



keyassets

SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES



Fostering Matters

Your guide to becoming a foster carer



“

Hello...

I'm Rob Ryan, the CEO of Key Assets - The Children's Services Provider. We're an international group that has been operating in Australia since 2007.

During this time we have developed a strong reputation as a leader in the child and family welfare sector. As a not for profit we are passionate about delivering outstanding services that enable children and families to achieve their potential. Our purpose is to achieve positive and lasting outcomes for children, families and communities. We can draw on our group's wealth of knowledge, international safeguarding and child protection practice, therapeutic models of intervention, academic research and qualitative programs to continually improve care options for vulnerable children and their families. In Australia, we have services in New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania. We also provide programs on Norfolk Island and have strong partnerships with our Key Assets service in New Zealand.

I am privileged to meet and talk with carers across Australia, New Zealand and the other jurisdictions Key Assets operates. I am inspired at the stories that bring people to become carers and the impact that our carers have on the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our community. The carer journey is not always easy and I know the challenges faced by foster and kinship carers in shaping a better future for children and young people.

Good caring is like running a marathon, to do it well requires preparation and training, assistance from a support team, motivation to help you in the tough times when you hit the wall and friends, family and coaches to celebrate the wins. I look forward to hearing about your carer journey and the way in which we can support you in creating positive and lasting outcomes for children, young people and families.

Thank you for taking the first step.

”



Rob Ryan
Chief Executive Officer



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SERVING CHILDREN, FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES

A photograph of two young girls, one white and one Black, blowing bubbles in a grassy field. The girl on the left is holding a yellow bubble wand. The girl on the right is blowing a bubble. The background is a soft-focus green field with a bright sun in the upper left corner.

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What is fostering restoration, guardianship and open adoption?

Our dedicated foster carers look after children and in some cases will work to reunite them with their families. Where this is not possible carers will provide long term family based placements and will help children move onto independent living.

How is fostering different to open adoption?

Fostering means that the child or young person in your care will remain the legal responsibility of the local child protection department and/or their birth parents. This is different to open adoption, where the legal rights of a child are permanently transferred to their adoptive parents.

Some children may maintain strong bonds with their birth families, which may take the form of regular face-to-face or verbal contact. In some cases, parents may continue to be involved in any important decisions that are made about their child's welfare or education.

Why do children come into care?

Children and young people may come into care as a result of a parent's illness, relationship problems, family breakdown or a situation where their welfare has been threatened.

Many of them will have experienced neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse, and all will have faced loss and separation from their birth family.

Children in care may express their feelings through difficult or challenging behaviour. Some may be clingy or have tantrums. Others will be withdrawn and find it difficult to build trusting relationships with adults. Even if they seem happy and smiling, their past experiences will almost certainly have an effect on their behaviour and development.

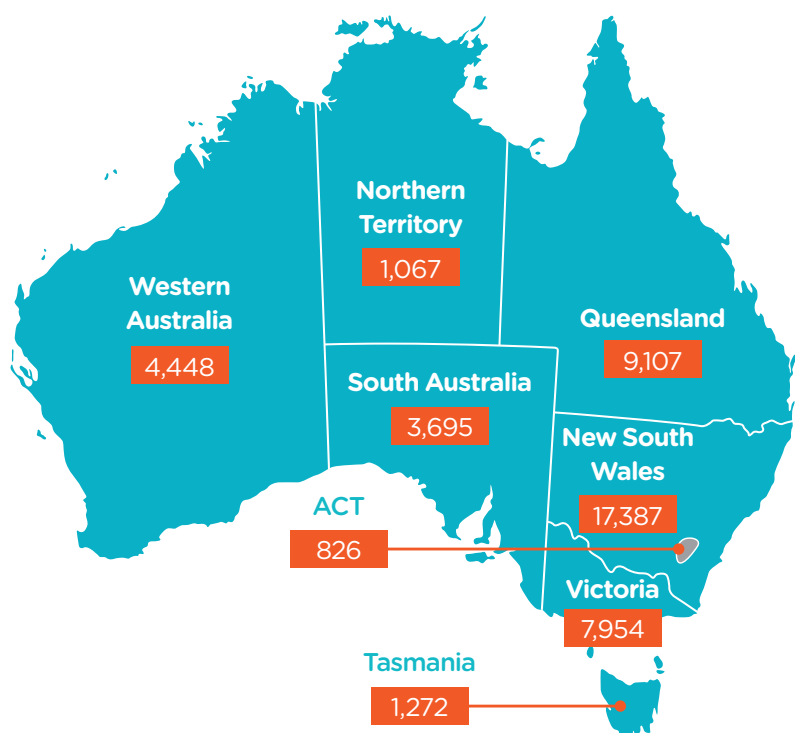
Could I be a foster carer?

