



Children's stories about foster care





Lots of people have helped to make this book.



Thanks for making it happen

Kathryn Voutier first thought about the idea for this book. She helped us to work out what should go in it. She knows lots about children who come into foster care because her family was a foster family. When she was growing up many children came to stay at her house.

Janise Mitchell and Neerosh Mudaly also helped to write the book.

Chris Goddard (from CAPRA at Monash University) helped by giving us ideas about listening to children.

The Alan and Elizabeth Finkel Foundation gave us some money so that we could make the book.

The Australian Government also gave some money to make this book available to many children living in foster care.

Our friends at The Harcourts Foundation (Frankston) also supported this book.

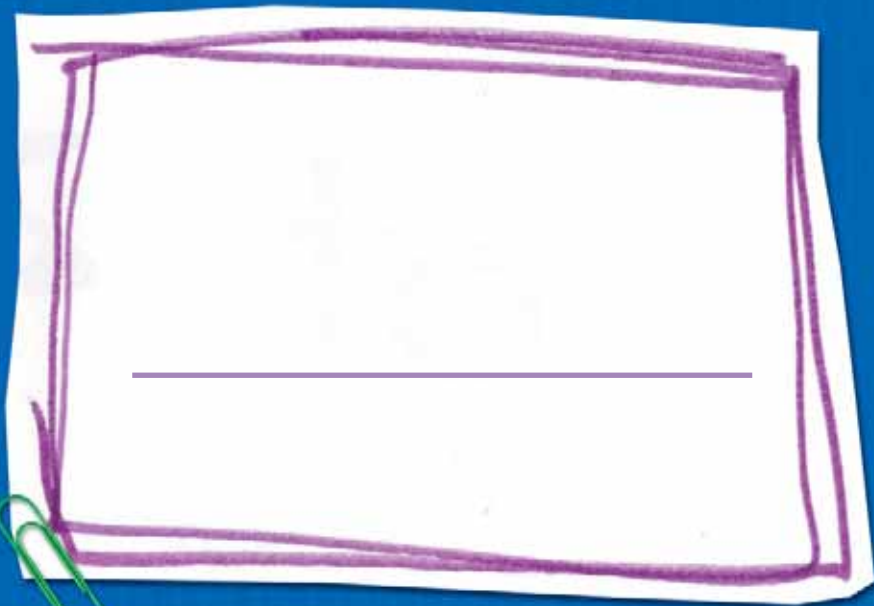
But the most important people are the children who told us their stories about being in foster care.

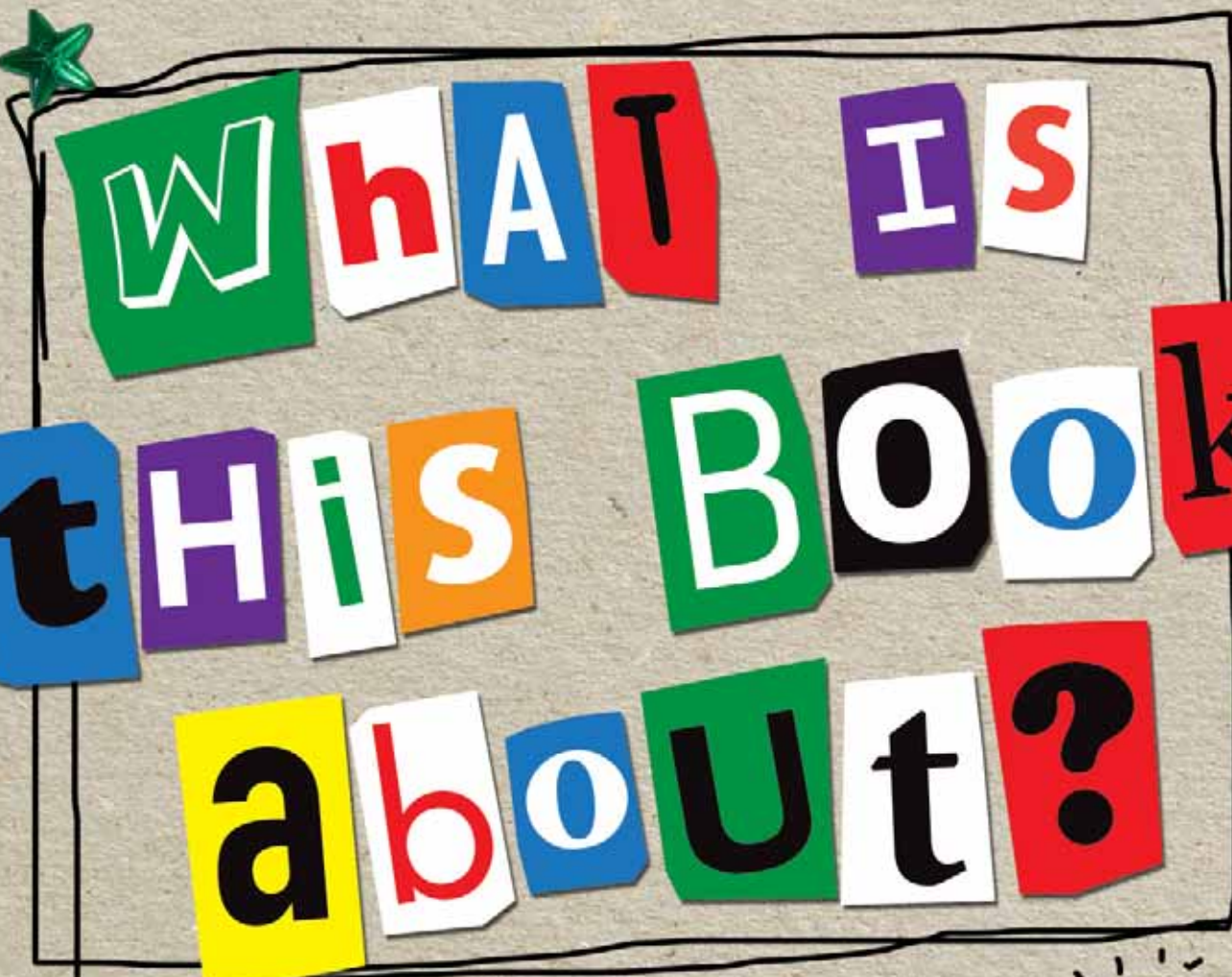
Thank you.





