

# What is Kinship Care?

## An information sheet for the public.

DISABILITY, CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

### **What is meant by ‘formal’ kinship care?**

Formal kinship care is the placement of a child or young person who is the subject of a legal order under the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* with a member of their extended family or other adult with whom they have a significant relationship.

This means that in all cases where a formal kinship care placement is made, Child Protection Services have been involved and a judgement has been made that the child is at risk and needs to be placed away from home in a safe environment.

In these circumstances, all carers are ‘approved’ by the Department as able and suitable to provide care for the child or young person.

### **Are all children living with relatives in ‘formal kinship care’?**

There are many children who live with relatives or members of their community network who are not in formal kinship care. These children are not on care and protection orders and live with relatives because of informal arrangements made by their parents, not Child Protection Services. Some of these arrangements are supported by orders made by the Family Court of Australia which make it clear who has responsibility for different aspects of the child’s care and how connection is maintained with their parents.

### **Is this a new type of Departmental care?**

In developed countries around the world there is an increasing reliance on the placement of children where there are care and protection concerns with extended family. Kinship care is the fastest growing placement type in Australia and in Victoria approximately 60% of new placements are now formal kinship care placements. If this trend continues it is anticipated that kinship care placements will exceed foster care placements by 2008-09.

Kinship care supports the principles of the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997*. It also supports the Aboriginal Placement Principle, the family-focused practice approach adopted by Child Protection Services and the four planning themes for children being continuity, connection, care and protection.

### **Is kinship care better than other forms of care?**

The placement of a child within their extended family can prevent the sense of grief and loss that many children experience when placed in foster care with people they do not know. This kind of placement also recognises the capacity of families to care and protect their children.

## **Are kinship carers the same as foster carers?**

Although there are similarities between kinship care and foster care, there are also differences because of the special relationship that often exists between a kinship carer and the child or young person. This can make it easier for the child or young person to adjust to the changes that have been made.

Children placed with kinship carers may also feel a stronger sense of belonging than they would if placed with a foster carer. At the same time, kinship carers may experience difficulties if the parents do not agree with the arrangements that have been made for the care of the child.

The pathway to becoming a formal kinship carer is also quite different to that of a foster carer. Many foster carers think about applying to be a carer over an extended period of time and do not make a decision until they have completed introductory training and formal assessment. Even after being approved, there may be further reflection as foster carers consider the type of child that would suit their circumstances. In contrast, kinship carers are more likely to provide care in response to a crisis in the child's life. Consequently they have less time to decide whether or not they will care for the child.

## **Are kinship carers assessed?**

The processes used to assess the suitability of kinship carers to provide a placement for a child are similar to those used to assess foster carers. This includes a police history check, child protection check and home safety assessment.

## **Are kinship carers reimbursed for costs?**

Kinship carers are reimbursed for the cost of care at the same rate as foster carers. They may also receive additional reimbursement if a child has a disability, medical condition, behavioural problem or some other need that results in additional costs to the carer.

## **Is training provided for kinship carers?**

Kinship carers are offered training but do not have to participate. Training includes information about their role and responsibilities in relation to children on care and protection orders as well as information on bonding and attachment, the experience of loss and grief and maintaining connections with family members. Training is also provided on the role and responsibilities of Child Protection Services and the planning and decision-making processes that apply to children on care and protection orders.