Our foster carers come from all types of backgrounds and we welcome carers of any race, sexual orientation, income and home ownership status. We're looking for people who can provide a safe, caring and supportive environment for vulnerable children and young people.

Fostering a child or young person is a big decision and takes high levels of commitment and patience. You'll need an enthusiastic approach, bags of energy and a genuine desire for making a positive and lasting difference to the lives of children and young people in care.

You'll also need to be over the age of 25, have a spare bedroom in your home and be able to meet the needs of the child/ren in your care.

In return, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that you're making a real difference to children who desperately need a foster family to care for them.



The most recent statistics from Child Protection Australia (2017-2018) show nationally, 45,756 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2018—a rate of 8.2 per 1,000 children.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018. Child protection Australia 2017-18. Child welfare series no. 68. Cat. no. CWS 65. Canberra: AIHW.

● Key Assets operational regions

Who are we?

By working together with carers we can offer children and young people a brighter future.

Key Assets is a non-government, not-for-profit children's services agency and part of the International Key Assets Group – a leading children's services provider with more than 20 years' experience in a range of children's services including supporting foster carers, children and young people in care.

What's in a name?

Key Assets reflects our belief that foster carers are the agents of change for children in care, therefore each is a key asset. We believe children are our tomorrow and as adults we should be cherishing them and helping them to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy life and achieve goals. All adults have a positive contribution to make in encouraging children to achieve their potential.

Furthermore we believe that in seeking to improve these outcomes or key development assets, a child or young person's strength and resilience will grow.

Key to what we do is our culture and core values:

- ▲ Recognising everybody counts and is accountable.
- ▲ Providing high quality and safe services.
- ▲ Achieving excellence through continuous improvement.
- ▲ Cultivation knowledge, innovation and learning.

**Our purpose:
is to achieve positive and
lasting outcomes for children,
families and communities.**

Caring with Key Assets

How do we work?

At Key Assets we have a unique approach to fostering that encourages foster carers and professionals to work together in the best interest of the child. We call this the Key Care Team Model. Our dedicated team of professionals build collaborative and trusting relationships with carers, that focuses on developing their skills and capacity and nurturing their competence and confidence. Offering carers the support, coaching and training they need to provide stable and successful placements for children and young people they look after.

What kind of support do we offer?

Caring for children can be rewarding yet a demanding journey, but don't worry, you're not alone, we'll support you every step of the way.

You'll receive regular visits and ongoing support and coaching from a dedicated qualified social worker. Your social worker will support you in prioritising issues, setting goals and working through projects that matter to you so that you can achieve the outcomes you want for your family.

For children and young people identified as having more complicated needs we'll also provide continuing support of an child and young person support worker and therapist to help promote the needs of the young person in your care.

We offer fostering allowances, 24/7 support and the opportunity for you to enhance your skills through ongoing training opportunities. You'll also receive extra benefits, including paid respite, access to carer support groups and organised family activities.



**“To see Luke smile
and at peace is
worth everything.”**



Claire and Steve's story

Claire and Steve started new lives as foster carers when they fostered Luke, a 12 year old boy.

