



Carer Gatherings.

Creating opportunities for connection.

A Carer Gathering is all about creating a space for carers to connect with others who have a shared experience, in order to support and equip them in their care journey.

Carer Gatherings can provide support through prayer, encouragement, and learning for individuals or families who have welcomed, or are in the process of welcoming, children into their families.

Together groups can celebrate, validate, problem solve, and be a source of hope and encouragement during both the joyful and challenging seasons of the unique journey of caring for children and young people in Out-of-Home Care.

Carer Gatherings are a unique opportunity to gather carers from across the community, broadening their network of relationships and support.

This resource provides some general ideas and things to consider if you are planning to host Carer Gatherings.

The Homeward Project team is here to support you and can connect you with other churches in our network. Get in touch at hello@homewardproject.org





What is a Carer Gathering?

WHAT IS A CARER GATHERING?

A Carer Gathering is a regular event hosted at your church or in the community for:

- Current carers: those providing Foster care, Kinship care, Permanent carer, Guardianship, or Adoptive parents
- Prospective carers: interested in pursuing any of the above
- Past carers: providing mentorship and support
- People who work in the sector or are interesting in supporting carers might also be interested in attending.

Carer Gatherings are not intended to replace other Support Groups offered by Out-of-Home Care Organisations but rather provide an additional option for social connection and support.

We recommend extending the invitation to carers in the community, inviting them via other local churches in your area and local Out-of-Home Care organisations (we can help you identify and connect with them).

WHAT IS INVOLVED?

Typically gathering bi-monthly or quarterly, your Carer Gatherings could take on many different forms but at the core it's all about *connection*.

Your events may have a focus that is:

- Social,
- Educational,
- Spiritual, or
- All of the above!

See the list of examples and ideas on the next page.

Think about how you can create a welcoming, relaxed atmosphere and an environment that is conducive to people connecting with each other.

If inviting carers from across the community, remember to be mindful of creating a supportive environment for those who may not have a shared personal faith.



Carer Gathering examples.

Be creative with activities and ideas that suit the carers who are attending (remember to ask them!)

Some examples include:

- A quarterly morning tea for the carers in your church.
- A bi-monthly afternoon tea for any carers from the churches in your area and via Out-of-Home Care Organisations.
- Gather for a picnic or BBQ in the park with a BYO lunch.
- Invite a speaker or host a panel of carers or those working in the sector to provide information on key topics and answer questions e.g. Case Worker, Foster Carer Association representative, mental health professional, etc.
- Do a Bible Study together and spend some time in prayer for each other.
- Discuss an article or blog on a relevant topic in small groups.
- Read through a relevant book about Foster Care, discussing a chapter at a time when you gather.
- Work through a video-based training course or watch a webinar.
- Invite a trainer to facilitate a workshop on a relevant topic, based on the options available in the local area. We encourage you to work with your local Out-of-Home Care organisations, Foster Care Association, or networks to identify opportunities (get in touch with The Homeward Project team for support).
- Organise a photographer to do family portraits.
- Throw an annual Christmas party or Easter egg hunt.

We recommend planning well ahead across the year and having structure to your events to assist the team hosting and to respect everybody's time.



Recommendations.

TEAM:

You may wish to allocate key roles to assist in planning and hosting your events, such as:

- Lead Host
- Support team: venue set up/pack down, hosting
- Catering team, if providing food
- Kids leaders, if providing child-minding

CHILD MINDING:

Where possible, it is recommended that childcare be provided to enable those who are attending to relax, fully engage, and enjoy some brief respite.

These volunteers should be screened to work with children according to your Child Safety Policy.

We recommend trauma-informed training for these volunteers – contact The Homeward Project for information about the [trauma-informed training](#) we have available.

CATERING:

Providing food is a great way to set a welcoming tone and to foster connection.

This is a great opportunity for volunteers within your church to help out.

Remember to consider allergy risks and dietary requirements.

Or, you might opt for encouraging families to BYO food and drinks if you don't have capacity to provide catering and avoid allergy risks.

FACILITATION:

Where your gatherings involve facilitated times of discussion, it is strongly recommended that the group's facilitator has significant knowledge and personal or professional experience in the Out-of-Home Care sector. They will also ideally have qualifications in a related area e.g. counselling or social work.

The significant challenges that carers are often facing can lead to quite negative discussion that needs to be handled sensitively and assertively. Providing a Christ-centred and hope-filled perspective is important. This is not to deny the reality of difficult experiences and the need to process these, but it needs to be carefully managed by a facilitator with adequate skill and empathy. They need to be able to read the room and redirect conversation as necessary to avoid unhealthy discussion, as well as recognise when someone may need to be referred to additional supports.

It is important to note that a Carer Gathering is not intended to provide a professional therapeutic environment and should not be referred to in place of qualified professional support services.



SAFETY

If a Carer Gathering is being facilitated by your church, it should be compliant with your Child Safety Policy and WH&S Policy, which may include:

- Volunteer screening and training according to your Child Safety Policy and specific role, including background checks, suitability and competence, and briefing and training
- Adequate ratio of volunteers to children if providing child-minding
- Safe food handling practices
- A Risk Assessment & Management Plan
- Reporting of hazards and incidents

GROUP VALUES

To help create an environment that is welcoming, safe, and supportive, we recommend that groups create a set of shared values or embrace the following examples.

Confidentiality: Everything shared must be kept within the group. Any social media posts should be confidential, not revealing personal information of children, details of their care, or birth families.

Hope: Although it is appropriate to share frustrations, we will be vigilant in promoting an atmosphere of hope for good outcomes and wholeness for everyone – children, birth parents and service providers.

Listening: We are all “in process” on the parenting and care journey, therefore, we will listen to each other and refrain from giving advice unless it is requested.

Grace: We will commit to not judging other families or their decisions; and extending grace to everyone we engage with.

Prayer: We recognise that prayer is what connects us to God and we will seek to bring needs to Him in prayer rather than trying to fix things on our own.

Humility: We strive to be humble in our call as foster and adoptive parents, therefore we will guard against an atmosphere of competition regarding how many kids we have, how difficult their needs are, how successful we have been in relating with birth parents, etc. We will instead focus on God’s unique plan and gifting He has for each family.



The Homeward Project

is a movement of Australian Christians committed to better outcomes for children and families with an experience of the Out-of-Home Care system.

The Homeward Project provides a bridge between the child protection system and the local Church, offering resources and opportunities to grow in depth and reach and make a difference where it's really needed in our communities.

For more information and resources visit homewardproject.org

