



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

A
GUIDE
FOR
FOSTER
PARENTS



FAMILY
LIVES

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GUIDE FOR FOSTER PARENTS
IN FAMILY HOMES

Family Homes were introduced into the New Zealand Child Care system in the early 1950's. There are now over 120 administered by the department throughout the country.

This booklet is issued primarily to assist Family Home foster parents but will also serve the needs of administration staff and social workers who have the task of helping foster parents in this important work.

The department is very appreciative of the vital role played by Family Home foster parents and in preparing these notes our hope is that they will help to make life a little easier for all concerned.

Wellington

1.5.1978

GUIDE TO FAMILY HOME FOSTER PARENTS

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A1 DEFINITION OF A FAMILY HOME

Family Homes are large houses owned (with the few exceptions mentioned below) furnished and maintained by the Department of Social Welfare and occupied rent-free by selected foster parents who are not paid a salary, but receive board payments for the children in their care.

The homes are usually situated on a large section in a normal residential setting and every effort is made to ensure that the homes blend into the local community as far as possible. In a few cases the house is owned by the Housing Corporation and let to a family of children with the department acting as trustee. These homes function in the same way as the homes actually owned by the Department of Social Welfare.

A2 THE FUNCTION OF FAMILY HOMES

Family Homes fulfil a variety of needs for residential care but these fall into four main classes:

- (a) Children or young persons requiring short-term care in localities where there are no institutional facilities. These may be:
 - (i) Wards of the Director-General recently placed under guardianship and awaiting permanent placement in private foster homes.
 - (ii) Children or young persons in Social welfare custody pending a Court appearance.
 - (iii) Wards who are in between foster homes or work placements and are awaiting another.
 - (iv) Wards from country areas who are visiting larger centres for some reason e.g. for medical treatment.
 - (v) Wards in transit from one district to another.
 - (vi) Children or young persons from families in temporary distress who require emergency accommodation.

- (b) Children or young persons in need of long-term care but for whom an institutional or private foster home placement would be inappropriate. Such children or young persons need the kind of care which can be provided only in a family group.
- (c) Young persons, who are about to or have already begun working and who need a supportive environment for a time until they establish themselves.
- (d) Young persons discharged from the department's long term training institutions or on placement from Department of Education special schools.

A3 ADMISSION POLICY

Approval for admission of a child or young person to a Family Home is the responsibility of a senior social worker and is given as being in the best interests of the youngster. The views of foster parents will usually be sought and taken into account in making a decision.

A4 THE LEGAL STATUS OF CHILDREN/YOUNG PERSONS IN FAMILY HOMES

The children or young persons placed in a Family Home will fall into one of five categories. They will be:

- (a) Wards of the Director-General. That is children or young persons for whom the Director-General is the legal guardian.
- (b) Children or young persons in the temporary custody of the department by virtue of a remand from a Children or Young Persons Court or a warrant under the Children and Young Persons Act 1974.
- (c) Children or young persons who are under the care and control of the Director-General by private arrangement with the parents under Section 11 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1974. To all intents and purposes, these children/young persons have the same status administratively as wards.

(d) Temporary admissions. These are cases where the department has no continuing responsibility for the child or young person but has provided temporary care in some emergency or other.

(e) Children or young persons who are pupils at a special school under Section 115 of the Education Act 1964, and for whom the Department of Social Welfare provides some services by arrangement with the Department of Education.

A5 THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL'S ROLE

On the making of an order by the Children and Young Persons Court placing any child or young person under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare, the Director-General has, to the exclusion of all other persons, the same powers and rights as if he had been appointed the sole guardian of that child or young person under the Guardianship Act 1968. In other words the Director-General assumes all the powers previously held by the natural parents or other former guardian. The Director-General has the responsibility for providing care, protection, education, training and control for every child or young person placed in his care either by an order of the Court or by private agreement with the parents.

A6 THE FOSTER PARENTS' ROLE

The role of the Director-General is often likened to that of a prudent parent and this is also the role of foster parents. It is the department's hope that foster parents will be able to provide a substitute for the warm, loving, supportive parents that the child or young person has so frequently lacked. The advice of a social worker is available both for help in specific difficult incidents and in a general supportive way, but foster parents are encouraged to use their own initiative in the normal day to day decision making of the home. The intimate knowledge that the foster parent will gain of the child will be helpful to the supervising social worker in deciding if and when placement outside the

family Home may be appropriate.

