

Guidance for later life letters – CLA

Purpose of this work:

The later life letter should give a young person a clear explanation about why they are/were in care, the reasons for social services involvement in their lives and their journey through the care system. This is provided to a young person so that they have a clear understanding about decisions that were made about their life, when they were made and how, in order to support their narrative about who they are and what has happened to them, which in turn it is hoped will support their emotional and mental health. It should also be considered that this letter might be referred back to by the young person when they might no longer have professionals around to answer any questions that they have.

What it is and isn't:

It is a letter written to the young person with a factual account (based on social services records) of their involvement with children's services. Involvement with leaving care services should also be included depending on when the letter is given to the young person.

It is a considered piece of work that requires consultation with the young person and the significant adults in their lives including family members and carers, and all of them will need careful preparation that the letter is being written and the purpose of it. Depending on the relationship with these people and their own needs this consultation could be one session or several. The parents should not dictate the information in the letter but should have an opportunity to comment on wording and anything they would like to be added, but it will need to be made clear to them that certain information cannot be removed (whilst the wording can be thought about).

It is essentially a detailed summary of all the life story work that has been done with the young person. If they have not had extensive life story work for whatever reason the letter will contain all the information that they might want to know about their journey through care and the reasoning behind the decisions that have been made about them, as well as the narratives of important people in their lives such as their parents and carers.

It is not a document that explores in detail the young person's feelings about being in care although reference can be made to these where appropriate. Exploration of feelings should have been completed during ongoing life story work.

It is not a goodbye letter from the social worker, there might be some comment about who wrote it and how they knew the young person but a separate goodbye letter should be written that gives detail about that worker's involvement and enjoyment in working with the young person.

When is it completed?

- 1) Special Guardianship – the later life letter should be written by the child's social worker prior to the order being made or before the case is closed. Advice should be given to the special guardian about when this letter should be shared with the child and that they can seek advice from the Permanency Team in the future should they need this.

- 2) Where children are fostered – the letter should be completed by the CLA social worker before the case transfers to IF. The IF worker may well review and amend this over the course of their work with the young person and their family and carers.

Due to the need for this work to include consultation with the young person, their family and carers time needs to be given to completing it. At least one session with the parents and any other key adult in the child's life (including carers) needs to be completed before the letter is finalised.

Where children are fostered the later life letter should be given to the young person by the time they end their involvement with children's services, including any work that they do with IF. Ideally the young person will have the letter between the ages of 16- 18.

What should be included?

The letter should be broken down into sections. It might be quite long by the time everything is included so sections will make it easier for the young person to understand and keep the information in the letter clearer.

- Explanation of what the letter is about – be clear that it is an account of what is known by social services and that might not be the same as other people's memories/views about things that happened and these are explained where known.
- Before coming into care – include family history and information about birth parents as well as the child/YP's experience being at home
- Court proceedings
- In care – different placements etc.
- Contact/relationships with family
- Key family member's views on YP being in care, their current situation, hopes for the future etc. (Could be weaved into the previous sections if more appropriate)
- How the YP has developed during their time in care, achievements etc?

Further points to consider:

Acknowledge the difficult feelings that are likely to have been felt during each stage by the different people involved. Be clear if you are hypothesising or there is an actual account or memory from someone.

This letter will be completely different for each young person depending on their wishes, feelings and needs.

Acknowledge that the child's own memory and the memories of others might be different but this is the information as understood by social services that informed the decisions that were made.