

**This guide is intended to assist Foster and Kinship carers (Carers) understand the process of the Reunification Court and identify how Carers can be part of the process.**

#### **What is Reunification?**

Reunification in the context of child protection, is when the child involved is being or has been reunited with a primary care giver, which is usually the birth parent/s.

#### **Why Reunification?**

The first objective of the care system when children and young people enter care is for them to be restored safely to the care of their birth families. Many children and young people who enter care are returned to their parents within a short space of time. Unfortunately, many of the children and young people who return to the care of their birth families subsequently re-enter the care system. When there is careful planning and support, reunification is more likely to succeed.

#### **What is the Reunification Court?**

The Reunification Court is effectively a diversion program where hearings are conducted within the Youth Court.

On applications where a viable reunification plan has been identified in the child's Care Plan, the matter may be diverted to Reunification Court.

Reunification Court aims to rebuild relationships between the child and parents by working together with the Department for Child Protection (DCP) and external support services. Reunification hearings are less formal than regular Care and Protection hearings, with the parents being invited to sit and speak directly to the judicial officer.

If reunification is successful, the originating Care and Protection application is withdrawn.

#### **Who can attend a hearing at the Reunification Court?**

At this stage, the only parties involved in the reunification hearings are the birth parent or parents being considered for reunification, the child's lawyer, the DCP and the judicial officer.

#### **What is the role of the child's lawyer?**

The role of the child's lawyer is to clearly state the child or young person's views and wishes. If the child or young person is not capable of properly instructing the lawyer, then the lawyer must act, and make representations to the court, according to her or his own view of the best interests of the child or young person.

#### **Carers roles in the reunification hearings**

Carers are not allowed to attend the reunification hearings unless the Court specifically invites them to be involved.

However, the Court is very interested to hear from Carers who have had care of the child/children involved.

Carers are encouraged to give their views to DCP to put them before the Court or the Carer can give their views directly to the court by emailing them their thoughts and opinions.

The Youth Court can be contacted via email at [youthcourt@courts.sa.gov.au](mailto:youthcourt@courts.sa.gov.au)

The email addressed to the court should clearly identify the Carer, identify the child in question, outline the relationship between the two (e.g. that Carer has had care of the child for X years) outline the Carers opinions and thoughts in relation to the child and their best interests. It is also important to attach any certificates, photos, report cards and any other information that will assist the Court in making any decisions for the child.

#### **Carer support**

For more information, or to discuss your personal circumstances, please contact CF&KC-SA to speak with our team:

Email: [support@cfc-sa.org.au](mailto:support@cfc-sa.org.au)

Freecall: 1800 732 272