A7 THE SOCIAL WORKER'S ROLE

The social worker is responsible for the long term casework with the children in residence. Thus while the foster parents are responsible for meeting the immediate physical and emotional needs of the children in their care, the social worker is working towards longer term goals. These usually involve the return of the child to his own family. As the local representative of the child's legal guardian, the social worker has the responsibility for making the major decisions which would normally be made by the natural parents. Social workers also provide support to the foster parents in their work and will want to get to know each child as far as possible as an individual. In order to do this he or she will have to be a regular visitor to the Family Home.

A8 CONTACT WITH PARENTS

In most cases the ultimate aim of the department's intervention in a child's life is to reunite the family in circumstances where they can lead reasonably normal happy lives. This is one reason why continued contact with the natural parents, however inadequate and difficult they may be, is desirable, but the social worker will always indicate if contact with the natural parents or relatives is to be restricted. Children should be encouraged to write to their parents and from time to time there may be the opportunity for visiting and holidays at home. Some natural parents quite understandably resent the fact that foster parents are caring for their children and feel deeply their own failures in bringing up their children. Foster parents should appreciate that the hostility occasionally shown them by the natural parents is a reflection of these feelings and should not take it personally. Where the natural parents are making a nuisance of themselves, foster parents should discuss the matter with the liaison social worker. If necessary, legal sanctions can be invoked to prevent the parents' interference.

A9 REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS

It has long been accepted that rewarding a child for good behaviour is more effective than punishing for bad behaviour. In disciplining children in their care foster parents should adopt similar measures as they would for their own children. While corporal punishment is not forbidden it is not considered an appropriate penalty for many of the misdemeanours of children in care. If corporal punishment was an effective measure few of the children would be in care in the first place as it has frequently been the main form of discipline used in the child's own home.

A10 CONFIDENTIALITY

Few people like to have their failings and more personal details of their background known by strangers. The children and young persons in the department's care may be particularly sensitive in this respect, and foster parents may well have to exercise considerable tact and caution in the use of the personal information which will be supplied to them by the social worker. Information about the child or young person will normally be given to the foster parents at the time of admission to the home but foster parents should not hesitate to ask about other matters that may arise. The department regards Family Home foster parents as important members of the social work team and will make available as much information as is reasonable and necessary. In return foster parents are expected to respect these confidences and not divulge the information to any unauthorised person.

A11 RELIGION

The department has a moral obligation to see that children retain a particular faith even though it be nominal and that they are not subject to the proselytising of other religious denominations. Foster parents should encourage attendance at a church of the children's own faith. Where children have no formal adherence to a particular church foster parents should discuss the matter with the liaison social worker

with a view to discovering the wishes of the parents. Depending on age, the views of the child should be considered.

A12 AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL AND FOSTER PARENTS

Applicants for positions as Family Home foster parents are asked to complete an application form (S.W.625) and to provide references. The Director-General makes the final decision on appointment and an agreement (S.W.628A) is then completed by both parties. Foster parents are given one copy of the completed agreement and this should be retained for future reference.

A13 ACCOMMODATION FOR FOSTER PARENTS

In all Family Homes two bedrooms (unfurnished) are provided for the exclusive use of the foster parents and their own family. In the newer homes a bedroom (furnished) is also set aside for the use of a reliever. Other than in an emergency this room should not be used to accommodate children. Although two bathrooms are provided in all Family Homes, it is not intended that one should be kept for the exclusive use of the foster parents.

As covered in the agreement at paragraph 3(g) the foster parents may not allow any person, other than their own children and those admitted by the department, to reside in the Family Home without the prior approval of the Director or Director-General.

A14 ACCOMMODATION FOR CHILDREN

Children must have separate beds. Generally speaking it is preferred that no child over the age of 6 years may sleep in a bedroom occupied by any person of the opposite sex who is over 6 years of age.

A15 CONTACT WITH THE OFFICE

A successful working relationship between foster parents and the department's officers requires regular contact between the two. This will be both formal and informal and occur at several levels. Senior officers such as the district Director and the Assistant Director

(social work) will want to call on foster parents from time to time but routine contact will be with a Senior Social Worker or Social Worker and an officer in the administration section. Foster parents should come to know these officers well and be able to discuss social work or administrative matters freely with them by telephone or in person. In particular, the social worker responsible for liaison will want to call at the home regularly to see the children. From time to time it may be appropriate for foster parents to participate in case conferences and staff training sessions with social work staff. It is very important that foster parents report to the office details of accidents and regular medical treatment.

