

## Guidance for life story work – CLA

### Purpose of this work:

Life story work should be done throughout our involvement with a child/young person to help them understand the reasons they are in care and the decisions that are made about them and their life. The work should include an exploration of their feelings about these things as well as the narratives and feelings that other people in their network might have.

### What it is and what it isn't:

It is ongoing work that happens at almost every visit you do with the child/young person. It can take the form of conversations, direct work activities or a considered block of work to explore a particular aspect of the work if the child, their carer or a family member request it and it is thought to be appropriate/useful.

It is not 'therapeutic life story work' which is a particular intervention that can be commissioned by trained specialists and involves visits every week or two over approximately a 9 month period. The work that we do might overlap with therapeutic life story work but we are not expecting social workers to be able to offer this level of intensive work over such a long time period.

### When should it be completed?

The work should be completed throughout our involvement with the child, from when they are involved with care proceedings until they reach 25 or stop being CLA for any other reason.

### What should be included?

The child/young person should be supported to have open conversations about their memories and experiences, and supported to understand the professional and family context of what happened to the child/young person and the decisions that have been made about them.

Wherever possible photos and important objects should be incorporated into lifestory work and should be carefully recorded. Digital Services have offered a professional copy service of family photos where needed so that they can be shared with the child and good quality copies can be kept on file. Important objects should be photographed and saved on the child's file, and wherever possible the narrative about the importance of the object should be explored and recorded with the person that gave them to the child.

Family members, carers and other professionals narratives and input should be sought wherever possible and appropriate, and they should be supported to understand the ongoing work that is being done with the child/young person. Family members and carers in particular have key insights into their memories and stories about the child/young person and they should be encouraged to record and share these in appropriate ways. Examples of successful contributions have included parents writing their own lifestory books with the support of a professional involved with them; parents taking children to take photos of them at important places in their lives and talking about what happened there with the support of the child's social worker; and foster carers making annual photo books for children and their parents (sometimes tailored to the different audiences) to document what they have done.

A key consideration for ongoing work is how it is going to be recorded and collated for the child to look back over when they get older.

- Conversations should clearly be recorded on case notes and using a subheading of life story work will help with then searching for that information in the future.
- Discussing/reviewing the child/young person's understanding of their life story should take place periodically in supervision.
- Any work sheets or other direct work activities should be documented (either scanned in or photos taken) and saved to documents with a clear title relating to life story work.
- Books can be created for work that is completed, or boxes are available for storing documents or other items.
- Every child/young person should have recorded in their CLA plan/Pathway Plan about what lifestory work is being undertaken with a child and why and this should be updated regularly.

Areas to cover throughout the work include but might not be limited to:

- Why social services became involved with the family and the concerns relating to the parenting that the child was receiving.
- Why the child/young person could no longer live with their parents.
- Decisions that were made by social workers and court.
- Decisions that were made about placements and placement moves, why did they happen, what was the child/young person's experience in each placement.
- Information about family, who the parents are and the child/young person's background and heritage. This will include the ongoing relationship with the family and the contact that happens.
- The child/young person's feelings about all of the above.
- The parents and other family member's feelings about all of the above.
- Who the child is at different times in their life, their interests etc., their behaviour and how that relates to the trauma that they have experienced.

**Further points to consider:**

Parents should be included in the work wherever possible and some joint sessions with the child/young person and their parents should be encouraged wherever possible.

If possible the narrative given to the child/young person should be agreed with the parents, and where it is not possible, then key points of disagreement should be noted and covered in lifestory work so that the child/young person can understand the multiple perspectives about what has happened to them.

Carers should be included in the work where possible and appropriate, and they should be kept updated about what is being with the child/young person so that they are able to support the child/young person with it when the social worker is not around.