This book belongs to






WHAT IS THIS BOOK about?




This **BOOK**
is about **children**
just like **YOU.**


For some reason you can't live with your own family and you have come to stay with a foster family. The children in this book also live with foster families.

A foster family is a family who looks after you when you can't live with your own family. Foster parents are grown ups. They may live on their own or have their own children. Some may have other foster children living with them, just like you.





You might have a lot of different feelings about having to live with a foster family:

- You might be feeling scared because you don't know this new family and what it will be like to stay with them.
 - You might be feeling worried about when you will see your family again or what will happen to you next.
 - You might be feeling confused or angry because you don't understand why you can't be with your own family.
 - You might be feeling sad because you had to leave some of your favorite things behind.
 - You might be feeling happy and safe with your foster family.
 - You may be feeling other things as well. It's okay to feel all of these things. Foster parents understand that you will have a lot of different feelings when you come to stay with them.
- 

There are lots of different reasons why children can't live with their own families.

This is a book about children who have stayed in foster care and what it has been like for them. By reading their stories, this book may help you to know a bit more about foster care and what it might be like for you.



just FOR YOU.

The end of the book has a special section just for you. You can add your own story about being in foster care if you want to.

After reading this book you may have some things you would like to talk about with your foster carer or someone else. There is a space for you at the end of the book to write down the things you would like to ask about.

We hope you like this book.





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Monika

Hi. I'm Monika.

This is a picture of me wearing my favourite T-shirt. I got it for my eighth birthday.

I can't live with my mum at the moment, so I'm living with Sally and Bill. They have two kids. Stacey is 3 and Rick is 2. They're fun to play with. Stacey loves going to the park and having a turn on the swing. She yells 'Higher, higher' when I push her.

I hope I can live with mum again soon.

From Monika



?

What is your favourite colour?



Sally, Bill, Stacey and Rick

They're all really nice. At first I was worried about staying with them. I was thinking 'What if they don't like me?' Now I think it's okay because they look after me just like I'm their own daughter.

I like my room at Sally and Bill's house. The doona on my bed has my three favourite colours on it: pink, purple and orange.



My family

Chris and Shelley are my brother and sister, they live with mum. Their dad is Brian. Brian's not my dad. I haven't seen my real dad for a long time. I don't miss him but

I really miss mum. I see her once every month. Sally drops me off at mum's house on a Saturday and I stay there for the afternoon. I get to see Chris and Shelley then as well. Brian is usually around too. I'm not sure he likes me much.

Sometimes when I go to mum's place there's nothing much to do. Shelley shows me what she's done at school and Chris wants to play at the park next door. After that I usually just play on the computer until Sally comes to pick me up to take me home.



Dee

This is Dee.

She's my foster care worker. She finds families for kids to stay with. She arranged for me to live with Sally and Bill. Sometimes she calls me after school to see how I'm going.

