



# FOSTER CARE SERVICES GUIDE



母親的抉擇  
Mother's Choice

Mother's Choice is a local charity serving the many children without families and pregnant teenagers in Hong Kong. Since 1987, we have joined hands with our community to give hope and change the life stories of vulnerable girls and babies.

## How To Use This Guide

This guide is for those living in Hong Kong who are considering fostering as a way to get to know the service. You can also use this guide if you are a family member or a friend of someone who is considering fostering in order to learn more about foster care and supporting your friends.

In this guide, you will find out more about the needs of foster care in Hong Kong, learn why foster care is needed for some children, the procedures of fostering and the preparation and support needed in becoming foster parents.

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## Introduction to Foster Care Services

Foster care provides a temporary family setting and care to children under 18 years of age whose parents cannot adequately take care of them so that they may continue to enjoy family life until they are able to reach “permanency”, be it by re-uniting with their birth family, joining an adoptive family or living independently. The benefit of a family setting in foster care is known to lead to better outcomes for children than those living in residential institutions.

## Why do some children need foster care?

Children need foster care for all kinds of reasons. Sometimes, it is for reasons such as family domestic violence, parental drug use, or mental illness, all which impact a family's capacity to care for their child. Some of the children's cases sadly include a history of abuse or neglect. Some foster children may be in care because they have special needs, a disability or emotional problems that require more care and attention than their own families can provide. Foster children are of different ages, from newborn to 18 years old, and from all backgrounds.

They all have a common need for a suitable home for them to thrive in whilst they are in care, and until they achieve their permanency plan. Fostering provides these children with a safe home and a loving supportive environment whilst they are separated from their permanent family.

## **Mother's Choice's foster care programs**

Mother's Choice runs two foster care programs:

### **1. Ordinary Foster Care (OFC)**

This is a program designed, operated and largely funded by the Social Welfare Department (SWD). Families in OFC receive a monthly allowance as financial assistance from the SWD to cover the child's expenses and an incentive for the OFC families. Mother's Choice supports up to 65 families at any given time; placements which can usually last several years. These are critical services to provide a loving home for children who may need longer term care whilst they wait to be reunited with their families or adoption. The children may be enrolled in school whilst they living with their foster family and may have regular leave on the weekends or during holidays to see their parents or other family members.

Mother's Choice as one of 11 OFC agencies in Hong Kong that provides such placement services.

# Mother's Choice's foster care programs

## 2. Project Bridge

Since 2016, Mother's Choice has been running an alternate foster care program called "Project Bridge" to expand the placement for waiting children. Like OFC, this program is focused on giving safe, loving, temporary care for children, whilst they wait to rejoin their birth family or be adopted. The objectives of the program are to model a different, integrated early intervention approach and international best practices in foster care, resulting in children spending a shorter amount of time in care and achieving permanency more quickly.

Project Bridge is centered on four pillars:

- Recruit, train, and support highly motivated volunteer families (with no financial incentives) to provide quality temporary care to children in need.
- A very individualized process that matches foster families with their unique strengths to children in need of placement.
- To ensure higher retention and placement stability, foster families in Project Bridge are paired with a buddy partner family.
- Children receive access to early intervention screening and services to help meet any mild to moderate medical challenges. Early access is critical as it increases a child's chance of leaving residential care in a shorter time-frame.

Project Bridge inspires communities to care for and support vulnerable children and their families, leading to children joining a safe, loving and permanent family as quickly as possible.

## Preparing for foster

### Ideal Foster Parents should have:

- Fondness for children, experience and ability in childcare
- Adequate care plans for children
- Appropriate attitudes and skills in parenting and nurturing children
- Primary education standard or above
- Good health and stable emotion
- Happy family life and stable living
- Residence in Hong Kong for at least 1 year
- Plans to stay in Hong Kong at least 2 years from time of interview
- Stable financial condition, such as having sufficient income, savings or disposable assets
- Tidy, clean and safe living environment, including provision of window grilles or installation of secure window opening restricting devices, compliance with safety requirements for kitchen, and installation of safety devices for balcony (if any), etc.
- Adequate living space, including provision of separate beds and activity space for foster children
- Consent from all family members to participate in foster care service
- Willingness to accept investigation and guidance by social workers

*(For those who cannot meet all the above requirements are also welcome to inquire for individual consideration.)*

## Preparing for foster

Foster families will encounter different challenges and various experiences. Understanding your motivations to foster is an important step in the application process, and we recommend you to consider a number of questions before applying. You can discuss with your spouse, children, family members, relatives and friends. You can also think about the following questions with the help of dedicated social workers.

- Why do I want to foster a child?
- What expectations do I have about my foster child?
- Can I accept the changes in my family after fostering a child?
- Am I willing to nurture a child and build healthy attachment?
- Am I able to experience the joy that comes with fostering a child, and the bittersweet experience of loving a child and then letting them go to their forever family?
- Am I willing to consider the child's best interest and advocate for the child

### Talking to your spouse and/or your family members

Before making the decision to become foster parents, it is important to discuss the many aspects of fostering together with your family.