“Our lives as foster carers began a couple of years ago after we saw an advertisement that had been placed in our local newspaper by an agency just starting up in Australia, looking to recruit new foster carers. They were called Key Assets.

We had been talking a lot about looking into fostering and it was just by chance that we saw this particular ad, it must have been fate. The following day we called the number and arranged to meet a social worker to have an informal chat.”

“We decided that we had a lot to offer a child that, through no fault of their own, was unable to live with their birth family.”

“As first time carers we knew there would be difficult times ahead but the wrap around support network offered by Key Assets gave us the confidence we needed.

In Summer 2008 we became the first carers to be appointed through fostering panel – we joined the Key Assets family. By May 2008 we had our first placement, we were so excited, our family had expanded by one, a 12 year old boy called Luke with a mischievous sense of humour and a smile to melt your heart.”

“Our first 12 months together were a rollercoaster of emotions to say the least, we went from elation to despair and back again quite a few times.”

“We had many highs and lows and at times wondered why are we doing this. What we found difficult was that normally when you go out to work and have a particularly stressful day, your home is your haven where you can recharge the batteries and relax. When you foster it's all happening in your own home. That's where Key Assets gave us the support and strength to carry on, to know that things would improve, to give us some much needed respite so we could look after ourselves as well. They listened to us and gave us advice on how to deal with specific behavioural issues, all of which were new to us.

Since then, what a difference. Looking back we realise that it takes time for a child to begin to trust again, they have been through so much in their short lives. We had to learn to deal with rejection; when Luke didn't even want to sit next to me at the dinner table, picked up his chair and moved away, to being criticised and put down at every opportunity.

For new carers it is very difficult to cope with this type of behaviour coming from a child you are putting your heart and soul into helping. Over time we learned not to take things personally, it really wasn't us he was angry at, we just represented the adults in his life that had let him down in the past. Now two years on, at the dinner table I often get, 'Claire, you can sit next to me if you like', and he often helps me preparing the meal and clearing up afterwards. We have learned that consistency and routine play a vital role in caring for Luke, only time and persistence can aid this.”

“Luke is now settled and happy and talks of his long term future with us.”

“He considers himself part of the family and is treated like one, he often tells us he loves us. We are reaping the rewards of the stressful beginning we all had. To hear his laughter and joy is priceless and to see Luke smile and at peace is worth everything.

We hope that our story gives you a glimpse of the difference you can make to children and their lives. There is no magic formula, just plain old patience, kindness and sincerity.”

Types of care...

All children and young people in care have a plan which determines the type of care they require. Our initial goal is to give children and young people permanency within 2 years. Our goal may change as more information is gathered and as we become more familiar with the family.

Emergency

Emergency placements involve caring for a child or young person who needs somewhere safe to stay immediately, usually for a few nights or up to 6 weeks, depending on the child/ren's need. Children usually have face to face contact with their family 2-3 times a week while in an Emergency placement.

Permanent care

Carers make a commitment to caring for the child or young person until their care order ends at 18 years and can continue to care for the young person informally after 18.

Short term or Restoration care

Short term or restoration care is from 3 months to 2 years, until a permanent placement is found or the child is restored to family. Family contact can occur 2-3 times per week and carers may be involved in facilitating contact especially if the case plan is guardianship or open adoption.

Respite

Respite foster care offers a short stay to a child or young person, who lives with their own family or foster carers, to give them a break. This might be for weekends or a few weeks but we really need people who are flexible to meet the need of the children and carers.

Children with disabilities

There are many children and young people with disabilities in Victoria who need a foster family. This can include children with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, sensory impairments or a combination of these



The journey to become a foster carer...

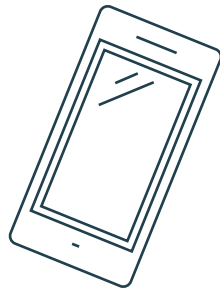
Receiving this booklet is just the first stage in the process to becoming approved as a carer. The diagram shows the 'journey' that you will follow, however, it is only once we receive your application form that you will enter the assessment process.

