

Section 9 - Achieving Economic Well Being

Key Outcomes

Children live in foster homes which provide adequate space, to a suitable standard. The child enjoys access to a range of activities which promote his or her development.

Children are prepared for and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing.

(Standards 10 & 12 of National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, 2011)

9.1 Achieving economic well-being policy

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering will ensure that all children and young people looked after by the agency are helped to develop the skills, competence and knowledge necessary for adult living, building resilience and achieving personal economic well-being in their own right.

In our aim to achieve this goal the Agency will:

- Ensure foster carers are appropriately trained in these matters and provided with the necessary support to help carers in their task. Foster carers will also be provided with clear written guidance on what is required of them.
- Work with responsible authorities, personal advisers, the Connexions Service and other agencies to help the young people achieve the objectives set out in their Pathway Plan.
- Work with foster carers to ensure that young people and their families are consulted about their future and are encouraged to be actively involved in decision making.
- Assist with the assessment of needs of disabled young people and help them through the period of transition from children's to adult services.
- Provide, where appropriate and it has been commissioned by the local authority, on-going support to young people who have left care.

9.2 Engage in further education, employment or training on leaving school and being ready for employment

Preparation for leaving care/adult living

Legal background

The Children Act 1989, Section 24, places a duty on local authorities to prepare young people for leaving care and to provide after-care as amended by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

Recent legislation and regulations and guidance are intended to improve the life chances of young people living in and leaving local authority care:

- The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children (Leaving Care) Regulations and Guidance 2001
- National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services, 2011 (NMS)

The main aims are to:

- Delay young people's discharge from care until they are prepared and ready to leave.
- Improved the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care.
- Provide better personal support for young people after leaving care.
- Improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.

This legislation builds on other related initiatives:

- Targets for Social Service departments to improve the level of education, employment and training for care leavers.
- The publication of 'Getting it Right: Good Practice in Leaving Care Resource Pack July 2000.
- The Connexions Service.

How are young people prepared for adulthood and leaving care?

Assessing the young person's needs and future

Planning for the young person's future when they leave care should be incorporated in the care plan as soon as he/she starts to be looked after and will be considered as part of the young person's first review after they reach the age of 15.

The young person's Social Worker will start talking to them about their plans for the future and encourage the young person to share information about themselves in their Assessment and Action Record – see Looking After Children (LAC) Forms usually completed by the child's Social Worker.

In some local authorities this may be done by a worker from a specialist leaving care team.

When the young person reaches the age of 16, the needs of the young person will be formally addressed.

Foster carers, the young person's family and school would usually be asked to contribute to the assessment. The assessment may start earlier, but should be completed as soon as possible after the young person reaches the age of 16.

The Pathway Plan

As soon as possible after the assessment, an individual Pathway Plan will be drawn up describing the support that the young person needs and who will provide it. The Pathway Plan for the future e.g. when the young person would like to leave care, education and employment, where they would like to live, any health needs, financial and personal support. Family, foster carers and other important people in the young person's life may be asked to contribute to the plan.

The Pathway Plan is reviewed every six months.

Pathway Planning should also assess the potential for foster carers to support young people once they have moved on, where the young people want such support and the foster carers are able to give it.

Appointing a Personal Adviser

Each young person will be given their own Personal Adviser who will have responsibility for co-ordinating the plan and supporting the young person until they are 21.

The young person will be asked their opinion on who they would like this person to be. It could be their Social Worker, a leaving care worker, or Connexions Adviser. The personal advisor may also act as their Connexions Adviser.

The Personal Adviser will offer support and help until the young person reaches the age of 21.

The Connexions Service

The Connexions Service in Kent is delivered by CXK and offers confidential information, advice and guidance to 13-19 year olds (24 for disabled young people) on learning, living and working. It is a universal service with targeted support for looked after children and care leavers. When the young person reaches 16 it is expected that the Personal Adviser, as set out in the Children (Leaving Care) Act, will also be the Connexions Personal Adviser.

Their qualified Personal Advisers can help with career choices, looking for a job or finding an apprenticeship or training opportunity. They can also help young people if they have a personal issue and wish to speak to someone in confidence.

