FACT SHEET

Shared Stories Shared Lives Victoria and Step by Step Victoria – Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

This fact sheet provides answers to commonly asked questions about Shared Stories Shared Lives Victoria (SSSLV) and Step by Step Victoria (SxSV).

Gaining a competent understanding of these packages requires mandatory training. Prior to using this Fact Sheet please read Fact Sheet – Shared Stories Shared Lives Victoria and Step by Step Victoria (Familiarisation training).

Can Community Service Organisations adapt these packages?

Three parts of SxSV are available in Word format. This enables adaptation of the ‘Foster care information pack’, and ‘Assessment resources’ to enable Community Service Organisations (CSOs) to add letterhead, logos, policy and personal touches.

The ‘Assessment record’ is available in Word format to allow electronic completion of each assessment undertaken, however must not be streamlined or altered. The prompts in this record are important to guide the assessor. Once completed, it will become the record of assessment.

The SSSLV ‘Participants’ Workbook’ contains an ‘Organisational Chart’ and ‘Commonly asked questions’ in Module 7. Trainers may adapt these pages to ensure they reflect up to date CSO policy and practice. No other parts of SSSLV or SxSV may be adapted or changed. SSSLV materials are not available online.

Where is the ‘Step by Step’ website?

The Department of Human Services has a password protected ‘Step by Step’ website at:


All seven parts of SxSV are available online for staff to download, save and print. Under no circumstances should you provide all or part of the package in electronic or other form to anyone outside of your CSO.

You may only forward your password to staff in your program if they have completed familiarisation training and are undertaking assessments and training of foster carers. Under no circumstances should you forward these details outside your CSO.

For enquiries about online access and passwords please contact the Home Based Care team on (03) 9096 7366.

Is the training delivery method flexible?

SSSLV consists of approximately 16 hours duration, divided into eight two-hour sessions. Each session contains one module, and modules must follow in sequential order. All modules are essential.

The course can be run over several days, evening sessions, or a combination of these. Group sessions are important; however some sessions may be delivered individually.
Training may include special guests, varied locations, even a residential weekend.

The case studies within SSSLV provide examples to help participants explore issues that arise for children and foster carers. At times, issues may need to be explored in more depth or addressed in an additional training module to adequately equip a foster carer to meet a particular child's needs.

The activities, DVDs, handouts and games are all purposeful and required as part of this training and assessment approach.

Do applicants with fostering experience need to be re-assessed or re-trained?

It is a requirement that prospective Victorian foster carers must be screened, assessed and trained using SxSV and SSSLV. Experienced carers approaching a new CSO or returning to a CSO will be required to participate in the full SxSV and SSSLV process if they have not previously done so.

Some foster carers may wish to transfer from another CSO. SSSLV and SxSV are intended to allow for portability of accreditation. Foster carers should not automatically be required to complete the full training and assessment program if they have successfully done so recently.

However, to enable a foster carer approval panel to confidently accredit carers, a review similar to an annual review is required. This review must include a thorough exchange of information and referee checks with all previous CSOs (including foster care providers interstate or overseas). This hand over, mandatory checks such as police checks and a review will assist the new CSO to determine whether an applicant requires refresher training or further assessment prior to recommending accreditation at panel.

If an applicant has previously been rejected by a foster care approval panel, appropriate weighting must be given to this decision.

Wherever possible, the assessment and training components should be undertaken by one CSO. This aids timely communication between trainers and assessors, and limits potential loss of information or conflicting assessments.

What is included in an annual review?

Foster carers must be formally reviewed on an annual basis to confirm performance, continuing appropriateness, availability and capacity to care.

Many CSOs have developed their own review tool based upon core requirements and competencies included in SxSV. Annual reviews are conducted through visits to the carer’s home and must cover:

- placements during the past twelve months
- training received and required
- police, working with children, medical and home and environment checks
- personal readiness and capacity to continue caring
- ability to work effectively as part of a team
- ability to provide a safe environment that is free from abuse
- ability to promote the positive development of children and young people
- carer files, including exit interviews, quality of care reviews and any other relevant issues.

