

LIFE STORY WORK 2019

Introduction

This protocol sits alongside the protocol for life story work for children with a plan of adoption. The purpose of this protocol is to set out the expectations and process for all looked after children and young people with a plan of permanence to have Life Story work completed.

Definitions

LIFE STORY WORK *is the process of helping children separated from their birth families to remember, learn about and make sense of their early lives. As such it is relevant to every child living away from their parents / family of origin.*

THERAPEUTIC LIFE STORY WORK *is specialised and structured direct work with children who require skilled help to deal with past trauma. It requires an appropriately trained worker and a willing child in a stable placement.*

LIFE STORY BOOK – *A Life Story Book is an account of a looked after child's life in words, pictures and documents that enables a child to explore and understand their history before and during being a looked after child.*

Practice Standards

- All children and young people with a plan of permanence (whether this plan be placed on long term CLA status or otherwise, for example permanence via Special Guardianship Order) should have a completed LIFE STORY BOOK (see below).
- This work should commence at the outset of CLA status, be confirmed as such at the first CLA Review, and a life story book concluded as above. This work should be directed and confirmed via the CLA Review process and Permanence Panel.
- The IRO will use appropriate review recommendations / escalation / problem resolution to ensure that life story work is actively underway at the second CLA Review and concluded (the Life Story Book) by the third review / plan of permanence.
- Life story work with looked after children is an ongoing piece of work and each CLA Review for a child with a plan of permanence should specifically consider and direct what needs to happen to maintain and update the child's knowledge and understanding of their life story.
- Information regarding the life story work and life story book must be up-to-date within the Permanence Tracker

Roles and Responsibilities

The **Social Worker** has overall responsibility as case holder to ensure a Life Story Book is completed / updated, and ensuring life story work is undertaken with the child as needed. Given their central role in understanding key decisions and events in the child's life the Social Worker is responsible for collating and concluding the Life Story Book.

Parents & Carers (Foster Carers or Residential Staff) are responsible for gathering information about key milestones, events and people in the lives of children they care for from day one of placement. (see Our Child's Adventure - Template).

Support Workers work at the direction of the child's Social Worker to support the delivery of life story work through direct work with children and collating content for the Life Story Book. Foundation level training in 'life story work skills' will support them in this work. The social worker must sign off the life story book for accuracy

'Therapeutic Life Story Work' trained staff – this means staff that hold either the Certificate or Diploma in Therapeutic Life Story Work. They will undertake direct work as commissioned by CSC Managers with those children with an identified need for such. They will also act as Champion / Mentor for support staff in their locality who are undertaking life story work.

CSC Heads of Service and Senior Managers should ensure they have sufficient staff with the right level of training to deliver / support both therapeutic life story and generic life story work.

The Life Story Book (see Our Child's Adventure Template)

This should be an electronic document with a paper copy held by the child / carer in a folder format. Photographs should be stored within Locality 'R drive' storage (not pen drives) and should include who, when and what the picture relates to. This should be accompanied by a memory box to hold important physical items. These should not be stored at Social Care Offices.

Children Looked After and Care Leavers views about Life Story work?

We asked the LINX Group and Corporate Parenting Board about their views / experience of Life Story work. They told us –

- Some young people had not taken part in life story work and had not received a life story book
- Those that had taken part spoke positively about it
- Some young people fed back it was done when they were young but not kept up to date
- Young people have different ideas about how life story books / life story work should be undertaken and they all agreed that this must be taken into account when work is planned. This might mean talking through the life story, using pictures or photos of key memories or being given information to go through on their own and ask questions later
- It was important to young people that we recognise what information they are able to process and understand at different stages of their life and are sensitive in how we deal with this