Implementation

The Agency's Standards for Foster Care (Preparing Young People for Adulthood) sets out what Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering expects of its foster carers in relation to preparing young people for leaving care.

All foster carers receive training in this area of work as part of their post-approval training and are supported through supervision arrangements and support groups. Where a particular need is identified, the foster carer can ask for specialist help, advice or training.

For most young people a LAC Assessment and Action Record (15+) will have been completed and should include information on preparation for adult living.

The Pathway Plan will have set out what preparation the young person will need and identify what skills and competencies they need in developing.

Some young people may be offered specialist training programmes arranged through the Leaving Care Team of the local authority or through specialist projects or Personal Adviser. In other situations it may be agreed that the foster carers are in a good position to provide specific support and training for the young person.

There should be agreement in the Pathway Plan on what help foster carers are expected to provide. Preparation for leaving care should help develop the young person's capacity to make satisfactory relationships, develop their self-esteem and enable them to acquire the necessary practical skills for independent living.

Guidance for foster carers on preparing young people for adult living/leaving care (NMS 12)

Why is preparation important?

Becoming independent is a big stage in anyone's life and for young people who are looked after it comes earlier than it does for most young people living with their own families.

The national average age for young people leaving home is 23 - 24 years old. Approximately 46% of care leavers leave care at the age of 16.

Most young people leave home and return on at least 2 occasions before finally becoming independent. Young people leaving care often cannot choose to go home again when life gets tough or they find they are broke.

We also know that many young people who have been in care end up on the streets or in trouble.

The lives of young people in care have usually been disrupted and they do not have the benefits of stable family environments to support them.

How can foster carers help?

Foster carers can do a great deal to help young people for living independently or semi-independently. For the reasons given above most young people in foster care need more help to develop skills for independent living than your own children may need.

Foster carers should provide all children and young people in care with opportunities for learning independence skills (not just those coming up to leaving care).

You will be expected to contribute to the assessment of the young person's needs, putting together of the Pathway Plan and will work closely with the young person's Personal Adviser to help the young person achieve their objectives.

Foster carers are in a good position to provide support to young people, to help them develop practical skills (e.g. managing money, benefits, work, cooking and domestic responsibilities) and to manage family and social relationships.

Some foster carers may be in a position to offer on-going support after the young person has moved out or has left care. This should be discussed and agreed as part of the Pathway Plan and any continuing financial arrangements should be clearly written down.

Preparation for leaving care

Preparation for leaving care must start well before a young person leaves a foster placement. Every child or young person placed with foster carers will leave that placement, or care at some future stage, whether that is one month or five years away. All foster carers have a responsibility to ensure that children/young people are as well prepared as possible for those future transactions.

Young people will be provided with a copy of the Fostering Network 'Stepping Out' guide, foster carers will have a copy of our preparation for independence checklist to complete with the young person.

Guidance on preparing young disabled people for transitions

Almost 1 in 4 care leavers may have a disability. The importance of transitions for young disabled people is highlighted in a variety of legislation relating to education, disability, social services and health.

'Transition Planning' is planning the future of young disabled people and the transition from children's to adult services. Planning for young disabled people leaving care is complicated involving an array of initiatives and strategies.

Different arrangements exist for future planning with pupils who have a statement of special educational needs, disabled children and children who are in need and those who are care leavers.

The main provisions are as follows:

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| Education Act 1996 | LEA responsible for co-ordinating planning for children with Special Educational Needs. Planning for transitions begins after 14 th birthday. Annual reviews of the transitional plan. |
| Connexions Service | Specific role for personal advisers for disabled young people including assessment of need and careers support. |
| Disability Services Planning | Disabled young people entitled to receive assessments under variety of disability legislation. Direct payments extended to 16 and 17 year olds. |
| Children Act 1989 S24 | Disabled young people entitled to an aftercare service. |
| Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 | Introduces new entitlements to eligible and relevant young people disabled young people may still be able to claim benefits. |

Channels and Choices Therapeutic Fostering foster carers and foster carers need to be aware of what entitlements and processes are relevant to individual young disabled care leavers.

In some cases they may need to act as advocates to ensure that the young person is getting what they are entitled to.

