LEARNING BRIEF - ACHIEVING PERMANENCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE – JULY 2019

This Learning Brief links to the audits undertaken in July relating to the topic of Permanence. 73% of audits were moderated and a wide range of infromation was gleaned from these in terms of our overall performance. A higher number of Outstanding features were identified than those located in previous audits, similiairy fewer Inadequate Judgements were made within this co-hort. – This suggests positive developments in practice.

Extracting specific information relating to Permanence has been problematic, in that the audit findings have not been placed in the context of this topic. Therefore this Learing Brief will focus on some key principles for achieving permanence for children .

The Care Enquiry 2013 – Making Not Breaking concluded that *Permanence for children means security, stability, love and a strong sense of identity and belonging. One route is not necessarily the right route for each child (3.9)*

 **Assessment**

Assessing for permanence commences at the start of a childs journey. The objective being to estabish what permanence looks like for this specific child?

 Permanence requires detailed and analytical assessments that explore the impact of different options on and for the child. They need to gather and evaluate the views of others including that of the child, the parents, family members and relevant professionals. Collectively this information will inform future recommendations. Remember Individual solutions for Individual Children.

Assessments will need to tell the story of the child, outlining their experinces and subsequent impact of these. Using a S of S approach they will need to contain an analysis of risk versus strengths, vulnerabilities and need, alongside an assessment of parental capacity for change and the timescale required to achieve this. They must be decisive, time limited and goal orientated to avoid children, paticularly very young children being left in harmful and negative situations for too long. ( Ward et al 2012) - (36% of Audit Assessments were judged to be Good ).

**Plans**

Planning for children is an individualised process, therefore permanency must be seen in the context of the childs age, developmental stage, existing relationships and overall life experince. Plans seek to reduce disruption and increase stability and security. Plans seek to optimise change and outcomes by considering a range of options within a specified timescale. Trajectories provide clarity and transparency outlining goals, objectives and Bottom Lines. Effective planning recognises the close ties that children have with people, places and things, reviewing and incorporating these ties at different stages of a childs plan can help in the development of security and stability.

It is a statutory requirement that all looked after chidren have a permanence plan by their **second** LAC review. The plan may consist of several options, with each option setting out clear expectations, timescales and a contingency should it not be possible to achieve this within the childs timescales. (48% of plans were Judged to be Good )

**Decision Making and Reviews**

Swift and clear decision making enables plans and objectives to be developed which reflect the childs need for permanence. Decision Making needs to analyse and challenge the evidence available in order to make best interest decisions for the child in a timely manner. It needs to consider what if any legal route is required in order to provide this particular child with permanence – not all routes and options are the same for each child. (18% of Decision Making was judged to be Good )

Reviews keep children at the centre of all plans. The review seeks to challenge the options and ensure that families are included in the decision making process. Reviews ensure that voices of children, their parents and families are not only heard but also considered in detail. Reviews will scrutinise the detail of plans, clarifying Next Steps, reinforcing Bottom Lines and ensuring drift and delay is minimised wherever possible. ( 54% Reviews were judged to be Good.)

**Family solutions**

Families need to be encouranged and supported in forming their own solutions at different points in the childs journey. Family networks should be explored early on within the assessment process in order that any opportunnity for disruption and or delay is minimised for the child. Involvment and participation with families enables better acceptance of plans, this in turn can lead to better longer term outcomes for Children.

Families are experts within their own rights and therefore engagment and particiaption should be at the heart of everything we do. – Remember the 12 S of S Practice Prinicples that build partnerships.

Children need to be included in decision making and planning regarding their future. Their voices need to be clearly recorded in case notes, assessments and reviews. Words and picutures should be created at different stages of a childs plan in order that they have access to age related material as needed. Family involvement with this helps to develop a sense of shared responsibility in owning and achieving common goals and aims, whilst providing consistency in the narrative provided to the child. ( 63% of Audit Participation was Judged to be Good).

 **Options**

Permanence Planning involves consideration of more than one option and plan for the child. Plans should run concurrently in order that delay is reduced. Family members need to be included in the exploration of the options, in order that they are aware of the pros and cons in terms of permanence for the child and subsequent consequence for them as a family. A balance sheet should be produced and reflected upon, demonstrating transparency and non bias within the decision making process.

One key option for children is whether they be placed alongside a sibling, or on their own. Permanency planning must consider the needs of the individual child, the nature of the relationship and how best to secure their future need for permanence. We should not assume all sibling placements are in each childs interest. Together or Apart assessments are recommended prior to making permanence arrangments for children, failure to do so could result in placement disruption for one or both children.

**Stability**

Stability is achieved when everyone works together for the benefit of the child. Predictable and consistent care helps to develop stability and a sense of commitment and belonging. Whilst the outcome of this brings positive longterm gains to the child, the journey to achieving this can involve a journey of fear and unfamiliarity. Life story work and placement support can help to reduce some of this fear.

Placement stability is an important element of permanence, as it creates opportunities for children to develop new and positive relationships which in turn lead to acceptance, trust and a sense of belonging. - Continuity of relationship is essential in helping children to construct their identity, and to develop a strong sense of belonging both of which are crucial to their welbeing (3.21 2013 Care Enquiry ).

Stability reduces stress and anxiety, this enables children to relax and engage with the world and people without feeling threatened or fearful. This meets one of the primary aims of permanence in respect of psychological safety.

Stability of care and placement enables continuity and a sense of connectivity to evolve, over time this leads to a sense of belonging being created and experienced. ( 18% of Audits judged Outcomes for Chldren to be Good ).

**Permanence**

For children permanence is about having a family in some shape or form, it is about acceptance and support, encouragement and guidance, predictability and safety. It is a sense of home and where they belong and are wanted. It is about relationships, trust, continuity, aspiration and having a future. ( 18% of Audits judged Permanence to be Good ).

<https://southgloscs.proceduresonline.com/chapters/g_perm_plan.html> link for Permanence.