A16 DAMAGE TO FOSTER PARENTS' PERSONAL PROPERTY AND NEED FOR INSURANCE COVER

The department does not as a matter of course accept responsibility for any damage to or loss of foster parents' personal property in the Family Home. It will be appreciated that in every home where there are children some fair wear and tear is to be expected and foster parents must accept this risk when they choose to place their own furniture and equipment in the common areas of the home. Foster parents are strongly advised to arrange appropriate insurance cover for their personal property. In special circumstances the department may be prepared to consider some ex gratia payment where unusual circumstances have caused the foster parents to be out of pocket and normal insurances do not cover the expense.

A17 FIRE PROTECTION

Fire protection in government buildings is the responsibility of the Ministry of Works and Development and its Fire Protection Officers will visit Family Homes from time to time. These officers are available to give foster parents information and guidance regarding efficient exit procedures in case of fire and instruction in the use of the fire extinguishers installed in the particular home.

In order to ensure that fire alarm bells are kept in good working order the foster parents are asked to check them once a month and enter the check date in a log book provided by the Fire Protection Officer. The test procedure is extremely simple and involves very little time.

Electric Blankets

Because of the danger of fire no child should be allowed to sleep in a bed with an electric blanket turned on.

A18 TRANSPORT ASSISTANCE

In order to facilitate occasional special outings which may be beyond the foster parents' own transport resources, approval may be given by the district Director for the hire of a rental vehicle of a suitable size or for the supply of a departmental vehicle which can be used together with the foster parent's vehicle. Approval is available for up to six such occasions each year, but because of financial considerations there are some limits on the distances which may be covered. The Director will advise details and also the rates payable to reimburse foster parents.

Where Family Home foster parents use their vehicle to provide transport for the children placed in their care a lump sum payment is made 12 months in advance. The initial payment is on a proportionate basis from the date of taking up appointment up to the following 31 March, and thereafter is paid during the month of April. The amount payable will be discussed at interview.

It is the foster parents responsibility to ensure that any vehicle used at any time for conveying children is not overloaded.

A19 SETTING-UP GRANT

A grant is made to assist with the initial provisioning of the home to avoid foster parents having to bear the cost of purchases of food etc., pending receipt of board payments from the department. The rate of the grant will be discussed at interview.

A20 STOCKTAKING

Because the Family home is government property the Treasury instruction requiring an annual stocktake must be followed. The administration officer will make the necessary arrangements to suit the convenience of all concerned. It is a good opportunity for both the foster parents and departmental officers to thoroughly check on the property inventory and make good any losses, or arrange for write off action if appropriate.

B1 BOARD PAYMENTS

Foster parents are not paid a salary but receive free accommodation and are paid board for the children placed in the home. Payments are made fortnightly from the local office by cheque. Some arrangement should be made between the foster parents and the office so that either the foster parents call at the office on the due day or an officer visits the Family Home.

These regular visits are also a good opportunity to discuss property maintenance requirements and the like. Board payments are expected to cover the costs of food and other consumable stores (see below) but separate arrangements are made for the supply of clothing, medical expenses and the like.

B2 CASUAL MEALS

Foster parents may provide a casual meal for a friend or relative of a child or young person in residence or for an ex-resident who is visiting. The department pays for such meals at a standard rate fixed from time to time.

B3 CLOTHING

Clothing is provided by the department as required and requests should be made to the liaison social worker. Most foster mothers do their own shopping on an order from the department but a social worker will attend to this if necessary. An outing to purchase clothing can provide a good opportunity for a social worker to get to know a child a little better so occasionally the social worker may want to do this. It is not the department's policy to encourage the handing down of outgrown clothing but on occasions with such items as school uniforms, parkas etc., this may be appropriate.

In Family Homes dealing mainly with children who are considered long term placements there, the foster mother may receive an allowance payable quarterly to enable her to shop for the clothing needs of the children

in care without reference to the office or the use of clothing orders. The amount of the quarterly grant is reviewed from time to time with the rise in costs and the exact amounts and general information on how the system works will be detailed by the liaison social worker.

B4 COMMERCIAL CLEANING

Where necessary the Assistant Director (Social Work) may approve of the services of a commercial cleaner once a year to springclean the interior of the home and also to clean the outside if required. It is usual to give the home a thorough cleaning when there is a change of foster parents. Foster parents should approach the administration officer to arrange this service.