Dee said I might be living with Sally and Bill for a long time, maybe even a year. It depends on how things go between me, mum and Brian.



Hien and Mei



What is your
favourite food?

?

Hello.

This is me and my sister.
Her name is Mei.

I am Hien and I'm six years old. Mei is three. Soon, we're going to have a new baby brother. Mum said when he's born, he'll be zero years old! I think that sounds funny.

Mum has a really big tummy. If you put your hand on the bump, sometimes you can feel the baby moving inside.

Dad is not around very much. When he is, he yells at mum. This makes mum very sad. It makes me sad too.

I hope you like this drawing of us.

From Hien and Mei



Brett and Jenny

This is Brett and Jenny. We've lived with Brett and Jenny before, plus three other places. That's four times we've had to live away from Mum and Dad. We are staying with Brett and Jenny this time because Mum is feeling very tired and needs to get ready for the new baby.

Brett and Jenny



My Cubby

Brett and Jenny's house is fun. They have a cubby house in the back yard that I remember from last time.

My favourite food

The food is different at Brett and Jenny's house. We hardly ever have rice. We used to eat lots of rice and noodles at home. This is my favourite dinner – sweet and sour pork.



Mum and Dad

We go to see mum and dad on Tuesday and Friday after school. Mum showed us some new toys she got for the baby. There was a really cute cuddly elephant. Mum said that could be my present for the baby. Mum said that dad is getting some help to stop getting angry. Dad seemed happier when I saw him the last time. I'm glad. I'm so excited about having a new baby in the family. I can't wait to give the baby a big hug.

My Card

Mum said she misses us lots. I hope she's okay. I made her this card on the weekend. When I see her on Tuesday, I'm going to give it to her so she won't miss me so much.

Poppy

Hey. I'm Poppy and I'm eleven. Things have been hard for me up to now, but now I'm feeling better. I don't know what's going to happen. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before.

I've just moved in with a lady called Carolyn. I had to move out of mum's for a while because of mum's boyfriend, Noel. Mum's a bit upset because of what's happened. Carolyn is really nice and she helps me when I feel sad about everything.

I'm looking forward to seeing mum soon. I hope she understands. I love my mum.

Poppy



My Painting

Who do you talk to
if you are feeling sad?

?



Stuff that happened to me

Mum's boyfriend Noel has been living with mum and me for about a year now. Mum really loves him, but it hasn't been so good for me. He's been doing things to me that I don't like. He comes into my room when I'm sleeping and hurts me. And sometimes he comes in when I'm having a shower. That's why I had to move out on Friday to live with Carolyn, so he can't do that anymore.

Mrs Jasper

Mrs Jasper is my art teacher. I love art. I told her about Noel last week. It was very hard telling her that Noel does those things to me. Mrs Jasper was wonderful. She said she was very pleased I had come to see her. I'm really glad she stood up for me, but I still feel mixed up about it all. Mrs Jasper told the child protection people what had happened so that I could be safe. This is a picture I drew in art. Mrs Jasper loves it.

Kate

That's when I talked to Kate. She spoke with mum and me about what Noel had been doing. Kate is my child protection worker. She said I would have to live with a different family for a while so that she and mum could sort things out. That means living away from mum for a bit. I've never done that before.

When Kate asked me today about how I'm feeling, I didn't know what to say. I cried over the phone. I said that I think I'm angry at Noel, but I feel really bad about telling on him. Kate said I did the right thing and that it's really important to talk about how I'm feeling.

Carolyn

Now I'm staying with Carolyn. She's really good to talk to. She understands when I tell her that I feel upset about everything that's happened. She tells me that it's not my fault and always gives me a hug when I want one. She has been helping me get to sleep at night by sitting on my bed until I fall asleep. It feels hard to go to sleep by myself right now.



JOSH



What sports
do you play?

?



Firebirds

Hi. My name is Josh.

That's short for Joshua. I'm nine years old.

Soccer is the best! I play for 'The Firebirds'.

I live with Lorelle, Gordon and Bec. They haven't always been my family. When I was a baby, my mum had trouble looking after me. Sometimes she forgot to feed me or gave me old milk that made me sick. That's why I live with a different family.

Living here is pretty cool. If I didn't live here, maybe I wouldn't play for the Firebirds and they rock!

Bye

Ruby



This is Ruby. Ruby is our dog. She's a Labrador. She loves swimming in the lake near our house. Last week I got very cross with her because she chewed up my favourite soccer ball. Now it's full of holes and I can't use it.

