

What is a Life Appreciation Day?

A Life Appreciation Day is a guided journey of the child's life. It is a meeting arranged for the purpose of:

- Bringing together individuals who have significant knowledge and experience of a child with the purpose of sharing this with prospective adopters, thereby increasing the chance of a shared understanding and the potential for better outcomes for the stability of the placement;
- Collating a chronologically contextualised life story for the child;
- Providing a permanency planning opportunity;
- Highlighting the connection between the factual and emotional chronicle of a child's life;
- Considering issues of contact past, present and for the future; and
- Assisting with planning appropriate and specific support to the child's adoptive placement.

What do Life Appreciation Days Achieve?

- They help prospective adopters understand the position of the birth family whilst they were caring for the child. For example, to have an appreciation of how external factors can hinder parenting capacity, such as the birth parent's own life experiences, poverty, drugs and alcohol;
- They enable prospective adopters to feel the 'reality' of the child's history and to put this into context;
- They allow those present to consider, as a group, how best to support the child and their adoptive family in the short and long term; and
- They give prospective adopters the opportunity to listen and to absorb the available information and to ask questions of all those attending the Life Appreciation Day.

Who are Life Appreciation Days for?

Life appreciation days are for all children irrespective of their age. It gives the opportunity to explore the lives and history of the birth family, as well as the child and therefore should not just be for older children.

When Should they be Convened and by Whom?

They should be convened once a match has been identified and prior to this being presented to Adoption Panel. The Family Finding Social Worker will organise the day however it is important that the child/ren's Local Authority Social Worker carefully

reviews their file to identify those who have been involved in the child's life and provide details to the Family Finding Social Worker.

Who Should Chair the Meeting?

The Life Appreciation Day will be chaired by the Adopt North East Family Finding Social Worker. They will ensure the meeting is structured to allow the fullest sharing of information, ensuring each participant is able to contribute their knowledge and understanding of the child and their birth family. Life Appreciation Days are very different to general Social Work meetings and it is important that the Chair is able to embrace this difference and encourage contributions from everyone, whilst enabling participants to 'stand in the child's shoes' and empathise with the child's experiences.

Who Should be Invited?

The range of people invited should be carefully considered and will vary depending on the child's specific circumstances.

Essential people

- Child's current Local Authority Social Worker;
- The prospective adopter/s;
- Adopters' Social Worker;
- Current Foster Carer/s;
- Fostering Social Worker.

Other possible attendees

- Previous Foster Carer/s;
- Previous Social Worker/s;
- IRO;
- Teachers;
- Nursery staff;
- Health Visitors;
- Medical professionals;
- Therapeutic Worker/s;
- Psychologist;
- Family Support Workers;
- Contact workers;
- CAFCASS Worker.

Any other significant person in the child's life.

The prospective adopter/s, their Social Worker, current foster carer, foster carers' support worker and the child's social worker should be present for the whole event. Other participants will be given an attendance time which ideally follows the sequence of when they entered the child's life.

Preparation for the Day

A suitable venue will be identified for the meeting which ideally should enclose a space away for the meeting to allow people some private time if required.

Invitations need to be sent out as early as possible. They should invite people to think about and bring with them important and significant memories, especially personal ones, to share on the day. If they have any photographs, memorabilia, paintings etc they should be encouraged to bring these along.

Social Workers and other relevant health professionals should be asked to bring along case files for reference and ideally have completed a review of the file beforehand.

The Chair should read the child's Child Permanence Report and any other available information to help prepare and guide the day. Family trees, chronologies and timelines, especially those that highlight change, loss and separation can be powerful being shared on the day.

Equipment should be sourced and ready whether this is flip chart paper and pens of PowerPoint. It is good to have current photos of the child so participants can hold the child/ren in mind throughout the day.

A minute taker should be arranged; this may be the Family Finding Social Worker.

On the Day

The chair will welcome everyone and outline the agenda for the day. They will highlight that Life Appreciation Days are often emotional experiences and that there will be regular short breaks for this reason. Refreshments will be available throughout.

The broad themes will be:

- Birth parents' history – this will include topics such as their history of being parented, their childhood, education history, wider family;
- The child's progress within their birth family – this will include topics such as where parents met, pregnancy, support networks, physical living conditions, child protection issues, child's early attachment experiences, resilience factors, early education;
- The child's progress in care – this will include topics such as why the child was removed from their birth family, the transition experience into care, placement moves, any changes such as school, social workers, contact issues, health and development, education, foster carers experiences of the child;
- The child's preparation for adoption – this will include topics such as life story work, the child's understanding of adoption, the child's wishes and feelings, current support and expected support needs.

The chair will provide a summary of themes from the day. Participants will be asked to write a short note to the child; this could be a memory of them or a wish for their future. These will be provided to the child's social worker for the life story book.

The respective social workers need to give the adopters and foster carers support immediately after the meeting and the following day to ensure their emotional wellbeing.

Minutes should be produced prior to matching panel and shared with the prospective adopters, their social worker, the Family Finding Social Worker and the Child's Local Authority Social Worker.