B5 CONSUMABLE STORES

Reference is made in the Foster parents Agreement (S.W.628A) that the foster parents are responsible to provide and pay for all food, soap, polishes, and other consumable stores required for consumption or use in the Family Home. Consumable Stores are regarded as those items required to service the Family Home and include such things as toilet paper, fly sprays, detergents, toilet and house cleaners and air freshners. Electric light globes are part of the building and the department approves of small purchases through petty cash, or arranges bulk supply through the office.

B6 FIRST AID

A fully stocked first aid cabinet is provided in each Family Home, and replacement stock is paid from petty cash. A lockable cabinet is provided for the custody of drugs and every care must be taken to see that all drugs, pills and medicines are kept in this cabinet which must be kept locked and the key inaccessible to unauthorised persons.

B7 LAUNDRY ASSISTANCE

Foster parents occasionally experience difficulty in drying sheets, pillow cases, towels, etc., during the winter months.

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In these circumstances commercial laundry charges may be approved by the district Director. Because the finance available for this service is very limited, approvals can only be given sparingly.

B8 PETTY CASH

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parents.
A petty cash allowance is paid in advance to foster parents so that they can meet immediate expenses which are the responsibility of the department. It is necessary for foster parents to keep a note of expenditure but receipts are not required unless the amount is \$3.00 or more. When the amount allotted has been spent it will be replenished. The petty cash fund should not be used to buy items of equipment or clothing for which other procedures exist. The following are examples of the more common expenses allowed for petty cash.

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Items such as Vitamin pills are not to be purchased. If a youngster appears to need them medical consultation is necessary.

B9 POCKET MONEY

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This is provided separately from the board payment for each child or young person in residence in accordance with a set scale. The amount provided is intended for the child's or young person's personal use as he or she wishes but some banking should be encouraged. When the clerical staff are making payments to the foster parent there will be one voucher, and one cheque but the two items, Board and pocket money, will be shown separately.

B10 POWER AND FUEL ACCOUNTS

The department pays 4/5 of the total cost of electric power and other

fuel used in the home. The usual procedure is for the department to pay the whole account direct and recover the foster parents' share separately.

B11 READING MATERIAL

Periodicals and other light reading materials are supplied by the department through any convenient local supplier. The Administration Officer will arrange this on an annual basis.

The choice of material should be by general agreement between foster parents and the liaison social worker and will alter according to the needs of the youngsters in residence at any given time.

B12 RECREATION FUND

This is a fund administered by the district office and is intended to cover minor expenditure of a recreational nature. Small gifts for birthdays and Christmas are met from this fund as are the costs of occasional outings etc. Because the funds available are limited foster parents will need to discuss possible expenditure well in advance with the liaison social worker and the Administration Officer.

B13 SCHOOL FEES AND EXPENSES

School fees, examination fees, the cost of school stationery, etc., are charges met by the department. If the amount is small payment should be made from petty cash, otherwise a cheque will be issued from the office on request. Sometimes where a number of children attend the one college, it may be convenient for an account to be sent direct to the department by the college.

B14 TELEPHONE ACCOUNTS

Provided that the telephone is included in the department's listing under "Family Homes", the department meets the full rental costs. Private toll calls are the foster parents' responsibility. The procedure is for the department to pay the whole account direct to the Post Office and recover the cost of any private tolls separately from the foster

parents. A record should be kept of any authorised official toll calls made from the home.

B15 TELEVISION

It is the department's policy to provide a black and white television set in each Family Home. Some foster parents may have installed their own black and white set and make it available for the general use of the home. In these cases the department will meet routine maintenance costs. The same provision is not available in respect of colour sets, but where the foster parents have installed a colour television set and permit the children to watch it the department will pay 50 per cent of the service contract up to a maximum of \$36.00 per year. Because Family Homes are government property no licence fee is payable for either black and white or colour. The Post Office reference to be quoted if necessary is GP 40/74 of 21.10.1966.

B16 ASSISTANCE WITH HOMEWORK

Where foster parents consider that children in the home require extra help with homework, the liaison social worker should be advised and an attempt made to find suitable people who are willing to assist on a voluntary basis.

B17 GAMES EQUIPMENT

Some indoor games equipment such as playing cards, table games, jigsaw puzzles and the like are supplied by the department. The choice of suitable material should be the same as for reading material, and the administration officer will arrange purchases at three monthly intervals.