My 'birth Mum'

This is a photo of my 'birth mum'. She's called that because she's the one who gave birth to me. I make a special trip every school holidays to spend a day with her. Last time I went to see mum, we bought fish and chips for lunch. We ate it at the park and I told her all about my soccer finals and school camp.

My friend, Dave, thinks it's weird that I don't live with my 'birth mum'. I think about her, you know. I wonder how she's going. I also get worried about what to call my foster mother sometimes. I'd like to call her 'mum,' but I'm not sure if that's okay or not.



Choo

Choo is my foster care worker. She's the one who brought me to the McKinnon's place to live when I was three years old.

Other families I've stayed with

I lived with a few different families while my 'birth mum' tried to learn how to look after me. In the end, it didn't work out with mum. Choo said the McKinnon family wanted me to live with them.



McKinnon family

GEORGIA, ANNA AND HENRY

Hi, I'm Georgia, I'm ten, I have a sister who is six. Her name is Anna. I have a little brother called Henry. He's three years old. They're really annoying but I love them, well most of the time.

We move around a lot and stay with family all over the place. This is a picture of me, Anna and Henry playing somewhere. I can't remember where it was.

From Georgia

Do you have
a special place?



Aunty Lucy & Aunty Melva

Dad got into a bit of trouble recently. The police took him away and mum has been different ever since. Sometimes she's not there in the morning when we have to go to school. When this happens we go and stay with Aunty Lucy and Aunty Melva because they look after people from my community. Seems like lately we spend a lot of time at their house. They seem worried about mum.

Brenda, Neville and their 2 kids

Aunty Lucy and Aunty Melva all sat down for a long yarn and thought it might be good if we stayed with someone else until mum felt better and could look after us and herself. That's when we went to live with Brenda and Neville and their kids. They live a pretty long way away from Aunty Lucy and Aunty Melva. But me, Anna and Henry like living at their place. We see mum sometimes but talk to her lots.



Family gathering

Brenda and Neville tell us lots of stories and I really love it when lots of our people get together. Last time mum came too and it was great to see her instead of talking on the phone.

Keep out — special place

I don't know how long we are going to live here. I worry about that sometimes. But talking to Brenda helps. We sit outside in our special place that the others aren't allowed to go to. We talk for ages.

Here's a sign I made for people to keep out of my special place.



SARAH



What is your
favourite animal?

?



Hello. I'm Sarah and I am in prep
at school.

I like ponies best. This is my
special pony and I brush her hair.

I live with mum and Aidan.
Sometimes I go to sleep over at
Gabby's house. I can't wait until
I see her next. I'm going to show
her my pony.

Bye.

Sarah

My Pony



Sarah's Mum

This is my mum. Sometimes she gets very tired. She gets so worried and she cries for a long time. Mum thought it would be good for me to live with another family every now and then so that she could get a rest.

Ruth and Gabby

I stay with Ruth and Gabby for the weekend once a month. That means that three weekends I stay at home with mum and the next weekend I stay with Ruth and Gabby.

Gabby is twelve years old. She says she loves it when I come over to stay. I think Gabby is great. She's like a big sister. Gabby says she likes the way I copy her. If Gabby has toast for breakfast, then I have toast. If Gabby has rice puffs, then I do too. I like to help Ruth and Gabby with jobs around the house. Last time I set the table, one plate at a time. Sometimes I pass the pegs when Ruth hangs out the washing.

My picture

I love Gabby. I drew this picture of her. When I stay over at Gabby's house, I sleep in her room. Gabby and Ruth live in a very little house in a big tall building. They don't even have a bath, but that's okay because I have a shower at their house.

Talking to Mum

Sometimes when I stay with Ruth and Gabby, I get worried about mum. I worry about who is looking after her while I'm not there. I always talk to mum on the phone after dinner so we can say goodnight.





Buddy



Do you have
any pets?



Dye



Buster

Hi. I'm Buddy and I'm ten years old. I get around in a wheelchair because my legs don't work properly. My wheelchair is like my legs.

This is Buster. He's June and Mike's dog. He loves it when I throw the ball to him. I get to sleep over at their house sometimes.

When I'm staying with June and Mike there's always someone to play with. I love it. June drives me to school in the mornings. She helps me get my bag packed and she always makes sure that we get there on time.

I hope I can keep on going to June and Mike's place, even when I'm much bigger.

June and Mike

This is June and Mike.

They set up their spare room for me to sleep in and they give me my favourite muesli bars for school lunches. I usually stay with June and Mike for a whole week each time I go.

Doug

Doug is my foster care worker. He arranged for me to stay with June and Mike. This is the second family he has found for me to stay with. I only stayed with the other family once. Now I've been to Mike and June's house five times.



