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Service Stream	Families and Young People Services	Category	Foster and Kinship Care
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Purpose

- The welfare and best interests of children and young people residing in foster and kinship care is paramount.
- Children and young people need to be cared for within a healthy family environment that is characterised by 'positive-parenting-practices', including: structure and routine; reasonable rules, expectations, and age-appropriate limits; guidance, support, and encouragement; positive reinforcement; with fair, consistent, and reasonable discipline, and demonstrating tolerance for normal and/or symptomatic behaviour.
- Respect for foster carers as partners together with other professionals in the fostering team is critical, as is the provision of ongoing information, training, support, and supervision.
- A safe and positive environment – the foster/kinship care home provides a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment for the child or young person, in compliance with the 'Statement of Standards', *Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)*.

Scope

This procedure applies to all employees, volunteers, and contractors engaged within Foster and Kinship Care (FKC) programs across Mercy Community (MC) – Families and Young People Services (FYPS), except for the Intensive Foster and Kinship Care (IFKC) program. This procedure relates to General FKC placements, Intensive Intervention Placement Support (IIPS) and High Plus (HP) programs.

Procedure

1. Carer enquiries and initial assessments – overview

- 1.1 MC is responsible for the recruitment of foster carers. This includes responding to enquiries and conducting initial assessments to determine the enquirer's potential as a future foster carer.
- 1.2 Enquiries in the context of this Procedure relate to enquiries from members of the community who wish to seek information about becoming a foster carer. If the enquiry is from the media, or is suspected to be from the media, the enquirer's details should be recorded and these details referred to the Regional Director (RD) for response.
- 1.3 The foster carer recruitment and assessment process is one that demands considerable resources and, as such, enquirers will be supported to explore the role of the foster carer in a realistic way to ensure that resources are expended appropriately.
- 1.4 Initial responses to enquiries also serve to reinforce the organisation's reputation in the community. Foster and Kinship Care Practitioners (FKCPs) must ensure that through all enquiries, they are courteous, respectful, and professional.
- 1.5 FKCPs with any involvement in the enquiry and recruitment process must reinforce that the needs of carers should always be actioned within the context of a child/young person's need for care and not the applicant's perceived right or wish to become a carer.
- 1.6 FKCPs must maintain the confidentiality of all current clients and carers when responding to enquiries.

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2. Responding to enquiries

- 2.1 Each program will have local protocols regarding the appointment/rostering of an allocated FKCP to respond to enquiries.
- 2.2 All programs have a responsibility to respond to the enquiries of community members who seek information about foster caring. Responding to enquiries may involve:
 - Providing information about the roles and responsibilities of the foster carer;
 - Providing information about the foster care system; and
 - Providing information about the foster carer assessment process.
- 2.3 Enquiries may be received directly from community members or from the Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services (the Department). Enquiries may also be forwarded by Queensland Foster and Kinship Care (QFKC) or through MC's recruitment pathways online. They may be received via telephone, in writing, via email or face-to-face.
- 2.4 If an enquiry relates to another region, the allocated FKCP will either provide contact phone numbers for other services in the enquirer's region or record contact details for the enquirer for forwarding to the regional Placement Services (PS) for follow-up.
- 2.5 Where an enquirer requests information regarding the application process, they will be posted or emailed relevant information within two (2) working days. If delivered as part of a home visit, this will occur within two (2) weeks. Documentation to be provided includes:
 - Program information brochures;
 - Foster or Kinship Care program brochures or booklets;
 - The *MC Privacy Brochure*, the *MC Feedback and Complaints Brochure* and other relevant MC information;
 - Information regarding the attainment of a blue card; and
- 2.6 When responding to an enquiry, the allocated FKCP will check the archived carer files and existing enquiry information to review any previous history (including history of previous enquiries). A search of both the Penelope and CMS archived databases must occur across demographic parameters, such as first and last names, date of birth, and contact phone numbers, to ensure no duplicate files are created.
 - Note: As the Penelope CMS also covers programs other than FKC, there is a possibility that new enquirers have previously accessed MC services. If a history exists, the allocated FKCP will add the enquirer to a new Case File utilising the Intake Wizard function. At this stage of enquiry, it is not necessary to add all members of the potential carer's household, as this will be added when they make a formal application via lodgement of the Application for Approval (APA) document.
- 2.7 If a search is conducted in Penelope and the individual has not previously received services through a MC program, the allocated FKCP should add the enquirer to Penelope CMS. When still in the Search page under the Individual search tab, select the *Intake Wizard* and complete all fields, including mandatory fields Gender, First Nations status, CALD, Address and Contact Numbers. If the Date of birth is not known, the default is 01/01/1901 to indicate the file will require updating.
- 2.8 Where an enquirer requests information regarding the application process, they will be posted or emailed relevant information within two (2) working days. If delivered as part of a home visit, this will occur within two (2) weeks. Documentation to be provided includes:
 - Program information brochures;

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- Foster or Kinship Care program brochures or booklets;
 - The *MC Privacy Brochure*, the *MC Feedback and Complaints Brochure* and other relevant MC information; and
 - Information regarding the attainment of a blue card.
- 2.9 For all enquiries where information about the enquirer is gathered, a Carer Assessment and Approval Service File will be created. A Service File can be created utilising the 'Add Service File' link to the right of the Service Files overview, within the Carer Case File. The allocated FKCP for the enquirer should be added by searching in the Primary Worker field. The correct individual for the Service File should be selected by clicking on the checkbox to the left of their name before clicking 'Finish'.
- 2.10 Where the enquiry is completed using the Departmental *Form 1: Foster Carer Intake*, this will be uploaded to the EOI Service Event in the Assessment and Approval Service File.
- 2.11 FKCPs will ensure they make the enquirer aware of their privacy rights by reading the privacy statement, *FS IP FKC Privacy Notice*.
- 2.12 FKCPs will ensure enquirers complete the *Privacy Agreement – Carer or AHM* during the first face to face contact.
- 2.13 If it is determined that a face-to-face home visit is required to complete the Departmental document *Form 1 Foster Carer Intake* with the enquirer, the FKCP must first complete a *Community Visit Risk Assessment*.

