

Foster Carer Definition

Background

The out-of-home care (OOHC) system in Western Australia has previously relied on two clearly defined models of care: volunteer foster care and residential care. Traditionally, foster care has been defined as care provided by a volunteer within their own home. Residential care has typically been defined as paid employment, usually in a group setting.

Different assessment methods have been used to determine suitability and capability of an individual to care for children. Foster carer assessments use a carer-competency approach; while Human Resource/employment processes have been used to employ residential care workers.

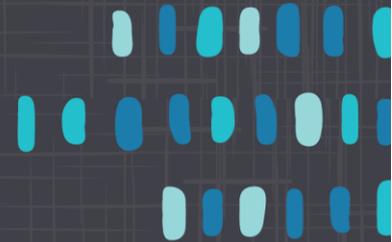
In recent years, these traditional models of care have evolved in Western Australia, leading to uncertainty about which models are considered foster care or residential care. Recent variations of care models include volunteer foster carers living in a home provided by a community service organisation (CSO); carers who are engaged by CSOs as employees; and carers providing care on a rotating basis (i.e. children have two sets of carers coming into their home seven days on, seven days off).

Some of these models have been established through an agency specific Human Resource/employment process, which has led to inconsistencies in the type and depth of assessment undertaken. This approach has resulted in no formal assessment of some employees against the requirements under Regulation 4(1)(a) of the Children and Community Services Regulations 2006 (commonly referred to as carer competencies) because the Regulations do not directly apply to CSOs. Compliance requirements for these carers are assessed through standards imposed under a service provider contract.

While there is evidence that standards of care remain high, it is important that there is consistency and clarity for all carers across the OOHC system into the future.

A key reform action (57) in the former Department for Child Protection and Family Support, now the Department of Communities' (the Department) Building a Better Future: Out-of-Home Care in Western Australia (the Reform Plan) report was to broaden the definition of a foster carer.





What is the change occurring?

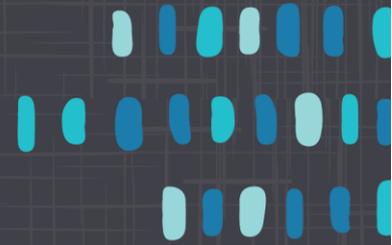
Carers will be defined by the category of care they are providing, which will define the type of care and assessment expectations.

Table One: Categories of care

Category of care	Definition	How is an individual assessed?
Family Care (formerly Relative Care)	An out-of-home care arrangement with a person(s) who is a 'relative' as defined in the <i>Children and Community Services Act 2004</i> .	An individual is required to undergo an assessment against the carer competencies.
Foster Care – Carer's Residence	A non-family care arrangement provided by a foster carer where child(ren) are cared for in the carer's primary residence (where the residence is not provided by the Department or a CSO).	<p>An individual is required to undergo an assessment against the carer competencies and complete preparation training.</p> <p>Department assessment reports are submitted to the cross-sector foster carer panel for endorsement.</p> <p>CSO assessment reports can be submitted to the cross-sector foster carer panel for endorsement, or the CSOs own panel.</p> <p>The Department or CSO then makes the decision to approve the foster carer/s.</p>
Foster Care – Other Residence	<p>A non-family care arrangement where child(ren) are cared for in a residence provided by the Department or a CSO. This includes group settings where the carer may spend some time in the residence but also maintain their own home. Carers in this category may be engaged as volunteers but are often employees.</p> <p>An individual providing care in this category is only required to undergo assessment against the carer competencies if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • he/she is engaged to provide continuous care for 48 hours or longer; and • the CSO/Department intends to engage the person to provide care on a regular basis. 	<p>An individual (employee or volunteer) will be assessed against the carer competencies.</p> <p>Department assessment reports are submitted to the cross-sector foster carer panel for endorsement.</p> <p>CSO assessment reports can be submitted to the cross-sector foster carer panel for endorsement, or the CSOs own selection panel.</p> <p>The Department or CSO then makes the decision to employ or engage the individual.</p>
Residential Care	A care arrangement is provided for a child by employed staff on a shift basis.	<p>An individual will be assessed through an agency-specific employment process. He/she will not be assessed against the foster carer competencies.</p> <p>Monitoring occurs through the Better Care, Better Services Standards.</p>

From early 2018, all new “Foster Carer – Other Residence” applicants will be assessed and approved against the carer competencies, regardless of how they are engaged (volunteer or





employee). The commencement of this requirement is intended to align with the commencement of the new OOHC care arrangement contracts with CSOs.

