use of physical punishments e.g. hitting or smacking. It is very important that foster children are disciplined in a way that sends a strong message to them that they are cared for and safe.

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

## Health and hygiene standards

Carers are expected to conform to guidelines designed to ensure that children are being cared for in a healthy environment. Such guidelines include infection control, smoking policies the home and environment check. Training is provided to carers about health and hygiene standards.

## Frequently asked questions about foster care

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### Can a child in foster care attend crèche or childcare?

If you will need a foster child to attend crèche/child care in order to accept a placement, you need to specify this when you are being offered the placement. If your situation changes and you will need to start utilising child care services in order to maintain an existing placement, you should speak to your worker as soon as possible.

Sometimes it may be possible to obtain specific funding to pay for the cost of child care, and other times it may be necessary for you to pay out of your regular reimbursements. Generally speaking, babies and toddlers requiring full time care and direct supervision are not placed in households where full time childcare is required

## School (including after school care)

Foster children are also able to attend before and after school care. If you would like to enrol your foster child in before or after school care, you should discuss this with your worker.

Most foster children attend school just like any other children. Mostly, Njernda will try to place children with carers who live close to their current school so that transport is not an issue. It is often very important for children and young people to be able to continue on at the same school, as this allows them to retain some stability in their lives.

A partnering agreement between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Department of Health & Human Services, Catholic Education Commission of Victoria and Independent Schools Victoria exists, and serves to ensure that a child's right to

education is not disadvantaged by their care circumstances.

School fees and other large costs associated with a child's education are partially covered by a \$200 per quarter per child payment made to active foster carers to help meet school and medical expenses. Any costs over and above this amount should be discussed with a child's case worker.

## **Guests, Holidays, Babysitting & Overnight stays**

Children in foster care are generally either under the guardianship of their birth parents or the Department of Health & Human Services. For this reason, permission must be sought in relation to interstate or overseas travel. Consent must be gained for children to partake in certain activities (such as

motorized sports or horse riding) and approval must be gained for medical procedures and treatment.

## Holidays

If you plan on taking a holiday while you have a placement, you should notify the agency. In some circumstances, it may not be possible for a foster child to travel with you. This may be due to scheduled court dates or planned access visits that cannot be rescheduled. In some circumstances, a child might not be granted permission to travel interstate or overseas by their guardian.

## Overnight Stays

If a child or young person in your care wishes to stay overnight at a friend's house, contact the agency. Your worker will assist you in making the necessary arrangements.

## Babysitters

Babysitters who regularly look after children and young people must be Criminal History Checked, hold a Working With Children card and be over eighteen years of age. Most babysitting agencies will be able to provide these as well as reference checks if requested. Informal babysitting arrangements must be discussed with your worker.

## Guests

You are always welcome to have guests stay in your home whilst a child or young person is staying with you – however the Agency must *always* be notified in advance. People who will be in regular direct contact with a child or young person that you care for (such as house guests, family members, friends or neighbours) will be required to undergo a police check.

## Pets

Many children have never experienced the joys that pets can bring. As such, they may need extra support in understanding how to interact appropriately with animals. It is important to consider whether you feel your pets will cope having young children in your home.

Households that own restricted breeds of dogs will not be considered suitable for fostering.

Applicants also need to be mindful that the feeding, sleeping and hygiene arrangements for their pets will not pose a risk to a child or young person.

### **Do carers have to own a car?**

In order to be able to drive with a foster child in your car, you must have a car that is fully insured, roadworthy and registered. Learner drivers cannot drive with foster children in the car. It is also a

requirement that all cars that foster children travel in must be fitted with a first aid kit.

Foster carers for infants and young children must also adhere to state rules regarding child restraints, and all restraints must be compliant with Australian safety guidelines.

Smoking inside cars that carry foster children is prohibited by the Department of Health & Human Services. Whilst having a license and car is not mandatory, the role of a foster carer frequently involves transporting children.

## What is the process of becoming a carer?

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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. Then we can arrange an initial “Information Exchange Session” with you.

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 to hear more information about our program and answer any questions you may have.