3. Progressing suitable enquiries

- 3.1 Where a thorough conversation has occurred during the completion of Departmental *Form 1: Foster Carer Intake*, and the enquirer is considered suitable to progress to pre-service training, they will be invited to attend the next available course.
- 3.2 If a potential carer is unavailable for the next available course, the allocated FKCP will record this in the Assessment and Approval Service File in a *Case Note*.
- 3.3 The naming convention for case notes applies:
- [Name of record][Surname][First initial][Date]Refer to *FS PROC FKC Pre-Service Training* for further actions.

4. Progressing unsuitable enquiries

- 4.1 Where the enquirer is considered unsuitable to progress to pre-service training, the allocated FKCP will discuss any concerns with the line manager prior to advising the enquirer of a decision to not progress the enquiry. The allocated FKCP will advise the enquirer of the final decision, either in person or via telephone, including the reasons for the decision.
- 4.2 Allocated FKCPs will be honest about the enquirer's prospects of progressing to the next stage in the process. It is best practice to discuss concerns with an enquirer face-to-face with two (2) FKCPs present. The lead FKCP will provide the enquirer with advice as to how they can rectify any identified issues or why they might be considered unsuitable.
- 4.3 The allocated FKCP will send a letter to all enquirers, using *FKC Concerns with Enquiry Letter*, who have been assessed as unsuitable for progressing to the next stage in the process, along with a copy of the *MC Feedback and Complaints Brochure*. The allocated FKCP will upload a copy of the *FKC Concerns with Enquiry* letter to the enquirer's EOI Event. Where the enquirer makes another enquiry in the future, this will be assessed on its merits at the time of the new enquiry.

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5. Maintaining contact with enquirers

- 5.1 The allocated FKCP will undertake to follow-up with enquirers within reasonable timeframes, i.e. responses within two (2) business days for written correspondence. This includes phone calls, email, and mail correspondence and, if appropriate, home visits.
- 5.2 If there is no response from the enquirer after reasonable attempts have been made by the allocated FKCP to follow-up the enquiry, a *FKC Intention to Close Enquiry Due to No Contact Letter* will be sent to the enquirer. This letter will advise that, should no response be received within two (2) weeks, the enquiry will be considered withdrawn.
- 5.3 The allocated FKCP will complete the letter to the enquirer in the Assessment and Approval Service File.
- 5.4 If no response is received within the two (2) week period:
 - 5.4.1 The Department will be advised of the actions taken and the reasons for this (except in Toowoomba where the EOI information is only sent if the EOI is converted, and the enquirer becomes an applicant).
 - 5.4.2 The enquirer's file in Penelope will be closed by clicking on the 'Close Service File' link and recording the close date, reason, and any relevant notes. If the enquirer/s contact MC after this time, the allocated FKCP or Line Manager will consider how to recommence the enquiry process.

6. Records management

- 6.1 All enquiry documentation is to be filed in the Penelope CMS under the enquirer's name, even where the enquirer is part of an entity (the second person's Individual, Case and Service Files will be created upon completion of the pre-service training).
- 6.2 Any correspondence with the enquirer will be saved to the Service file in a *Case Note* by copying the email text, removing the formatting, and pasting directly into the *Case Note*.
- 6.3 All documentation is to be uploaded to the relevant Service File within ten (10) working days. Where uploading is anticipated to take longer than this, FKCPs must negotiate this with their Line Manager.
- 6.4 Refer to the *FS IP FKC Document Filing Guide* for further guidance on CMS recordkeeping requirements and naming conventions.

Definitions

Foster and Kinship Care Practitioner (FKCP)

The employee who has been delegated by the line manager to undertake specific case management or placement support tasks.

Line Manager

Employees with supervisory and program management responsibilities within the fostering service.

Regional Director (RD)

The manager with overall finance and program management responsibilities, who is a member of the leadership team.

References

Child Protection Act 1999 (Qld)
Department's Charter of Rights

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Department's Child Safety Practice Manual (CSPM)
Department's Form 1: Foster Carer Intake
Department's Foster Care Handbook (or equivalent)
Department's Household Safety Assessment (available on Child Safety Practice Manual website)
Department's Statement of Standards of Care
FS DOC FKC Program Overview
FS IP FKC Document Filing Guide
FS IP FKC Privacy Notice
FS PROC FKC Pre-Service Training
MC Feedback and Complaints Brochure
MC Privacy Brochure
Program-specific information brochures

Related Documents

Penelope Forms:

Case Note
Community Visit Risk Assessment
Concerns with Enquiry Letter
Intention to Close Enquiry Due to No Contact Letter
Privacy Agreement – Carer or AHM

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