Mum, Dad, Hank and Ella

I usually live with my mum, dad, my big brother, Hank and my little sister, Ella. Hank and Ella and I play together sometimes. One time we used chalk to write all over the path in our backyard. Sometimes Hank helps me play games on the computer. I don't like it when Hank has friends over. He doesn't want me to play with them.

This is Ella



Holden,

Brad,

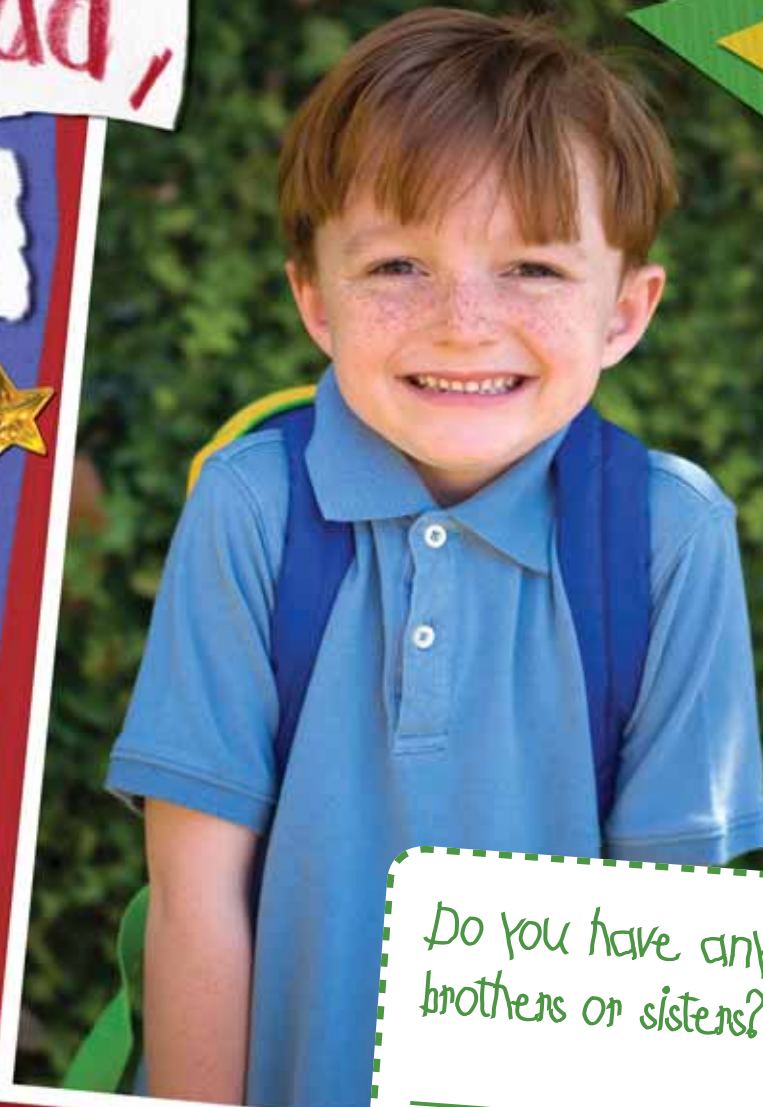
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Keisha

Hi there. My name is Holden. I'm seven and I'm in Grade One. My four year old brother is Brad and we also have a little sister called Keisha. She's only two. We can't live with Keisha at the moment. She lives with another family. None of us live with our mum and dad.

One day, after Keisha was born, mum and dad didn't come home at all and there was no one to look after us. Lots of people have tried to find them. We still don't know where they are. I wish they would come back.

Bye



Do you have any
brothers or sisters?

?

Keisha

This is my drawing of Keisha on a seesaw with me. I am not sure why we can't all live together. I feel sad when I think about Keisha not being with us and sometimes I feel really angry too.

Every week Brad and Keisha and me spend an afternoon together. It's always really good fun. It's hard to say goodbye again though.

Megan, Gary and Nick

We live with Megan, Gary and their son Nick. I go to the same school as Nick, but he's in Grade Five. We always walk to school together and sometimes I play with him and his friends at lunchtime.

I didn't want to be here at first but now its okay most of the time. Sometimes I still get really angry with mum and dad for leaving us. I still don't know why they left us. It's not fair. Sometimes I think it's my fault and cry. Megan is really good at listening to me and tells me that it is not my fault that mum and dad left. She helps me when I feel angry or sad.