Many of the needs of disabled young people e.g. preparation for independent or semi-independent living are similar to those for non-disabled children. The young disabled care leaver may have specific additional needs relating to their impairment or disability.

As with all young people it is important to involve the young person and their family in all the planning and decisions affecting their future.

Work experience

Young people aged between 16 - 18 years old may be placed in a work experience setting. Payment for any course may be made by a training organisation such as a college.

9.3 Access to transport and allowances

Transportation and escorting

Children and young people should have access to transport as and when needed and suitable to their needs in order to enable them to lead full and where appropriate, independent lives. The following allowances are paid to foster carers to assist them in this:

- a. The first 40 miles travelled per placement per day are the responsibility of the foster carer. This includes all fostering related activities and travel to and from school. Where appropriate (i.e. statemented and attending a special school) the Agency will endeavour to arrange transport for school, through the relevant Local Authority.
- b. If the carer is unable to provide transport in these circumstances the Agency may provide transport, but may pass on any deficit to the carer for reimbursement.
- c. Mileage is based on a door-to-door journey by the shortest reasonable route. Any detours (apart from emergencies) should be detailed on your claim and where possible have pre-authorisation and agreed as part of your journey.
- d. Where a child or young person has to attend a meeting, review, contact, court appearance etc. or any other transport which requires an escort, at least one partner/authorised allocated person (if not driving) should be available for this purpose.
- e. If the carer is unable to comply, the Agency will arrange for an escort but may pass on the cost to the carer for reimbursement.
- f. Transport for children to travel home for contact and overnight stays are expected to be met, by the carers.
- g. Use of public transport to school/college/work experience on a regular basis are the responsibility of the carer, although free or subsidised transport may be available through your relevant Local Authority.
- h. It is a requirement that where your own vehicle is used to carry a child or young person that it fully complies with all Road Traffic and other relevant legislation. Special regard should be paid to the matters of adequate insurance and MOT, proper and adequate supervision of the child or young person being carried and the use of seat belts/child seats. When a child or young person in your care is carried in a vehicle driven or owned by someone else it is your responsibility to ensure, to the best of your ability that similar standards apply. The Agency will require seeing all relevant driving documents to record them on your records. Information should be updated if circumstances change in any way and/or at annual review.
- i. It is necessary to obtain written confirmation from your Vehicle Insurance Company that you are insured to transport foster children in the course of your duties. Although this will not require full hire and reward insurance (as any monies claimed are seen as covering towards the cost of transport rather than at a level where a profit can be made) it will require the inclusion of business use cover on all vehicles used.

Pocket money, clothing & other allowances

Children and young people must be provided with allowances appropriate to their age, which will:

- assist them with budgeting skills
- learn the skill of saving for their future economic well being
- Provide them with the necessary clothing and material goods that will enable them to live healthy and fulfilling lives.

The following guidance sets out the allowances paid to foster carers which they are expected to pass on to the child(ren) in their care:

- a. Suggested rates for Pocket Money and Regular Clothing Allowance are age related and included in Appendix E.
- b. Allowances are a recommended minimum and can be increased with the agreement of the carer and the Supervising Social Worker.
- c. Clothing allowance should meet the cost of maintaining a reasonable level of clothing which should be present at the commencement of the placement.
- d. Carers, in their role as substitute parents are expected to additionally provide general allowances to meet reasonable personal needs of the child or young person and to allow them to partake in reasonable recreational activities such as club memberships, music lessons, school visits, sports and hobbies. It is impossible to provide a definitive list which would be different for each child or young person but it is clearly an important part of the integration of the child with you and local society. It assists in building a positive esteem and, within the usual family pattern and lifestyle of each carer's family, these activities are to be encouraged.
- e. The Agency requires foster carers to open a savings account for all children placed with them and to contribute from the fostering allowance and encourage the child or young person to contribute to this account. The foster carers are required to deposit a minimum of £20.00 per calendar month per child, unless a different amount is specified by the placing local authority.
- f. The Agency asks all carers to provide adequate luggage, holdalls etc. to ensure that children's possessions are always conveyed properly i.e. It is our expressed policy that children and young people will **never** keep their possessions in bin bags.