

## Lifestory Work

The London Borough of Islington believes that helping the children and young people who are in our care or have experienced our care, to understand their lifestories, including why they came into care, the decisions that have been made about them and making sense of their experiences throughout their life, is a vital aspect of the Social Workers' role. We have made promises to highlight our commitment about effective lifestory work for all of our children and young people:

**Lifestory Promises** for children and young people, their parents, family members, carers and social workers

- **To support all children and young people aged 0-25 who have been in the care of the London Borough of Islington to understand why they have been in care and the important events in their lives**
- **That all parents, family members, carers and professionals who play a role in the lives of our children and young people are supported to understand and contribute to the children and young people's understanding of why they have been in care and other significant events (also known as lifestory work)**
- **That conversations about children and young people's stories and experiences becomes an integrated part of work by all staff in Children's Services, including Social Workers, Young People's Advisors, support workers and Independent Reviewing Officers**
- **That every care plan and pathway plan for children and young people includes how we are supporting them to understand their lifestory**
- **Children's Services will ensure that important items, documents and photos for our children and young people are kept safely and integrated into our lifestory work with them**

Lifestory work is important to support children and young people who have experienced care to have an integrated understanding of themselves, and to help support their emotional development and mental health. To this end, it is expected that practitioners across the London Borough of Islington use all opportunities and a variety of tools to engage children and young people in lifestory work. CAMHS clinicians are integrated into the CLA and Independent Futures teams, and are available to offer one to one consultations with staff about planning lifestory work or thinking about the impact on children's emotional wellbeing and mental health.

There are minimum expectations about the lifestory offer for children and young people who are in or have experienced our care and these are listed below:

## Adoption

All children who are placed for adoption must have a lifestory book completed by the time of their adoption celebration hearing by their allocated Social Worker. Please see the link to the lifestory book guide on Tix-X here.

A Later Life Letter should have been completed by the time of their adoption celebration hearing by their allocated Social Worker.

## SGO

All children who are placed under a Special Guardianship Order will have had lifestory work completed with them in an age appropriate way, to help them understand the decisions that have been made about them and why.

By the time the case is due to close to Islington Children's Services, an age appropriate lifestory book should have been completed (either for or with the child) and a later life letter should have been completed by their Social Worker.

## Long Term Foster Care

All children who are in long term foster care will have lifestory work completed with them by their allocated Social Worker on an ongoing basis. There should be a clear record of this on the child's file, both in the form of write ups from visits, and worksheets/photos etc. There may be times that specific pieces of work are undertaken with children on a more intensive basis (for example weekly sessions) when the child has a particular question or area of their life that they want to think about.

The child should have the originals of all of the work they have done with their Social Worker and these should be stored safely in a folder or box that they have chosen and decorated, and a copy of all of everything done in sessions such as pictures/photos/labelling of important items should be recorded on the child's LCS file.

It should be specified in every child's Child Looked After Plan about what lifestory work is currently being undertaken with them and what the purpose of this is.

Where appropriate and particularly for younger children under the age of 7, a lifestory book should be completed with them to understand why they are in foster care and what decisions have been made about them.

## Leaving Care

When children transition to Independent Futures, the Leaving Care Service in the London Borough of Islington, their allocated CLA Social Worker should have written them a Later Life Letter (see guide to completing this on Tri X). It may well be that a Later Life Letter is

written for this key transition point involving the young person, their family members and their carer that is appropriate for the child, and that a more detailed Later Life Letter is written for when the child or young person wishes to access it, with the support of their worker from Independent Futures.

Staff in Independent Futures will also support their children and young people to access their records, should they wish to do this and want this support, in a way that continues to help and support them to understand the decisions that have been made about them and their experiences.

### Involving other people

It is important that everyone that plays a significant role in a child's life has an opportunity to contribute to the child's lifestory work so that their narratives are included and so that the child understands how many people have contributed to their story. Careful thought needs to be given by the Social Worker about who to involve, how and when, and wherever possible and appropriate, the child or young person should be involved in thinking about how these people are going to be approached. Not everyone who has been involved in the child's life will have the same views or understanding of a child's lifestory and so at times it will be important to support the child to understand the different perspectives that the adults around them hold about the child's lifestory. In addition, it is recognised that lifestory work can be emotive for many children and so everyone around the child should be supported to understand what work is being undertaken with children and how this might make them feel and behave, and therefore how the adults around them can be supported to respond and contain the child.

### Family Members

Wherever possible, the allocated Social Worker should involve the parents of the child that they are undertaking lifestory work with to (a) help them understand what lifestory work is being completed with their child and why (b) gain the parents' contributions to the lifestory work. It is hoped that by involving the parents as much as possible they will be able to share their memories, photos and views about their child's life, providing valuable insights for the child and the professionals working with them.

Extended family members should also be encouraged to share stories, memories and photos to add to the child's sense of identity and understanding of their family network.

### Carers

Foster carers and residential staff should be supported to understand the vital role they play in documenting the child in their care's experiences and memories, both in written and photographic form. Where appropriate, foster carers and residential staff will also be

involved in lifestory sessions or updated about them afterwards, so that they can continue to support the child in their care on a day to day basis make sense of what has happened to them and why they are in care.

When a child moves from a placement, the allocated Social Worker should encourage the foster carer or their key worker (or any other important people from the foster family or residential placement) to write to the child highlighting key memories and experiences that they have shared. Thought should be given as to how the child and their carer are going to maintain contact with each other, if this is appropriate and in the child's best interest.

### **Other professionals**

Children come in to contact with a range of professionals in their day to day lives, from school teachers, to classroom assistants, youth workers to holiday club workers. Children's Social Workers and carers should be alive to opportunities to get these professionals to contribute to lifestory work, for example at key transition points like changing school or starting a new after school club.

### **Friends**

When appropriate and in discussion with the child, it may be appropriate to ask for children's friends to contribute to a child's lifestory for example through cards or letters highlighting particular memories or experiences that they shared. This should be done by the Social Worker in consultation with the child or young person and their carer.