**Life Appreciation Day**

Buckinghamshire County Council

Practice Guidance

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**1. What is a Life Appreciation Day and what do they achieve?**

A Life Appreciation Day is an opportunity to bring together individuals who have significant knowledge and experience of a child with the purpose of sharing this with prospective adopters. It is a guided chronological journey through the child’s life to date and the circumstances which led to a plan of adoption.

They give prospective adopters the opportunity to listen and to absorb the available information and to ask questions of all those attending the Life Appreciation Day.

A Life Appreciation Day is also a coming together and celebration of the child’s achievements and a look forward to their future with everyone’s hopes and wishes for them.

A Life Appreciation Day will support the adopters by providing:

• As much information as possible to the prospective adoptive family in a relatively short space of time by the greatest number of professionals and significant others in the child’s life;

• Assistance to the prospective adopter(s) to ‘feel’ the reality of the child’s experiences and to help the adopters to develop and sustain empathy for the child, his/her history and experiences;

• Detailed understanding and knowledge about the child’s experiences which makes ’real‘ the written information already provided and supports understanding how the child might have made sense of their experiences to date;

•Understanding of the child’s attachment patterns with birth family and foster carers and therefore the style of parenting and parenting strategies that the child is likely to need in the future;

• A narrative/timeline of the child’s journey to date which will assist the adopters in providing a continuous narrative for the child, as the child develops in their care;

• An opportunity to gain a vivid sense, understanding and explanation of the child’s reality and experience, which can identify the child’s strengths, vulnerabilities and resilience;

• An opportunity to capture memories, differing perceptions of and feelings about the child and anecdotal information which may otherwise be “lost” or not recorded on the child’s file/written records;

• Information which can help the adopters in assisting the child to maintain and develop a positive self-image, self-esteem and identity;

• Assistance for the adopter in identifying potential behavioural/emotional triggers and strategies to deal with problems, e.g. bath times and patterns of behaviour;

•An opportunity to highlight any gaps in the information/knowledge/history provided to date.

At the conclusion of a Life Appreciation Day, the prospective adopters should take time to reflect and to feel confident that they have been provided with all relevant information to progress the match, to assist them in their parenting and in providing a stable base for permanence.

**2. Who are Life Appreciation Days for?**

All children who are being placed for adoption should have a Life Appreciation Day including children where the foster carer is proposing to adopt the child.

The Life Appreciation Day should take place after the match with the potential adopter(s) is identified (selection meeting), but before it is formally presented to Adoption Panel.

This allows the adopters to gradually build up and absorb the layers of information available and have as full a picture as possible of the child before they are formally matched.

It is always possible that new information emerges from the Life Appreciation Day that could impact on the match.

For some children, holding a Life Appreciation Day may only involve a very small number of participants (for example, for a baby in an Early Permanence placement) and adopters may prefer to have individual time with each potential participant, prior to the adoption match.

**3. When Should they be Convened and by Whom?**

A Life Appreciation Day should be convened by the Family Finder once a selection meeting has recommended the match. The Life Appreciation Day must be convened prior to the match being presented to Adoption Panel.

A date can be tentatively arranged at the family finding visit, to give the prospective adopters and other attendees as much notice as possible.

**4. Who Should be Invited?**

The range of people invited should be carefully considered, and will vary depending on the child’s specific circumstances.

There should be a core group of people who will be invited to attend the Life Appreciation Day. All participants, dependent on their knowledge and involvement with the child and their family, may attend the full meeting or part of the meeting and contributions can be made via attendance, oral or written recordings, provision of photographs, memorabilia etc. The day should include:

- The child’s current social worker

- The prospective adopters

- Adopters’ social worker

- Family finder (Chair)

- Child and Family Worker (Co-faciltiator)

- Current foster carers

Professional workers and other adults who have a played a significant role in the child’s life may include:

- Previous foster carers (including respite carers)

- Previous social workers/support workers;

- Previous Family finders;

- Current and previous class and nursery teacher and other relevant education workers;

- Current and previous health visitors and other relevant health professionals;

- Independent Reviewing Officers

- Contact supervisors/taxi escorts/home visitors/volunteers; (think about who should be present for the whole meeting and who should join just to give their input)

- Advocates for the child or birth family;

- Other agencies that were known to birth parents e.g. probation, mental health workers, birth family support worker.