3

You will be required to attend Foster Care Foundational training which covers all responsibilities and obligations of being a foster carer. You will also have an opportunity to hear about foster care first hand.

1

Call us or log onto our website keyassets.com.au to register your interest in caring with Key Assets.



2

A Key Assets worker will visit your home to answer any questions and help you to make an informed decision about becoming a carer with Key Assets.

You'll need to provide us with:

- ▲ A medical examination completed by your GP.
- ▲ Three personal references (one to be a family member) that will be interviewed as part of the assessment process and asked to provide written references. If you are in employment, we'll also ask for a reference from your employer.

- ▲ School references will be completed for all children living in the household.
- ▲ Ex-partner references are required when there is shared care of a child under 18 years.

The following checks will be carried out during the assessment process:

- ▲ National Police Clearance, carer register check and

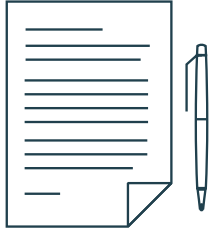
background check on all adult members of the household and any adult regular visitors.

- ▲ All adult members of the household will need to apply for a Working with Children Check through the Department of Justice and Community Safety.
- ▲ Standard safety compliance check on your home. If you have lived overseas we may undertake criminal history.

All information about you as a prospective carer is held on file. All information can be viewed on request except for references from external agencies (such as personal references) which are provided in confidence and cannot be accessed.

5

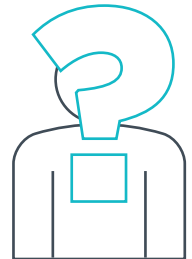
Once your assessment and all relevant checks and references are completed, we'll present your information to a Fostering Panel. You'll also attend the panel and they will make a recommendation to the Key Assets Director who makes the final accreditation decision.



The assessment process takes an average of 3-4 months to complete.

6

If you are accredited, we will begin to match a child to your experience and preferences.



4

Your suitability will then be assessed by a qualified social worker who will carry out a full assessment. They will visit your home 4-8 times to collect information about you, your family and any skills and experience you have that will help you with fostering. The information obtained forms the basis of an assessment report.



Once you are approved... some frequently asked questions

Q1. Could a child I foster share a bedroom with one of my own children?

Some agencies will allow this, especially for younger children. At Key Assets however, we prefer to place a child in a home where he or she will have their own bedroom but will assess if it is appropriate for children to share, for example a sibling group.

Q2. Can I still go out to work and be a foster carer?

It is possible for foster carers to work as long as you are available to meet the needs of the child.

Q3. Can I choose how long I want children and young people to stay with me?

Before you are accredited as a carer we will have discussed the different types of placements that are needed for our children and young people. You can decide which types of placement would suit you best. If you would prefer emergency or temporary placements you do need to be aware that it isn't always possible to know at the beginning of a placement exactly when a child will move on.

Q4. Can I choose which age group or sex I would prefer to foster?

Yes, you can. However, you are far more likely to have continuous placements if you are willing to take children of all ages. In Victoria there is currently a shortage of foster carers particularly for older children and for children who have high and complex needs.

Q5. How much will I know about the child/young person before they are placed with me?

We discuss every placement with our carers and it is your decision as to whether to take a young person. We will provide you with as much information about the young person and his/her background as possible, including any difficult behaviour and how to manage them. However, you do need to be aware that sometimes we have very little information, especially in an emergency. We would always, however, seek to find out information as quickly as possible.

Q6. As Key Assets is part of an international organisation do you place children from outside of Australia with foster carers in Australia?

No, Key Assets only provides foster care for children and young people who are living in Australia and more importantly in your local area. Because of our global network we are able to draw on international, as well as local, knowledge in Out of Home Care and apply this to our local services. Key Assets is an Australian agency associated to an international network.

Q7. Will I be taxed on my allowances?

The foster care allowances are exempt from taxation and are not cited as income for any purpose, including yearly tax returns, applications for Commonwealth benefits or when applying for loans from financial institutions.

