

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Community Services
The Hon. Linda Burney MP



Wednesday, 16 September 2009

CHANGES TO IMPROVE FOSTER CARER ASSESSMENTS

As part of the NSW Government's campaign to recruit more foster carers, changes are underway to improve the assessment of new foster carers, Minister for Community Services Linda Burney announced today during the Community Services Estimates Hearing.

"The changes include a new online application program, known as Carerlink, that will make it easier for prospective foster carers to apply and for caseworkers to track their applications," Ms Burney said.

"For the first time, people interested in fostering can submit applications via the internet. This will help reduce the amount of time caseworkers spend on paperwork and allow them more face-to-face time with applicants."

Ms Burney added that people who want to foster a child or young person in NSW will now be subject to an identity test under the new guidelines set down for criminal record checks.

"Community Services will use a 100-point test to verify the identity of carers and members of their households. Household members aged between 16 and 18 years will also be asked to meet an identity test," she said.

"To ensure that we get the right people to care for children, Community Services staff will be trained in new interview techniques to assess carers' capabilities and identify areas where more training may be needed.

"These changes are about simplifying the assessment process and making sure we have the best possible candidates to care for children who, sadly, can not live safely with their families."

Ms Burney said she would like to see more individuals and families opening up their hearts and homes to vulnerable children.

"At present, we have more than 2,500 foster carers in NSW but the number of children entering care continues to spiral. There are currently over 15,000 children living in out-of-home care. Many are being cared for by relatives but there is a continuing need for more foster carers.

"Carers can be of any age or gender, single or in a relationship and from any cultural background. You don't need a big house or big income, only a warm smile and some time to give children the encouragement and attention they need," Ms Burney said.

All foster carers receive intensive training, ongoing support and an allowance to help them meet the costs of caring for a child.

For more information on fostering or to apply to become a carer with Community Services or a non-government organisation, visit the new website www.fosteringnsw.com.au.

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