



Youth Services Foster Care Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

Why become a foster parent with Wesley Community Action?

When you join Wesley, you join an amazing team of foster parents, social workers, youth mentors, and others who share a genuine love and respect for the young people we work with.

Our work is truly strengths-based. We believe in working with young people, their families (whānau), and each other in a way that brings out the best in all of us. We focus on the strengths and abilities of each young person, and we acknowledge that the young people themselves know most about their lives and what works for them.

We support our foster parents with 24 hour, 7 days a week professional social work backup, regular supervision, team meetings, training and a strong supportive team environment. This is a paid position (full time or casual) and you will also receive a reimbursement allowance for costs of providing care.

What does it take to be a great foster parent?

The foster parents on our team come from all walks of life. What they have in common is a genuine desire and an unwavering commitment to provide the young people on our programme with the support they need. All are team players, have the ability to connect with young people, and it helps that they have a great sense of humour too.

We've included a list about what it takes to make a great foster parent, below. While there are certain qualities we are looking for, don't worry if you don't tick all the boxes. Our approach at Wesley is to work with everyone's unique strengths and experience, and build on that through on-going training and development.

People who make great foster parents are people who...

- Enjoy being with young people
- Can reflect on their own behaviour and know how their own past experiences have impacted on who they are
- Have strong community and/or whānau networks and support
- Are compassionate, and have empathy for young people and their families/whānau
- Are open and honest communicators
- Are good at spotting the strengths in young people and encouraging their interests and abilities
- Can challenge young people's behaviours and attitudes, while continuing to support and care for them

- Are open to learning and working with cultures other than their own
- Are patient, consistent, “firm but fair”, and have realistic expectations of the young person
- Are flexible and put the young person’s needs first
- Work well with others in a team setting
- Enjoy reflecting on and improving their foster parenting skills and can give and receive positive and constructive feedback
- Keep calm under pressure
- Have the attitude that “tomorrow is a new day”
- Have a sense of humour

It is important that our foster parents

- Have a current full driver’s licence
- Are free of the responsibilities of caring for dependent children
- Can commit to providing care for a young person for 12 months
- Have a supportive partner/family and community
- Achieve full Police and CYF (Child Youth and Family) clearance
- Are committed to completing introductory and on-going Caregiver Training provided by Wesley Community Action

What are the young people on the programme like?

The young people on our programme are aged between 12 and 17 and are referred by Child Youth and Family Service (CYFS) and require foster care with us for up to twelve months.. They are like any young people, except sadly, they often come from homes with issues of family violence, drugs and alcohol, poor mental health and financial hardship. As a result of these challenges our young people will often act out when stressed.

It is not uncommon for our young people to have been in many foster care placements so they have moved around a lot and missed out on going to school regularly. This can mean that it’s hard for them to fit into the school system and it can also mean that they find it hard to be socially accepted by other kids.

The young people really want to be normal kids. Our role is to support and guide them to make healthy choices. We want them to have a chance, which is what any kid deserves.

What is a typical day/week like for full-time foster parents?

From 9am to 3pm each weekday, our young people are normally in school, alternative education or training. Besides training sessions, meetings etc, your time as a foster parent during school hours would generally be quite flexible, although you would need to be available in case the young person living with you needs your support.

Every Monday during the school term, our foster parents, social workers, and team leader meet together for a couple of hours to reflect on the past week, celebrate successes, learn new skills, and support each other through challenges.

Being a foster parent involves working as part of a team to help the young person achieve their goals, and foster parents and their young person meet regularly with the range of individuals who are involved in supporting them. This team ideally includes members of their birth or extended family/whānau. The Wesley Youth Services Team brings everyone together and leads this process.

Outside of school hours, besides doing everyday family activities, foster parents and young people spend time together. This includes taking the time to do the things the young person enjoys. The young people also spend time with a youth mentor and they also have other activities and therapeutic appointments that you may need to support them to get to throughout the week.

During school holidays the young people may attend holiday programmes, have activities planned, visit family, or simply be on holiday with their foster parents.

What training and support do foster parents get?

When foster parents start out at Wesley they attend our three day in-house induction and training programme. They also undergo caregiver training by the Foster Care Association. Further training is provided throughout the year and can be tailored to the specific needs of each foster parent and the young person they are working with.

Back up support is available to our foster parents 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This is highly valued by our foster parent team. No matter what happens, they are confident that the Youth Services Team Leader and social workers are on-call to support them to respond to challenging situations. The team working with each young person works as a collective to address any issues that come up.

Each week foster parents meet to give each other support. They also get extra guidance and support from an external supervisor, and a child psychologist who is an expert in matters relating to children and young people in care.

What about time off?

Foster parents have paid leave every third weekend. During that time the young people stay with a part-time foster parent or family members. This is an opportunity for our hard-working foster parents to take a break. Foster parents are also entitled to four weeks annual leave each year.

How would I be matched with a young person?

If you became a foster parent with Wesley, the matching process would take into account your personality, interests and strengths, and every effort is made to match you with a young person who is likely to be most compatible with you. You would be fully involved in the decision for a young person to come into your care and you would get the chance to meet each other before that decision is made. Part of the decision making process includes you being fully informed about the young person's background.

If there is full agreement by you, the young person and wider team to go ahead, you and the young person would meet up regularly over the space of a few weeks to get to know each other further. This would include at least one overnight stay at your home. If everything goes to plan, there would be a celebration to welcome the young person into your family home.

This sounds like it's for me. What happens next?

If you decide you would like to apply to join our foster care team or would like further information, please contact our Youth Services Team Leader, Sarah Packman. As well as discussing the full-time foster parent role, Sarah can give you more information about our part-time foster parent and youth mentor roles.

Email: spackman@wesleyca.org.nz Phone: 04 805 0880. Cell phone: 027 475 4148.

Please send us your CV, a cover letter outlining your experience and reasons for applying, as well as the names and contact details of two referees. If you have been in a caregiving role before we would want to speak to your employer as one of those referees.

The next stage is an interview and we would also arrange for you to meet some of our other foster parents so you can be sure you are making an informed decision about whether the role is for you.

We would also need to phone your referees and complete Police and Child Youth and Family clearance checks.

If your application is successful we'd take steps straight away to welcome you into our team.