- Post adoption support worker – if immediate adoption support is planned;

- Birth family members where appropriate;

- Other adults who may have played a significant role in the child’s life e.g. school lunchtime supervisor/the child’s friends’ parents

- Birth parents may be asked to provide a written contribution, maybe with the support of Birth Family Support Worker, in very occasional circumstances for example where the child is being relinquished.

- Life story worker

**5. Preparing for a Life Appreciation Day.**

See **Flowchart to organise the event** in appendix.

**6. What happens at a Life Appreciation Day?**

The Family Finder should chair the meeting with the support of the Child and Family Worker to co-facilitate. The Chair’s role is to make sure that the event runs smoothly and on time, ensuring that all participants have the opportunity to fully contribute and ask appropriate questions, and that the meeting reflects the child’s journey through life.

It is important that the Chair is able to encourage contributions from everyone, whilst encouraging participants to ‘stand in the child shoes’ and empathise with the child’s experiences. It is also important to recognise that sensitive information is being shared and emotions may run high during the discussion. Some participants may be quite vocal and others may need encouragement to contribute and advice on how and when to do this.

The Co-facilitator’s role during the Life Appreciation Day is to welcome and/or show out participants who may not be able to attend the whole meeting and take notes of the key discussions. These will then be shared with the prospective adopters and child for the adopters’ information and child’s Life Story record (see sample Life Appreciation Day record letter to prospective adopters and sample explanatory letter to child in appendices.)

A DVD of the child may be running throughout the meeting and/or photographs on the walls are a good way of providing a constant visual representation of the child as a focus for the meeting and may give participants a visual context to explore the child’s experiences through their lifetime.

The Chair should be provided with an up to date Child Permanence Report and Genogram prior to the Life Appreciation Day by the Child’s Social Worker, so that this can be used during the meeting to aid everybody’s understanding of the child’s position in their birth family and their life’s journey.

A Life Appreciation Day will generally follow the agenda below;

Welcome from Chair – explanation of their and co-facilitator roles, housekeeping arrangements (toilets/fire exits/refreshments), expectations regarding confidentiality and respect for each other’s experiences and contributions.

Participants invited by chair to give brief introductions of themselves, stating their name, role/relationship to the child and timeframe of their involvement with the child.

The participants should then be invited to contribute to the meeting in chronological order of their contact with the child (as far as possible) whilst the Chair guides them through the following areas:

•The history of the child's birth parents and their own experience of being parented taking into consideration cultural, racial and religious differences.

•The child's pre and post birth experiences, identifying any positives or particular strengths of the birth family.

•Links should be made between any abuse or neglect experienced by the child and how this can impact on development for a child.

•The circumstances of the child's reception into care.

•The child's life in care, particular importance should be given to any placement moves and identifying different parenting styles the child may have experienced.

•Why is this child being placed for adoption?

•What have been the positives in the child's pre-care experience?

•How has all of the above impacted on the child's attachment history and their ability to form new attachments?

•The day will close with a summary by the chair and any reflections of other participants. The participants will be asked to write their ‘Memories and Hopes’ to be added to the child’s record of the day.

A record of the day will not be shared with the other participants to retain confidentiality; however, they should be thanked for the contribution and their feedback should be sought in an effort to continue to improve on our practice (see feedback form for participants).

**7. After the Life Appreciation Day**

A visit or telephone discussion with the prospective adopters within 3 working days should be arranged by the Adopter’s Social Worker to discuss their thoughts about the Life Appreciation Day (specifically any new information that may have come to light) and about the proposed match. Their feedback about the Life Appreciation Day and their thoughts about proceeding with the match should be shared with the Family Finder.

Where relevant, the child’s Child Permanence Report, chronology and family tree should be updated prior to the Adoption Panel with any new/updated information by the child’s social worker.

A record of the Life Appreciation Day for the prospective adopters and a version for the child should be written up by the Child and Family Worker (Co-facilitator) and verified by the Family Finder before it is sent to them.

