

Top Tips for Writing a Good Referral

Demand for placements has never been higher, with providers receiving over 100 referrals a day. Poor quality referrals often end up being put to the bottom of a very large pile. Providers remember poor referrals so the best way to increase the chances of finding the right placement for a young person (and save time in the long run) is to invest in getting the referral (PL1) right first time.

Tip 1: Submit the referral as soon as you can

The more time we can give providers to search, the better the chance we have of finding a placement. Same day/ emergency placements significantly reduce the number of offers put forward. Ensure that referrals are submitted as soon as possible and only request same day placements when there really is no other alternative.

Tip 2: Be clear when the placement is needed

Ensure that the date the placement is required is correct and realistic. If there is some flexibility around the start date, write this on the referral. If confirmation of placement is required for court (which may be a different date to the placement start date) or if an application to court is required before the placement can commence, make sure this is included in the referral. This will help providers identify possible placements that otherwise might not have been considered.

Tip 3: Help potential carers 'connect' with the child

Providers, but more importantly carers, make their initial decision on whether they can care for a child based entirely on the referral. It is vital that the information provided brings the child to life and is balanced, with as many positives as possible. First impressions count so make sure that the first page includes positives about the child. Also make sure that the later 'Positive Aspects' section doesn't include negative comments. Hobbies and interests are particularly useful at

Personality	What are the positive attributes of the young person? What makes them laugh? Do they show kindness/ empathy? Are they funny/ polite/ confident? Are they chatty or quiet?
Likes/ dislikes	Do they have any interests or hobbies? Do they like animals/ pets? Do they have a favourite food? Do they like cooking/ baking? What kind of music do they like? Do they have a favourite TV show?
Talents	What are they good at? Are they sporty? Do they play, watch and support a team? Are they in any clubs at school? What subjects are they good at? Can they sing, draw, write, act etc.? Educational/ other achievements?
View of the child	What are the wishes and feelings of the young person? What do they want from a placement? What are their aspirations?
Social Skills	Does the young person have friends and can they maintain friendships? What are the school's comments on the young person? What positive relationships are there in the young person's life?
Daily Routine	What is a day in their life like?
Behaviour	What behaviour strategies work well with the young person? Has a reward system worked in the past? Can they reflect on their behaviour?

helping carers connect with a child. Consider the following:

Tip 4: Don't make the referral longer than it needs to be

Make sure that all relevant information is included but keep it to a manageable size. Avoid copying and pasting large amounts of case notes. This can make referrals difficult to read and follow. Use bullet points to summarise history rather than including pages of information that the reader has to wade through.

Tip 5: Provide context behind any identified risks and behaviours

Make sure that the referral is accurate, up to date and includes all relevant information. Make sure that all pertinent risks/ behaviours are included but are **contextualised** e.g. violence/ fire setting/ sexualised behaviours – when did it happen? What was it? Who did it involve? How many times has this happened? What was done about it? What is the current level of risk? Not contextualising means that the risks/ behaviours may be perceived to be higher than they actually are and providers may reject the referral when they may have carers who could be appropriate.

Make sure that you include information about where the young person is currently placed and how they are behaving. Include information on triggers to negative behaviours and successful interventions and strategies that are in place.

Tip 6: Provide information on why the placement is needed

Include information on why the placement is needed, including the reasons for previous placement breakdowns. If not included, the assumption is often made that the placement has broken down due to the child's unmanageable behaviour, which can make a placement more difficult to find. If other factors have led to a placement breakdown make sure these are included.

Tip 7: Include information about current school and contact

Ensure that the current school is named in the referral and it is clear whether a school move would be considered – one of the first things providers look for is finding carers within a reasonable distance to school.

Ensure that relevant contact information is included – how often, who with, where, when, who will supervise, is there any flexibility in contact times?

Tip 8: Avoid limiting a placement search too much if you can

Try not to limit the placement search by requesting strict placement requirements, unless absolutely necessary. Flexibility around location, education, solo placements, single carers etc. can significantly increase options. For example, is a solo placement absolutely necessary - could the placement be with very young children or older young people?

Tip 9: Re-read the referral – is it the best it can be?

Make sure you read back through the referral you have written before submitting to check that it paints an accurate and balanced picture of the child; includes all pertinent information; and contextualises risks and behaviours.

Tip 10: Be available

Make sure that someone who knows the child is available/ contactable for at least 2 hours after submitting the referral to answer any queries. This is particularly important when the placement is needed the same day.

Make sure that you communicate promptly with providers if they have queries about a child. Delays in responding can risk the potential placement being offered to another young person. Equally, make sure that you respond promptly to offers of a placement, even if this is to provide an update that a placement decision needs to be delayed. A lack of response often results in the placement offer being withdrawn.

INVEST IN GETTING THE REFERRAL RIGHT FIRST TIME - Not only will it help providers find possible matches, it will help encourage carers to put themselves forward and help persuade other local authorities who have children placed that the placement is a good match.