It is anticipated that CSOs will be advised of the awarding of the OOHC care arrangement contracts in late 2018. From this time, CSOs will be able to commence progressing “Foster Carer – Other Residence” applicants through the new assessment and approval process. There will be a twelve month transition period for all existing “Foster Carers – Other Residence”.

It is acknowledged that this could create challenges for CSOs, as some will have current employees who may not meet the carer competencies.

Assessment

It is anticipated that there will be three groups of individuals who will be assessed against the carer competencies:

- family carer,
- foster carer – carer’s residence, and
- foster carer – other residence.

Whilst there are three groups of individuals who are assessed against these competencies, different information may be required to demonstrate that they have met the carer competencies. Table Two outlines some of the differences in evidence required to meet the carer competencies.

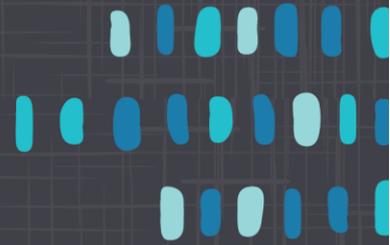
Table Two: Assessment of different groups who must satisfy meeting the carer competencies

Elements of assessment (non-exhaustive)	Foster Care – Carer’s Residence	Family Care	Foster Care – Other Residence
Capacity to provide a non-family care arrangement assessed	✓	✗	✓
Their own residence assessed as evidence to meet the foster carer competencies	✓	✓	✗
Their partner and children are considered as part of the assessment process	✓	✓	✗
Natural supports assessed as evidence to meet the foster carer competencies	✓	✓	✗

Given the different circumstances in which the groups identified in Table One provide care, different techniques are used to assess that the carer competencies are met. It is critical that there is a clear understanding of these groups and their differences within the OOHC sector, as their capacity to care for children across models will not be interchangeable without further assessment.

For example, an individual who is assessed against the carer competencies as a “Foster Carer – Other Residence” would not be able to provide care for a child in their own residence without further assessment. These categories would also prevent a “Family Carer” caring for a child in a non-family arrangement without further assessment.





“Foster Carer – Other Residence” applicants who are prospective employees will need to be assessed against the carer competencies as part of the Human Resource/employment process. This could involve the carer competencies being added to the selection criteria and then tested at interview.

This process will remain the same as the current employment process, except that the carer competencies will need to be incorporated as selection criteria. This is a more streamlined process than the current assessment process for foster carers.



“Foster Carer – Other Residence” applicants who are volunteers will need to be assessed against the carer competencies using a carer-competency approach.



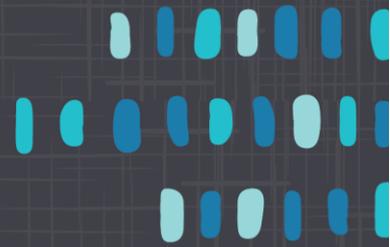
- *Panel can refer to – either the cross-sector foster carer panel, or the CSOs own foster carer panel, or the CSO’s employment selection panel*

Endorsement

The assessment report for applicants in the “Foster Carer – Other Residence” category, who are employees, will contain information about how these individuals meet the carer competencies. This will have been assessed through the Human-Resource/employment process, and by the applicant’s responses to selection criteria, being tested at interview. The assessment report for applicants in the “Foster Carer – Other Residence” category, who are volunteers, will contain information about how these individuals meet the carer competencies, following assessment through a carer-competency approach.

The assessment report will, ideally, be submitted to the cross-sector foster carer panel for endorsement, resulting in enhanced consistency and oversight.





The cross-sector foster carer panel will be able to identify any trends, issues or opportunities for continuous improvement for carers across the Department, and community sector organisations.

This should promote consistency in the decision making process for all individuals who fit the “Foster Carer – Carer’s Residence” and “Foster Carer – Other Residence” categories, irrespective of employment status across the Department and CSOs.

For information about the reforms, please refer to the Reform page on the Department’s website (<http://www.dcp.gov.au/ChildreninCare/Pages/OOHCreform.aspx>).