Angry feelings drawing

Here's a picture I drew with Sonia. This is what I feel like when I get angry. Sonia is my counsellor. I see her to help me with my feelings. I get really mad sometimes and I don't know why. Other times I get really sad. Sonia is trying to help me work out my feelings. We talk lots, play games and draw cool stuff. I think it is working because I don't get as angry as I used to.



CARLO



Hey.

I'm Carlo and I'm twelve.

My best friend is Jake. I like playing backyard cricket with him, except he's good at bowling and sometimes he bowls me out. I don't get to see him much now.

Everything's changed for me lately. It started when I was in Grade Three and I was living with my mum and dad, just like normal. Then something awful happened. Mum and dad were in a car crash. They died. I was very upset. I had to go and live with my grandparents. They are called Nonna and Nonno. That's where I've been living up until this year.

Now I'm living with the Turners. It's different here, but it's good.

See ya, Carlo



Where do you
go to school?

?



Nonna and Nonno

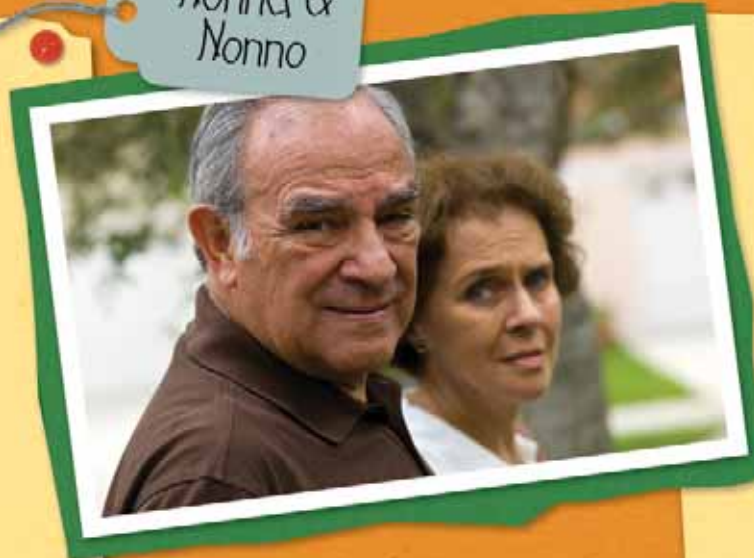
Living with Nonna and Nonno was okay. I was close to my school and they let me go to my friend's house all the time. But, Nonna and Nonno are getting old. Nonna gets sick alot and they both get very tired. They were finding it hard to care for me so I moved to the Turners. I still see Nonna and Nonno lots and talk to them on the phone, so it's not so bad.

I live on a farm

I live in the country on a farm with the Turners. They have lots of sheep. I'm going to stay here until I grow up.



Nonna & Nonno



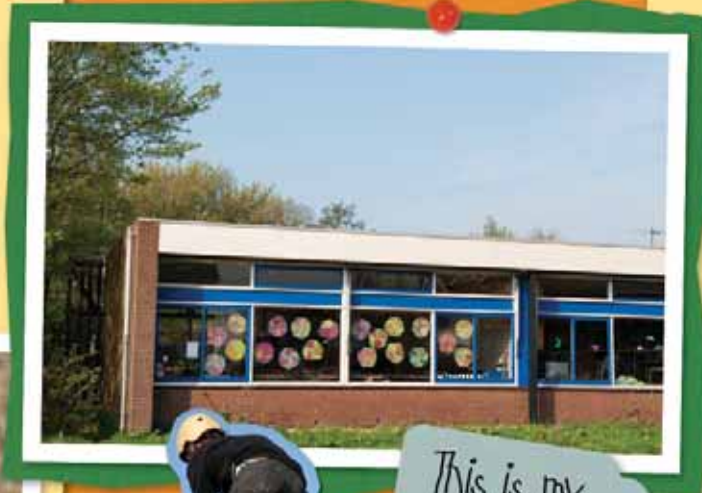
The Turners

I've been visiting the Turners to sleep over for about two months now. First I just stayed for one night, but now I stay for the whole week. I go home to visit Nonna and Nonno on the weekend.

I like to muck around on the farm so I don't get bored. But they don't have any good music here. I bring all my CDs with me.

My new school

My new school is pretty different. For starters, it's really small. There's only fourteen Grade Sixes. It's okay. The boys let me hang out with them, especially David. I've been to his place once and I thrashed him at his formula one racing game.



This is my classroom



Elizabeth and Nick



Do you like drawing
and painting?

?

