

Topics for discussion and feedback

Your experience with your agency

- Availability of services and supports offered by your agency

There is not much transparency on what services and supports are available, other than the 12 respites per year.

- Level of support received from caseworkers

I have a great relationship with my caseworker and feel supported by her.

- Experiences with the child needs assessment process

In our case plan meeting, they have offered to re-categorise my eldest who is 6.

We have not had a needs assessment done on the children since they have been with us.

Costs of raising children in care

- Initial costs when starting a placement
 - We had agreed with our agency in our Case Plan meeting (Dec 2023) of \$1500 per child, so we were able to go out and purchase set up costs as we had never had children in our home. We purchased bed, cot, pram, change table, sheets, clothes, curtains, a few room decor items, school uniforms and supplies and general items amounting to \$3000. The agency also gave us two car seats to take the children home with us. We submitted the invoices in Jan 2024 and didn't receive our reimbursement until July 2024. We had to chase this us several times over the months and were told, despite it being in our Case Plan that it wouldn't be paid. We are grateful that they ended up paying in the end.
- Costs covered and not covered by the care allowance

Weekly costs - Based on averages over the year

Item	Average Spending	Allowance	Difference
Grocery Contribution	\$100		
Rent Contribution	\$462.50		
Medical	\$135		
Clothes	\$50		
Activities (3)	\$90		
School costs	\$10		
Birthday and Christmas	\$60		
Events and outings	\$100		
Travel and Holidays	\$100		
Savings	\$25		
Total	\$1132.50	\$618.50	• \$514

Activities: Swimming, Gymnastics, Dancing, Nippers

Medical: Private health insurance, specialist appointments

Birthdays and Christmas: \$1500 allowance per day

Holidays: Includes holiday programs, loss of income and overseas travel

- Expenses that differ between children in care compared to those not in care

There are not many differences that I can identify from children, in and out of care. Our goal has always been to provide our foster children with all of the opportunities and support in life, despite the costs involved.

- Reimbursements for additional expenses

The most difficult reimbursement for us has been medical expenses that have required a medicare rebate. As our children have their own medicare cards, we cannot link our bank accounts to get the reimbursement. In order to get the medicare rebates we need to physically go to medicare and manually apply for the reimbursement. This is not only time consuming and resulting in a loss of

income, but has huge out of pocket expenses until we go in and get the rebate. Our agency have been good at reimbursing medical expenses where necessary.

- Employment and raising children in care

Like having any child, there is a loss of income due to illness, availability of support network and also commitments to school and outside activities.

The most time consuming that would be different to other parents would be the amount of administrative work it takes to look after kids in care, such as home visits, therapy, liaising with people, family visits etc.

For example, my husband and I attended our children's case plan meeting this week - it was 5 hours out of both of our working day, resulting in a loss of income of approx \$1815 income.

As well as the time and effort that we put into preparing and researching for the meeting.

Your experience being a foster or respite carer

- Motivation to become foster or respite carers

Simply because there were children out there that needed a loving home and we had that to offer.

- Suggestions to support carers to continue caring

A realistic allowance that covers the actual cost of the children's needs. This could be tested and reviewed every year.

I think if there wasn't such a deficit of allowance, it wouldn't feel so bad, when it's hard.

I also think flexible respite and support worker options for carers, similar to the NDIS core package for carers to access when it's needed.

- Suggestions to increase carer recruitment

Target younger carer options. There is a significant decrease in the younger generations having children due to the cost of raising kids.

If they looked at this as a viable option to starting a family and being supported financially it would allow them to be financially able to have a family.

It would be beneficial for both kids in care and young couples looking to start a family.

I look forward to seeing your consultation, findings and report and hopefully inevitably, change.