Q8. Do all children have contact with their family members and significant others?

Contact with family is important for all children as it helps them to form their identity and learn about who is in their family. Contact visits with family members forms part of the court order and can be several times a week when children first enter care or if their plan is to be restored to family. Children in permanent care such as guardianship and open adoption will all have ongoing regular contact with their family members, including parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings and other significant people in their life. All carers are required to demonstrate a commitment to children and young people having contact, where deemed to be safe and appropriate. Carers are involved in contact and where appropriate supervise children attending contact visits.

Mandy's story

Mandy already has two grown-up children of her own, she now fosters with Key Assets and is currently caring for two young sisters.

Mandy is a single mother to her two children, Sarah and Mason. Sarah is 23 and Mason is 21 and they both still live at home with Mandy, along with Mandy's mother who is 76 years old.

The family had two new additions, 2 sisters that Mandy fostered with Key Assets, upon her approval to become a carer in 2011.

Mandy describes her family as close, affectionate and musical. She says they are all extremely trusting of each other, laid back and work as a team together.

Thinking back on her time before being a foster carer, Mandy remembers it being a simpler time, much quieter with less mess. She previously worked in a pharmacy and in aged-care. She came to a point

in her life where she was tossing up between continuing with aged-care or attempting foster carer. After reading books and having discussions with friends about the topic she decided to enquire about fostering with Key Assets.

She explains how she found foster care very tough in the beginning...

“I soon learnt that if you are able to persevere for long enough, the rewards you get back are priceless.”

Speaking about the foster children that came into her care, “the first one it took over 3 months for her challenging behaviours to settle, and the second more than 8 months.”

Mandy feels the most important aspect of fostering for her is around providing a home with unconditional love. She said it's amazing when you begin to realise how much you can mean to them.

“The biggest reward is to see them grow and the change in their personality, behaviour, mannerism in such a short time and to see their confidence grow.”

Mandy knew that she was making a difference when her youngest foster child said “I knew you loved me when you kept telling me you were really proud of me”.



“I knew you loved me when you kept telling me - you were really proud of me.”



Learning and development

Skills and knowledge for success

We are committed to ensuring that everyone involved in caring for a vulnerable child or young person has the skills necessary to support them safely and securely. As such, we will provide you with learning and development opportunities that will enable you to continually increase your knowledge, skills and confidence.

Why is training so important?

Children and young people who are fostered have often led complex and traumatic lives. It is crucially important that you are able to constantly improve your own understanding of safety and welfare issues in order to provide them with the best possible support.

We ensure that our training courses and learning materials are accessible, relevant and compatible with the different levels of a foster carer's knowledge and experience.

Ongoing training opportunities

The training we provide will not only keep you up to date with national concerns and issues surrounding children and young people, it will also benefit your own development as a carer. Through these courses we want to explore the views, opinions and experiences of you and other carers, help you to overcome possible difficulties and challenges that you may face in fostering, as well as learning new skills through finding mutual support from others. We want to increase your own professionalism as a carer and ensure that your enthusiasm for fostering is refreshed.

1

You will first start your training with us as part of the assessment process, during which you will attend a foundational fostering course.

2

This is followed by a program of post-approval training.

The training is provided to:

- ▲ Help foster carers become therapeutic parents
- ▲ Improve knowledge, develop and refine skills
- ▲ Establish positive values that promote equality of opportunity
- ▲ Encourage foster carers to recognise that we care for children in the context of a wider society, and discourage discrimination
- ▲ Ensure that foster carers are competent and confident in safe caring and in protecting children from harm
- ▲ Encourage foster carers to take responsibility for their own professional development through individual training.

3

As you become more experienced we will provide you with a program of specialist courses that cover a wide range of subjects to further enrich your knowledge, skills base and understanding.

