LEARNING BRIEF – MAY 2019. - NEWLY ACCOMMODATED CHILDREN

This learning brief looks at the findings from the May audits of Children recently accommodated into LA care. Children enter care for all kinds of reasons at different times within their lives – this learning brief focuses on some reminders in terms of processes, both those with people as well as those with procedures.

 nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn LEARNING FROM THE AUDITS AND RESEARCH

Timeliness & Impact - *For many children the need to enter care could have been identified at a much earlier stage. This delay in decision-making can prolong children’s experiences of abuse and neglect. This means that when they do enter care they can experience greater degrees of difficulty, and the specialist services they require are less likely to have an impact (Davies and Ward, 2012).* The audits told us our decision making to accommodate children was not always timely. In cases of parental substance use we were often overly reliant on process and repeated Pre Proceedings at the expense of delay for the child. In some cases there was a lack of professional curiosity and over optimism. At times we lost sight of the child.

Planning & Review - *Good care planning and case management / tracking is fundamental to improved outcomes for looked after children and young people, in that it facilitates an appropriate response of services and decision making processes to the individual needs of each child or young person, and avoids drift. Sinclair et al.* The audits found lack of clarity in permanence and contingency planning. The audits also told us that we did not consistently inform the Reviewing service when a child became looked after.

Matching and Planning – *Good matching processes are associated with better outcomes for looked after children and young people. Ideally, research suggests that these processes should include attention to the  
characteristics of foster parents or key carers, so that care givers and children can be beneficially matched in order to avoid unnecessary discord, friction, confrontation, and placement breakdown .Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015*  The audits found that children were mostly placed in appropriate accommodation. In situations where this was not the case the SW was found to challenge the placement services and advocate strongly for the children in question, recognising and respecting their religious and cultural needs.

**Attachment outcomes:** *Children and young people entering care are likely to have been abused or neglected. Attachment experiences with carers may have been disturbed, and these experiences can underpin the subsequent limited or conflictual pattern of connections that many children and young people make with care staff and substitute carers. 3 Iwaniec, D (ed) (2006)*  Audits found that assessments and plans did not always contain details of the childs and families history. Impact was not always understood .

Individuality **-** *There are no simple solutions for children and young people who are looked after. Needs are complex and services should be tailored to the individual*. The audits found that often children had a family assessment and family care plan and not one of their own.

Impact & understanding - *Professionals working in the care system need the skills and knowledge to understand how they can support the emotional wellbeing of looked after children and young people.- Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015;* The audits found we mostly have a good understanding of the needs of our young people being looked after and that we ensure this is communicated to other agencies and carers of the child. We need to evidence this better in our case notes, supervision and reviews particularly at the start of a childs journey in being looked after.

 Relationships - *Regular contact for the child or young person with a trusted key worker (usually a social worker) and effective co-working with other key professionals and carers improves outcomes (Sinclair, I., Wilson, K., and Gibbs, I. (2005) Foster Placements: Why They Succeed and Why They Fail.* ) – The audits found some examples of good and outstanding practice in this area, with young people providing positive feedback. However in other areas some young people experienced multiple SW which will have impacted on their ability to form those initial relationships at a time they are feeling most vulnerable.

The audits told us that we work with respect and compassion, continuing to find ways to engage parents and family in difficult situations. Foster carers spoke positively of their relationships with SW and how information at the beginning of placements made a difference in the care they provided.

Listening & hearing - *Looked after children and young people need more opportunities to identify what is important to them and influence their own care. - Bazalgette, Rahilly, and Trevelyan, 2015*; The audits told us that we are visiting children in their placements and taking time to hear their voices. We need to be more creative as to how we capture this on case records. Young people informed the auditors that they felt listened to.

SO WHAT NEXT ? THINGS TO REMEMBER.

We need to continue to be creative and persistent in how we engage with children and their families, recognising that everyone is unique and has their own way of communicating and processing information. Voices of the parent and Child need to be clearly recorded within case notes, reviews and plans .

Each child has individual needs and lived experiences, therefore each child, particularly those in a sibling group **must** have their own assessment and care plan with timescales and actions that are relevant and meaningful to them.

Permanence plans need to be considered for Newly Accommodated Children as soon as they become looked after, these are likely to be twin or triple track plans. The aim being to return children to families wherever possible and to reduce delay in securing the child’s future.

Children will have a history that will to some degree impact on who they are, and how they manage new situations. Family histories **must** be considered in assessments in order that we can tailor the care we provide to the child’s needs and lived experiences.

Schedules of Expectation need to clearly set out what the expectation is of both the parent and the Local Authority. This will need to highlight what the next steps will be if the Expectations cannot be met or sustained. Remember we **no longer** use Written Agreements with Families.

Pre Birth Assessments **must** be completed when the criteria for one is met. This helps to avoid delay in planning for babies.

IRO’s are the eyes and ears of the child and therefore they must be kept informed of any major changes or events. They are responsible for ensuring the team around the child is doing what needs to be done, in the timescales necessary for the child. Scrutiny and challenge are core functions of the role. – Remember The Reviewing Service **must** be notified as soon as a child becomes looked after.

Case recording and chronologies are key requirements in terms of statutory compliance, however they are also essential tools in informing a child of their life story and the decisions that were made about their life.

Useful Links -<Https://www.proceduresonline.com/southglos/cs/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/Practice%20Guidance%20for%20Pre-Birth.docx> - Pre Birth <https://www.proceduresonline.com/southglos/cs/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/Practice%20Standards%20and%20Timescales%20for%20LAC%20ReviewsFinal5.docx> - Practice Standards for LAC

**Final Thoughts & Reminders** – Don’t forget to attend July GPW for further follow up . - Remember the promises to Children in Care . - Check out the Have You’s?