How long can a foster carer be ‘on hold’ before they require re-assessment?

There will be occasions when foster carers require time out from fostering due to the inherently challenging nature of the role. The decision to be placed ‘on hold’ must be made with a foster care worker, for a set timeframe, and must be clearly documented as part of a plan.

CSOs must ensure that upon their return to fostering, carers are competent, are provided with up to date information and still meet all of the key requirements.

For example, if a foster carer has been on a short holiday, and has been on hold for less than twelve months, full review or re-assessment may not be required. If however a foster carer has been on hold for six months following a quality of care investigation, a full review and presentation at a foster carer approval panel may be required.

Many CSOs maintain regular contact with foster carers who are on hold to ensure they remain connected to the CSO, and are up to date with training. CSOs may conduct annual reviews of their foster carers regardless of whether they are on hold or not, and may set a maximum timeframe allowed for foster carers to be ‘on hold.’

If a foster carer decides not to return to fostering, CSOs must conduct an exit interview, acknowledge
the foster carer’s contribution and remove them from the carer register.

Do partners or adult children need to be assessed, trained and accredited?

The decision about who to assess, train and accredit as a foster carer must be made by registered CSOs. SxSV ‘Manual for assessors’ section 1.1.7 states:

- the process of assessing suitability to become a foster carer involves all household members including children, in at least one information session. Adults in the household will need to be part of training sessions.

Police checks are a core requirement for all persons aged 18 years and older who reside or regularly stay overnight in the household.

An up to date working with children check is also required for any member of the household that will have a role with the child or young person.

It should be indicated to applicants at the beginning of the assessment process that new partners must be involved in the assessment and training process.

Whether new partners or adult members of the household need to become accredited foster carers, depends on the nature of their role.

For example, adult partners in cohabiting relationships will assume an ongoing parental and supervisory function with children in the house and therefore must participate in both SSSLV and SxSV. This distinguishes them from adult children, visitors, boarders, elderly relatives and baby sitters.

What should be presented to a foster carer approval panel?

Panel members do not need to read entire SxSV assessment records. The report presented by the assessing worker to a panel should include key components of the SxSV assessment tool. These are:

- 10.1 Summary report, recommendations coversheet and geno-gram
- The assessment record checklist (a record of assessment activities completed, including background checks, interviews and training)
- 10.2-10.5 Evidence of competencies A-D (‘stop’ and ‘proceed with caution’ signs may be deleted)
- 11.1 Life history
- Applicant’s preferred options
- 13.1 Approval panel recommendations and minutes (partially completed prior to panel including a summary of each competency, and recommendations about accreditation status for panel consideration).

Panel comments on competency and accreditation are added during or after panel. A foster carer applicant is considered accredited only after the panel chairperson signs the completed SxSV section 13.1 report. The accreditation status in the report should include detail about:

- the type of care for which approval is given
- numbers, ages and genders of children
- special conditions including priority training
- level and type of support to be provided
- review process to be followed
- a Code of Conduct and a Foster Carer agreement to sign.

Panels may be regional or CSO based. The panel must consist of CSO management representatives, departmental representatives and other relevant persons.

An annual review, or a significant change in circumstances may require a change to a foster carer’s accreditation status. Significant changes to a carer’s accreditation status should be brought back to a foster carer approval panel.

How long does will the assessment and training process take?

The SSSLV and SxSV process is complex and may take between four and 12 months to complete from initial enquiry to foster care panel accreditation. Many factors vary this timeframe due to the number of checks, visits and training sessions required.

Timeframes may be reduced by:

- swift responses to inquiries and holding regular information sessions
- sharing resources and delivery of joint training between CSOs
- having dedicated foster carer assessment and training staff and adequate materials
- proactively assisting applicants to complete the required tasks
- a regular schedule of foster carer training and accreditation panels to meet the demand.