Some of our courses include:

- ▲ Promoting positive behaviour
- ▲ Working with teenagers
- ▲ Understanding attachment
- ▲ Valuing diversity and promoting equality
- ▲ Recording
- ▲ Managing and promoting contact
- ▲ Safe caring.



Fostering poem

- f** is for having lots of fun
- o** is for offering children a place
- s** is for sharing things with each other
- t** is for treasuring the time we have spent together
- e** is for every child is different in every special way
- r** is for remembering the first to last day
- i** is for ignoring the bad and remembering the good
- n** is for never forgetting
- g** is for getting everybody to be a family again

Poem by Courtney, Age 11
A child in care

Children foster too

What will life be like for your children in a fostering family?

Becoming a foster carer as an adult can be an experience full of mixed emotions; anticipation, excitement, anxiety and worry. If you have children then all these emotions will be experienced by them as well. Your children will share their home, their parents, their siblings and belongings with the children and young people in placement. They play a vital role in the success of foster placements and we will help you in supporting them in this role.

Key Assets will make sure that your children have easy access to your family's social worker and contact with other young people in the area who are also a part of a fostering family. Many areas have specific support groups where birth children can discuss the issues affecting them and take part in activities together.



Kerrie's story

Kerrie grew up in a fostering family between the ages of 5 and 19, and her parents have cared for over 100 children and young people.

"Fostering for me was an adventure. Like any job it had its ups and its downs. When I say job, I do mean job. A job for me, my brother and sister, not just my mum and dad; we were all involved in various ways. It was just like having an extended family, with extra brothers and sisters, and having mum at home was a fantastic bonus.

Like any family, some days we all got on and other days we would all fall out. But my strongest memories are of the good times. Some mornings we would wake up to find a new face peeking out of the bedroom opposite, and then as we got older we would find empty beds where people had decided to leave in the middle of the night, sometimes with MY clothes and MY CDs!..

The hardest part of fostering has got to be when someone you really like or care for leaves. Don't get me wrong, this wasn't every placement we had, but I can remember a few in particular that felt like I'd lost someone close.

When I was 10 years old we fostered a baby from birth. He stayed with us until he was 18 months old; he was my little brother and we were his family. I think it affected us all when he left. All ended well though and when he moved back to his family we still saw him. This happened with many of the children and young people who stayed with us and mum even still has contact with someone who left us 15 years ago."



"If I could go back now and change anything that has happened in my past I, like anyone, would change some things. But being part of a fostering family would definitely not be one of them."

Michael's Story

What's it like to be a child in foster care?

