**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.

**Children’s Consultation and Participation**

**Engaging children in their care**

* WSCC is actively developing new and innovative ways to engage children in the delivery and development of its services, and residential care is an ideal platform to initiate positive change.
* Any child receiving short breaks or living full time in a WSCC children’s home will have opportunities to offer their views, opinions and ideas to the way support is delivered and changes they would like to see.
* There are various means through which this is achieved, including:
* The Children in Care Council; a forum for looked after children to come together with decision makers and help shape the services that are provided
* Regular children’s meetings in children’s homes
* Individual consultation work that takes place with key workers on a weekly basis
* Questionnaires issued by independent agencies (such as Ofsted)
* CLA reviews and pre-meetings with IRO’s
* Regular visits from social workers in the home
* Letter boxes in children’s homes for anonymous feedback
* Complaints and feedback leaflets distributed in children’s homes
* Access to national helplines
* Phone apps, such as ‘MOMO One’
* Access to Advocacy and Independent Visitors

**Children with additional learning needs**

* For some children, it is easier to communicate their views verbally, or by using other communication systems to support others to understand their thoughts and opinions.
* Staff working with children with communication difficulties receive training on using these communication systems (such as Pictorial Exchange Communication System (PECS) or Makaton (a form of sign language). This allows staff to be able to present the views of a child who has limited or no verbal communication.
* There are key areas when consultation and participation of children becomes critical and staff are skilled at enabling children to access a range of concepts, vocabulary and situations via their preferred communication system.
* In particular, staff support children to understand the symbol, sign or words for intimate body parts and ‘good’ and ‘bad’ so that they can tell someone if they are experiencing a form of interaction they do not like.
* Staff can also use innovative ways of capturing the child’s views; using digital technology and audio-visual equipment can be a powerful way of presenting the child’s views.

**Key principles in engaging children**

* It is important to build a positive and trusting relationship with children living in children’s homes in order to promote and support an environment where the child will feel comfortable to talk to adults. Every effort is made to build rapport with children and create safe opportunities to talk openly about any issues or concerns the child may have. This can be supported by:
* Offering a regular meeting once a week to spend time with the child, even if there are no concerns or worries. Getting into the habit of sharing information means the child will be more likely to use one of these sessions when something is bothering them.
* Ensuring the child knows that you will respond to concerns they have, and try to make the situation better for them. There may be times when a child specifically wants the information they share to remain confidential; staff are trained to respond by saying they are unable to do this if the child is at risk of harm, or being harmed. Agreeing a plan of action with the child can be helpful in these situations so they continue to feel in control.
* Treating the child with respect, empathy and responding to their concerns in a non-judgemental way. Having a positive attitude towards the child, and being a skilled communicator is essential for all residential staff.
* Be creative and use all available resources, tools and methods to support consultation with children; knowing what interests and motivates the child will encourage them to feel comfortable to express their views.
* Plan consultations in advance where possible, ensuring sufficient time, space and resources to complete the session. Children are likely to seek adhoc opportunities to share their views and this must be accommodated as far as possible. Often the most valuable conversations are those that are unplanned and take place in a non-confrontational situations (i.e. travelling in a car).
* Ensure you accurately record the information a child has shared with you and be clear about what will happen next, and when you will come back to child with an update.

**Links to related resources:**

MOMO One

Children and Families Engagement Strategy

Corporate Parenting Board

Children in Care Council

Consultation tools from each home