Dear Everyone,

I'm feeling pretty sad today. I've been thinking about my dad lots and lots because I can't live with him at the moment. The man at the court said so. He said we had to stay with our foster family for three months so that dad could change. Dad gets really angry all the time. Sometimes he's scary but other times he is just normal. I was worried the man at the court would say we could never see dad again.

We see dad after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Nick drew him this picture last time we went.

When we go home to live with dad again, I hope we can stay forever.

Love from,

Elizabeth and Nick



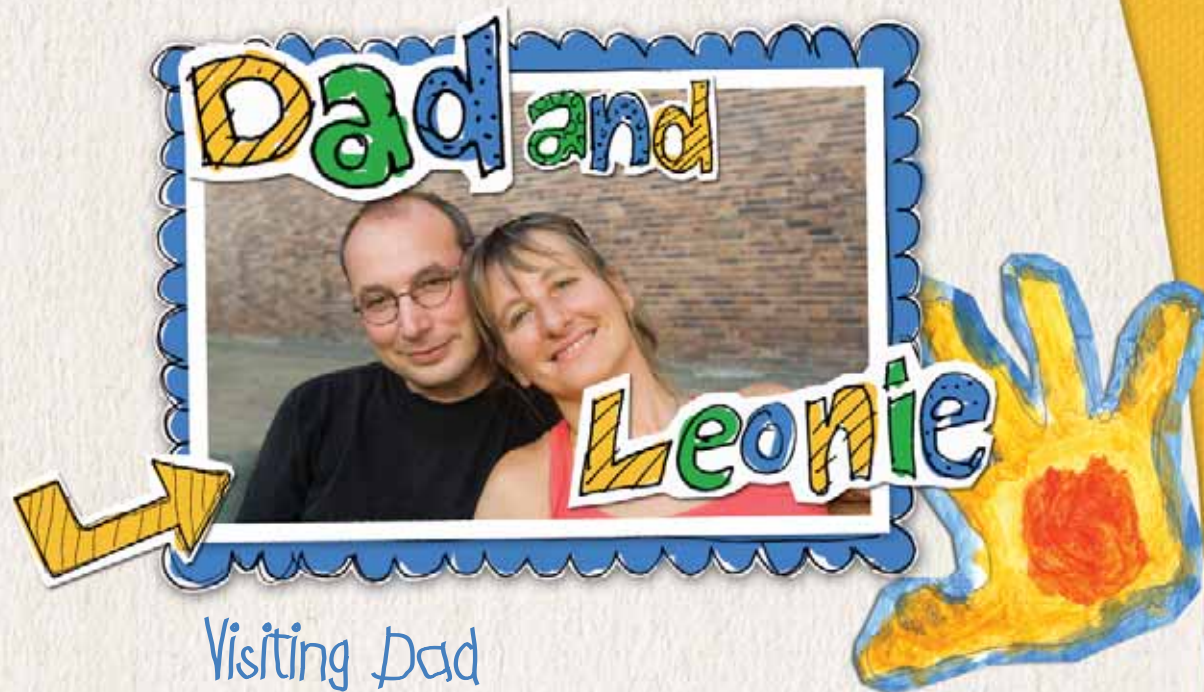
Dad and Leonie

This is our dad and his girlfriend, Leonie. We usually all live together, but there's been lots of fighting. Usually dad gets angry and hits Leonie. Last time they had a big fight and I saw it happen. I tried to stop them, but then Dad yelled at me, so I ran away to my room. Mrs. Biggs next door heard all the yelling and called the police. After that Terry came. She's a child protection worker. She spoke to us and to dad a lot that night. We told Terry all about the fighting and that it was a bit scary when the fighting was happening. Terry said Nick and me can't stay at home if there's fighting like that.

Christine and Pete

This is Christine and Pete. We're staying with them for three months. I have my own room, but Nick shares with Pete. Nick likes sleeping on Pete's bottom bunk. Pete's on the top bunk. Pete goes to high school.

I like talking to Christine about dad and Leonie. I told her about the time when dad got the car bogged and we all got covered in mud trying to push it out.



Visiting Dad

My Nan takes us to see dad twice every week. It's hard to say goodbye when we have to go home. When we get back to Christine and Pete's house, Nick is usually in a very bad mood. I don't think he understands what's happening.

Annie

Annie is my counsellor. I go to see her once a week after school to talk about how I am feeling. She helps me when I am feeling sad or scared. We talk a lot about what it was like at home. Sometimes it feels hard to talk about some things. Annie lets me not talk if I don't want to. Annie has talked to dad a few times as well. She helps dad to know what it is like for us kids when he is mad and hits Leonie. Annie says dad might need to see a counsellor to help him stop being so angry. I hope he does because counselling helps.