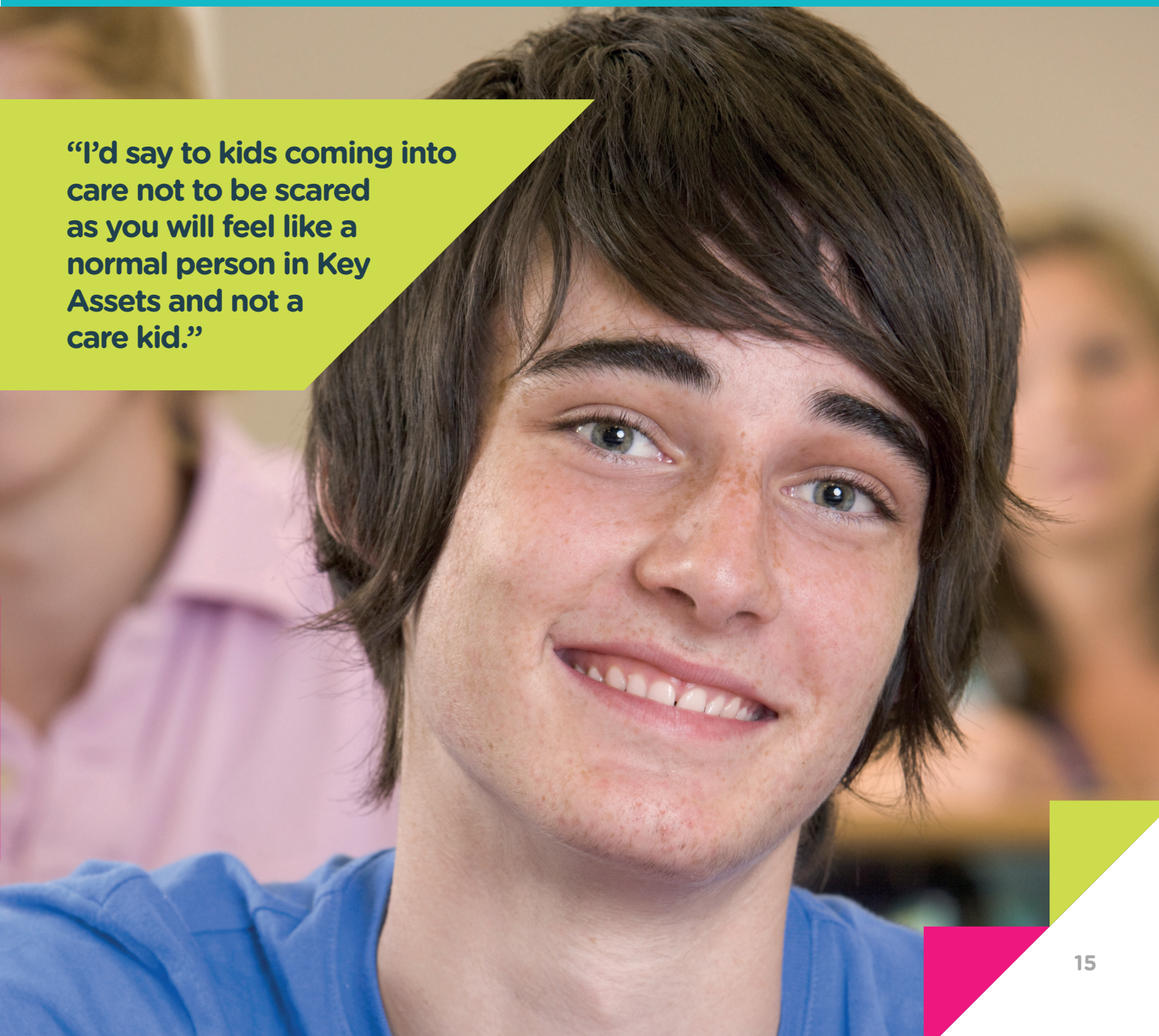
My name is Michael and I've been in care since I was eight years old. I'm 17 years old now and I've been with Key Assets since I was 14 years old.

I'm in foster care because my mum and dad didn't look after me well, it wasn't safe for me to live with them and so I was put in to foster care. I was very angry and I found it really hard to trust adults which made my behaviour difficult sometimes. The more I moved the more I felt angry and let down.

I've had a lot of different foster homes some of which have lasted a few days and others a few weeks and months but none which have lasted this long. I think its 'cool' being with Key Assets because everyone listens to you and you get to know all the staff, as well as the other kids and their foster carers. Another kid told me that he felt safe with Key Assets and they put on good activities which are always lots of fun. Key Assets staff are nice people. You don't feel like you are on your own in foster care with Key Assets and the support workers don't have 50 kids to look after which means you get lots more attention and support.

I was a bit scared when I got placed with my foster carers but now I would say enjoy and embrace it, don't worry because carers at Key Assets take notice of you, as do the staff. I'd say to kids coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person in Key Assets and not a care kid. My Key Assets carers didn't tell everyone I was in care and they gave me the choice whether to tell the neighbours or not, it was my choice and I felt like they listened to me. That shows that they put me first!

“I'd say to kids coming into care not to be scared as you will feel like a normal person in Key Assets and not a care kid.”





What next?

If you would like to take the next step towards becoming a foster carer, then contact us at:

Key Assets Victoria

Suite 10
Building 3
195 Wellington Road
Clayton, VIC 3168

Tel: 1800 WE CARE (1800 93 2273)

iwanttofooster.com.au



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