**West Sussex – Practice Guidance**

IROs are qualified social workers with at least five years’ experience, and who have acquired the right skills to carry out this role.

**Preparation for Leaving Care**

* WSCC has an ongoing responsibility to support children leaving care. Staff working in children’s homes are an essential part of helping the child to prepare for moving on from care.
* This applies to children who are 16 or 17 years old and have had lived in a children’s home for more than 13 weeks since they were 14 and who are still living in a children’s home. This group of children will be supported until they are 18 years of age and possibly longer.
* WSCC has to assess the child’s needs, review their Pathway Plan, appoint a Personal Adviser and provide accommodation and support relating to education, training and employment; health and wellbeing and financial management, planning for the future and family and social relationships. This is not necessarily provided by the child’s residential placement, but they may well be closely involved.
* WSCC has a dedicated Leaving Care Service who co-ordinate the support that is available for children when they turn 16 years of age. Residential staff will be in regular contact with the Leaving Care Service for any child who is planning for independence.
* The Leaving Care Service supports children up to the age of 21 years, and may include help with managing finances, costs of setting up home, costs of accessing education or training, costs of health care, finding work, benefits maximisation and other key areas of independent living.

**Leaving Care Assessment of Need**

* All children must receive a multi-agency assessment of their needs covering the advice, assistance and support they will need when leaving care. This will be coordinated by the child’s social worker. Once the child reaches 18 years of age, the responsibility for co-ordinating this support transfers to the Personal Advisor.
* The Needs Assessment should take account of the views of the following:
* The child;
* The parents;
* The current carer;
* The school/college and the education service;
* Any Independent Visitor;
* Any person providing health care or treatment for the child;
* The Personal Adviser;
* Any other relevant person including, in the case of a child with special needs, a representative from Adult Services.

**Role of Residential Staff**

* The major contribution from residential staff is to support the child who is leaving care to gain the skills they will need to live independently. For some children, living independently may still involve living in a small community home, or other provision that can meet their assessed needs.
* It is important that the keyworker and the social worker for the child work together to complete a Pathway Plan that addresses all the key areas identified above. This should be completed in conjunction with the CLA review prior to their 16th birthday. The child must also be involved in this process from the start.
* Residential staff should be closely involved in supporting the leaving care process as they may know the child best. It is therefore vital that the child’s keyworker attends and contributes fully to Looked After Child reviews as the child approaches 16 years of age as this is where decisions are made about where the child may be moving to.
* Areas where the child will need support include developing the emotional resilience to cope without the home’s support and practical skills such as cooking, laundry, housework, budgeting and personal self-care, where appropriate. This could include:
* Using pocket money, leisure and clothing allowances to help children develop money management and finance skills; including confidence in using their bank account
* Supporting children to set up a ‘bottom drawer’ of items that can be saved and used when the child sets up their home;
* Food preparation and meal planning;
* Support the child to develop independent travelling skills;
* Discussing with the child any careers advice and further education and training that has been offered and what they need to do to progress this.
* The home should seek to offer the possibility of ‘outreach’ type support - for a time-limited period - to directly assist the child and to help them develop positive relationships with the new professionals who will take role in their lives. This will depend on the wishes of the child.
* Residential staff should also be able to signpost children leaving care to other organisations and support services, such as the Care Leavers Forum.

**Ongoing Contact**

* Children who have left the care of a WSCC children’s home may want to stay in touch with key trusted adults.
* Residential staff can do this in a range of ways such as welcoming children when they come back to visit the children’s home they lived in or seeing them in their new home or community. Sometimes this is undertaken on a formal basis, such as time limited outreach support, and at other times more informally.
* This contact needs to be undertaken safely and so should be agreed and recorded by the line manager and social worker and set out in the child's Pathway Plan.
* If there has been contact with a child by residential staff, a brief record of the interaction should be completed and shared with the social worker and line manager where appropriate.
* It is important that staff do not share their personal mobile phone numbers with care leavers. Staff should not share their social media details with children they have previously supported in a professional capacity.

**Links to related documents:**

Local Offer for Care Leavers

Charter for Care Leavers

leavingcareservice@westsussex.gov.uk – tel: 0330 222 2004

advocacyservice@westsussex.gov.uk – tel: 0330 222 8686