Belinda

I'm Belinda and I'm nine. Sometimes people call me Linda. Purple is my most favourite colour ever.

My family has been having trouble finding somewhere to live. We had to move out from our house because mum and dad couldn't pay the rent. We lived in a caravan for a little while. Then they went to our friend's house or slept in the car. I didn't go to school for ages.

That's why I'm living with the Harrisons. I get my own room here. It's really big. I miss mum and dad though. I hope they find a house soon.

Then things will be more normal for me.

From Belinda.



What is your favourite toy?

?



The Harrisons

I've stayed with the Harrisons once before. Ruth and Dan are the mum and dad. Then there's Robyn, who's twenty-one and Adam, who's a bit older. There's also Susan, Carla and Lisa, but they've moved out of home.

Every time I go to stay with a family I get very worried that they won't like me. It's turned out okay though.

It's different living with the Harrisons than being with mum and dad. We don't ever watch TV at dinner time. We all sit up at the table together. I like it when Robyn and Adam take me out. Last week Robyn bought me a huge ice cream at the shops.

Mum and Dad

I still see mum and dad. Every week mum and dad and I meet at the place where Kim works. Sometimes we go for a walk to the shops and have a look around together. I wish I could see them a bit more often but dad says they are busy trying to find somewhere for us to live and that takes a lot of time. This is a picture I drew of the house I want us all to live in one day.



My dream house

Damien

It was when we were sleeping in the car that I got a child protection worker. I've had a few different workers from child protection before, but this one is called Damien. He went to court with my mum and dad and the court said that I should stay in foster care until they could find somewhere for us to live and could look after us properly.


Kim

Kim is from a foster care agency. She's found families for me to live with before when I couldn't stay with my mum and dad. This time Kim said I could stay with the Harrisons. I don't know how long I'm going to be here.

Kim was the one who organised new clothes for me. I've been moving around so much with mum and dad. I had to leave most of my clothes and toys behind when we went to the caravan park. Now I have some new clothes. I found heaps of purple things. The new clothes and stuff is nice but I wish I had some of my old things, especially some of my favourite toys. I don't even know where my old things are now.




things you may want to ask about



Now that you are staying with a foster family there may be lots of things you would like to know more about.


You might have a lot of questions about why you had to live with a foster family or what to do in a foster family. You may be worried about when you will see your family again.

You can talk to your foster carer. It's okay to ask anything that will help you to know more about what is happening to you.




You will also have a foster care worker, maybe a child protection worker, or maybe a counsellor that will see you too. You can talk






to these people too. They have talked to lots of children and have heard every kind of question and worry, so don't be afraid to ask.



If you turn the page, you can write your own questions. Ask your foster carer or someone else that can help.



Here are some things that other children have wanted to know. You might want to ask about the same things or you might want to know about different things. Just remember.....
It's okay to ask!



- 
- 
- 
- 
- 
- Can I have my special things with me?
 - How long do I have to stay here?
 - When will I see my mum or dad?
 - When will I see my brother or sister?
 - Which school will I go to and who will take me?
 - Can I still see my friends?
 - How will my foster family know what food I like and don't like?
 - How do I know what the rules are in my foster family?
 - What will happen if I get into trouble?
 - What will happen if I can't sleep at night time?
 - Who will take me to basketball practice?
 - Can I still go to my friend's birthday party?
 - Who's taking care of my dog?
 - What should I tell my friends about why I am in foster care?
 - Will people laugh at me because I am in foster care?




things I want to know about:



A series of horizontal red lines for writing on the left page of a notebook.

A series of horizontal red lines for writing on the right page of a notebook.





these are the people



I can ask about these things:



Your Story

This is a special place for you to put your story.

It has a place for photographs or drawings.

You can also write the date when you came to stay with your foster family.

You can write the names of your foster family and all about their home and their pets.

You can write about why you had to stay with this family and all about how you feel about being here.

You can also keep adding new things that happen to this part of the book.

The next page shows you how to start writing and adding photographs for your own story.

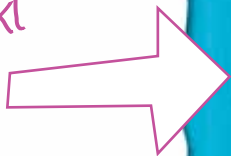
Write date _____

Stick your
photo here

Write your name here

Your story

Continue to
create your
own story on
the next
pages



This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for writing. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Stick a photo of your Foster family here

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This block contains a large, empty white rectangle defined by a thin red border. It occupies most of the page below the header section.

Stick a photo of
your family here

[illegible]

My drawings



**Australian
Childhood
Foundation**

www.childhood.org.au

We thank the children who let us use their drawings and stories. All stories and photographs have been modified to protect the identity of children.