C1 ESTIMATES FOR BUILDING MAINTENANCE AND EQUIPMENT

Government expenditure is programmed on an annual basis and foster parents will be asked by the local office for assistance each year in the attempt to make a reasonable forecast of expenditure required during the coming year. It is vitally important that all items required are included as unless Government allocates sufficient expenditure in its Budget to cover these items, it is unlikely that the department will be able to make finance available if a request is made late. In times of financial stringency it may not be possible to carry out all work seen as desirable.

C2 MAINTENANCE OF BUILDINGS

The department employs Regional Building Supervisors, stationed at Auckland, Palmerston North and Christchurch, whose function is to oversee the maintenance of all the department's buildings. Foster parents will see the Building Supervisor from time to time and should draw to his attention any maintenance work required. In addition, requirements should be made known to the local office as these arise.

C3 MAINTENANCE OF EQUIPMENT

Items of furniture and equipment belonging to the department are repaired or replaced at the department's expense. The local office will issue guidelines regarding which firms or tradesmen are to be used, and any procedures to be followed.

C4 MAINTENANCE OF GROUNDS

The department may arrange for major grounds maintenance such as rotary hoeing, trimming of large hedges and trees etc., once a year if required. Other than this, the foster father is expected to maintain the grounds in a reasonable and tidy condition. All the tools for this purpose are supplied by the department.

D1 RELIEF

A reliever may be employed by the department in a Family Home in the following circumstances:

- (a) When the foster parents are absent from the home on holiday or through illness and it is desired that they continue to receive board payments and to be responsible for maintaining the property. In this case, the foster parents must provide board and lodgings for the reliever and are entitled to charge her for these up to the equivalent of that paid by officers employed in the department's institutions (the Administration Officer will deduct the appropriate amount from the salary payable to the reliever and pay this to the foster parents). The maximum periods for which a reliever can be employed in this way are:
 - (i) Holidays three weeks in any twelve months. The first holiday should not be taken until the foster parents have been at least six months in the home.
 - (ii) Illness up to four weeks in all in any one year.
- (b) When the foster parents are absent from the home through illness or on holiday and do not want to be responsible for maintaining the home while they are away. In this case the foster parents will receive no board payments and the department will maintain the home throughout the relief period.
- (c) To give foster parents a break from their duties for a full weekend, that is, from Friday evening to Sunday evening or all of Saturday and all of Sunday including nights once a month or its equivalent in hours during the month (deemed to be 24 hours ordinary time P1). The district Director may at his discretion agree to foster parents accumulating up to three such full weekends for the purpose of taking a longer break from their duties, provided of course that suitable relief arrangements can be made. It is preferred that foster parents

live away from the home during their breaks, but they may live in provided that the reliever sleeps in the home and has full control of the home and of the children throughout the period of her duty and that no additional cost is incurred.

D2 When the foster parents prefer to remain at home and have the option of relief in the form of "babysitters" during the month instead of a weekend off, they may do so. In such cases it is necessary to keep a record of who performed the service, on what dates and the number of hours involved. The maximum relief available under this provision is the same as for a complete weekend off - i.e. 24 ordinary hours. The foster parent will need to send a certified list to the office once a month so that payments can be arranged.

D3 DAILY DOMESTIC ASSISTANCE

The department employs a person for domestic assistance of 12 hours per week, and when there are 7 or more children in residence this person may be paid for 16 hours. The actual hours worked are by arrangement between the foster parents, the person concerned and the department. The way the foster parent uses her help is of course her responsibility. Family Homes subject to pressure of admission and where there are 8 or more almost permanently in residence may need extra domestic help, and foster parents should discuss their needs with their liaison social worker. If the Director is convinced that assistance in excess of 16 hours per week is needed a case should be made to the Director-General for consideration

D4 RELIEF DURING SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

Additional paid relief up to a total of 14 hours per week may be provided at the discretion of the district Director during school holidays.

The purpose of this relief is to assist the foster mother with entertainment of the children, shopping etc., when all the children are at home.

D5 VOLUNTARY RELIEF

The department has no objection to relief being provided on a voluntary unpaid basis. Sometimes church groups or service clubs may wish to do some community work in this way. Any such arrangement would have to be with the full agreement of the foster parents and the department and should be made in such a way that it is possible to terminate it gracefully, if necessary.