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

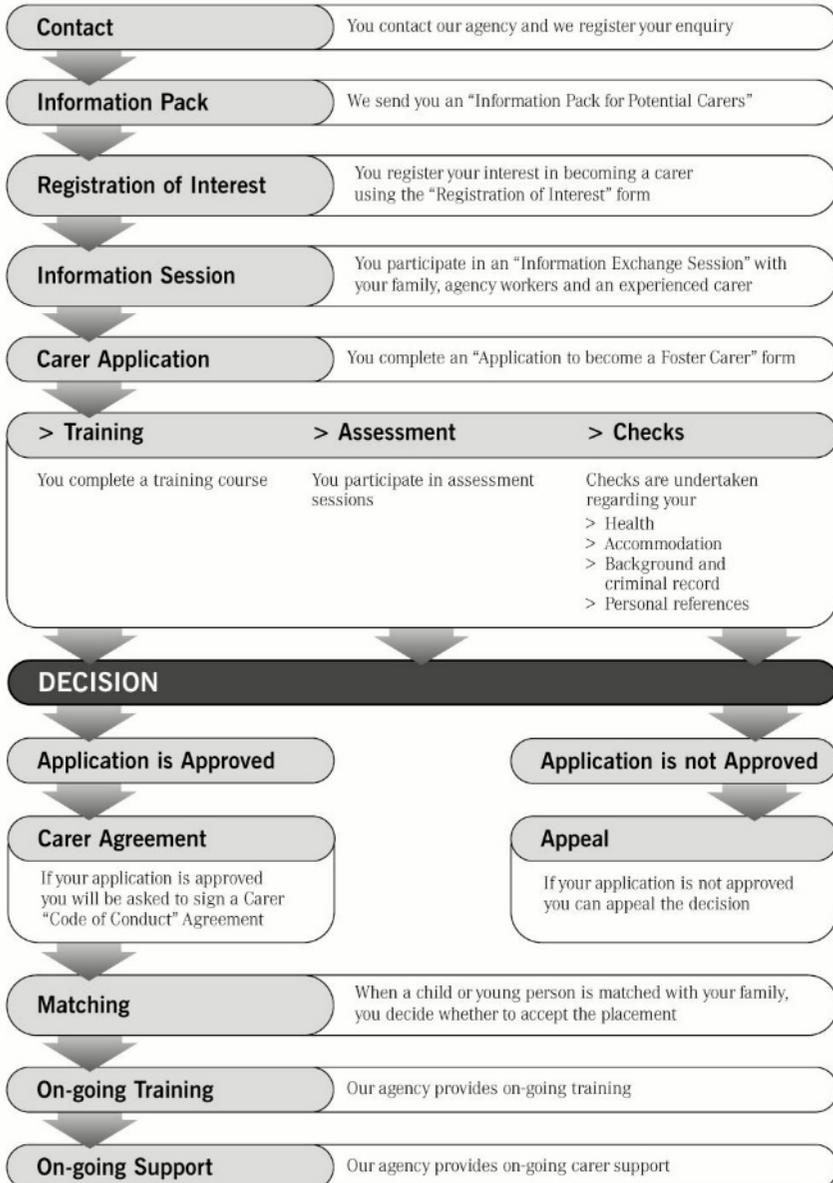
household if you accepted the placement of that child or young person. Sometimes it is possible for you to meet the child or young person before you make the decision about taking that placement.

### **Previous applications**

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.

# Flow chart of the assessment process



## Details of the assessment process

### What will the assessment interviews 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 Aboriginal 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.

### Medical check

During the assessment you will be asked to complete a Health checklist and 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.

### **Home and environment check**

This is a check to ensure that you are able to provide housing that is physically safe and suitable and is renewed annually. The check is carried out by a qualified assessor.

### **Personal references**

You will be asked to provide the name of three 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.

### **Criminal history check**

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 18 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.

### **Working with children's check**

A working with children's check is required for all adult members of a household, any frequent visitors or support persons. These checks are free for volunteers and can be applied for

online. For carers residing in NSW (in areas such as Moama) a NSW Working with children's check is also required.

## Appeals

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.

## Any further questions?

Contact Njernda's foster care program:

PH: (03) 54 806 252

Email: [fostercare@njernda.com.au](mailto:fostercare@njernda.com.au)