### Talking to your child

If you have other children in your family, how do they feel about being part of a foster family? Are they ready to welcome the foster child and accept their unique needs?

### Talking to family and friends

Support from family and friends is essential in fostering. We recommend you to share your thoughts when considering fostering, and discuss the support or further resources you will need from them.

## **Becoming Foster Parents**

Applying to become a foster family is an important decision that should be made together as a family. The application process takes around 4-6 months and includes the following steps:

### **1. Attend an Information Session**

The first step for a family interested in foster care is to attend an information session. Families get an overview of the process, what is required and may hear from other foster families about their experience. You may ask for the application form after the session.

### **2. Submit Application**

Interested parties then complete an application form and send it back to Mother's Choice. Supporting household documents such as marriage certificate, financial proof, employment letter, certificates for highest educational qualification and health declaration form should also be collected in the application stage.

### **3. Mother's Choice E-Learning Courses**

Each carer must also take an online course. You will learn about the importance of child protection, the situation of children without families in Hong Kong, and increase understanding to best care for the needs of the children we serve.

# Becoming Foster Parents

## 4. First Interview

This is a chance for us to get to know you and your family as a couple, the social worker will have some questions to find out more about your family and your expectations, and this meeting is also an opportunity for you to ask questions.

## 5. Home Study

A home study is one of the necessary steps to becoming a foster family. It is an in-depth assessment of the potential foster family based on individual and joint interviews; participation in training, and documentation, to evaluate an applicant family's capacity to foster a child.

Applicants will also have to complete chest x-ray, share their health history and undergo criminal record check.

## 6. Pre-Service Training

Mother's Choice and the SWD will provide a total of 9-hours training sessions to prepare applicants to become a confident foster family. The completion of these sessions is a pre-requisite to obtaining their final home approval. In the training, we will talk about:

- Children's rights and child protection
- Welcoming the child
- Building attachment
- Transitioning to forever family
- Development and discipline
- Working with birth family
- Handling parental stress



## **Becoming Foster Parents**

### **7. Approval**

Approved foster families will be available for matching with children in need of a home.

### **8. Matching**

Foster families will be matched with children based on the child's needs and the strengths of the family. We will contact the potential family with the information of the child, including the expected length of placement and give them some time for consideration.

## Becoming Foster Parents

### 9. Meet the Child

If you accept the matching, you will then meet the child and ideally, over a period of several days you will visit them to get to know them. You will meet with their current caregiver and get to know their routine.

### 10. Bring the Child Home

Your foster child is in your home! Mother's Choice provides guidance and support to foster families so that they can succeed in providing a safe and loving temporary home for children.

### 11. Goodbye and Rest

Whether a child is returning to their birth family or they are being adopted, the one thing they all have in common, is saying goodbye. Saying goodbye to a foster child can be quite heartbreaking for everyone. As such, it is always important to always remember that the focus remains on the best interests of the child. We encourage families to focus on all the positive impact that they will have had on the life of a child as well as the positive impact it may have had on their own family. Remembering this will help each family member bring support to the others who might be experiencing grief.

After you say goodbye to your child, you can give yourself and your family some time to rest and let us know when you are ready to foster care again.



## **Support to Foster Families**

### **Regular home visits**

Each foster family is assigned a social worker from Mother's Choice who will meet with the foster parent and their family on a monthly basis to discuss the progress of the child and answer any questions or concerns.

### **Comprehensive Training**

Apart from guidance and supervision offered by our caseworkers, we might arrange any training the family may need.

### **Foster Families Events and Support groups**

Mother's Choice also organizes regular social events to connect foster families to other foster families. We also help to connect families to other available resources in the community.

## Support to Foster Families

### Professional Support

Depending on the needs and age of the child, Mother's Choice may also provide additional support and intervention such as medical assessments, early intervention plan and therapy, tutoring, schooling, playgroups, etc.

### Foster Care Allowance or Reimbursement

Mother's Choice offers childcare items and approved reimbursement for necessary expenses or monthly allowance to Project Bridge foster parents. Families fostering through OFC receive a monthly stipend from the Social Welfare Department.

### Respite Care Support

A foster family may be partnered with a "buddy family". A buddy family is another Mother's Choice foster family that will be able to provide respite care for the foster child if needed. The buddy family will get to know the foster child, their routine and needs so that they may temporarily step in to provide care if the main family is unavailable.



**“A lot of problems in our society are originated from broken families. If we can provide enough loving healthy foster care families to help families or children in crisis, a lot of tragedies can be drastically reduced. And we have met people who were benefited from good foster care service are so grateful and in return they bless other people who have similar needs. I think good foster care is one of the most effective ways to break the vicious cycle of some deep social problems.”**

**Sue & Kit, Foster Parents**

## CONNECT WITH US:



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