Appendix 1

Flowchart to organise and conduct a Life Appreciation Day

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| What needs to happen | Who is responsible |
| AT LEAST 3 WEEKS PRIOR TO LAD  At the point of arranging a family finding visit, provisionally select a date for a LAD to take place (eg 2 weeks post selection meeting / 2 weeks prior to matching panel).  List of contact details of attendees from child’s social worker. Also request photos of the child (recent and older to be used on the LAD) | FAMILY FINDER to arrange Family Finding visit, selection meeting and provisionally select date for LAD.  FAMILY FINDER to inform Family Finding Team’s C&F WORKER of provisional date.  FAMILY FINDER to request these from CHILD’s SOCIAL WORKER and pass onto the C&F WORKER. |
| Venue to be booked (use list in appendix and/or book an appropriate room on Condeco) | C&F WORKER to book venue |
| Initial email invite sent to attendees with provisional date to alert them and add to their diaries. Explanation to be given that further details will be sent subject to outcome of selection meeting on (give date) | C&F WORKER to send TEMPLATE EMAIL TO ALERT ATTENDEES |
| LAD refreshment supplies to be used on day. Complete CSO for any extra (fresh items) for LAD (milk, fruit) (Vicki to check with Carole whether a CSO is required or items can be reimbursed via expenses) | C&F WORKER |
| ATLEAST 2 WEEKS PRIOR TO LAD  Family finding visit and selection meeting take place:  1) match not recommended – email invitees to inform LAD will not be taking place at this time  2) match recommended – email invitees to confirm time, date, venue and attach information leaflet | FAMILY FINDER and CHILD’S SOCIAL WORKER  FAMILY FINDER to inform C&F WORKER of outcome so she can send email.  FAMILY FINDER to send  TEMPLATE INVITATION EMAIL  INFORMATION LEAFLET  MEMORIES AND HOPES FORM (to be completed by those who cannot attend) |
| Record to be kept of invitation replies and expected attendees | FAMILY FINDER / C&F WORKER |
| Venue booking to be confirmed | C&F WORKER |
| ATLEAST 1 WEEK BEFORE LAD  Selection of photos of child/ren and poster to be sent to Business Support to print and laminate.  Memories and Hopes document prepared (photo and name of child added) and sent to Business Support to print. | FAMILY FINDER  FAMILY FINDER |
| Prospective adopter to be prepared for the LAD (ensure they have received all the relevant written information about the child and birth family - CPR, carer’s report etc). | ADOPTERS’ SOCIAL WORKER |
| Current and past foster carers need to be adequately prepared to contribute to the life appreciation day. This also includes assistance with child care arrangements and transport if required. | SUPERVISING SOCIAL WORKER |
| ATLEAST 3 DAYS BEFORE LAD  The adopters and the current foster carers should have had the opportunity to meet or engage in telephone discussion about the child before the life appreciation day. | This should be facilitated by the FAMILY FINDER as part of the Transitions Plan. |
| DAY BEFORE/OF LAD  Extra refreshments to be brought. | C&F WORKER |
| LAD held. | Chaired by FAMILY FINDER.  Co-facilitated by C&F WORKER  (SEE 6. What happens at a LAD for further details) |
| WITHIN 3 WORKING DAYS  Visit/discussion with prospective adopter(s) to ascertain their thoughts about proceeding with the match. | ADOPTERS’ SOCIAL WORKER. FAMILY FINDER to be informed. |
| CPR / Adoption Panel paperwork to be updated with any new/corrected information. | CHILD’S SOCIAL WORKER |
| WITHIN 5 WORKING DAYS  Key discussions of LAD and explanatory letter to child to be completed and sent to prospective adopters and saved on child’s file. | C&F WORKER to write up notes and FAMILY FINDER to add and/or verify before sending. |

Appendix 2

Venues for Life Appreciation Day.

New County Hall Aylesbury (book via Condeco)

High Wycombe Offices (book via Condeco)

Amersham (Book via Condeco)

All below are free;

Waterside Children's Centre 470 Waterside Chesham Buckinghamshire HP5 1QF.

(01494) 792852

Prestwood Children’s Centre 134 Wycombe Road, Prestwood, Bucks, HP16 0HJ. (01494) 866181.

Hazelmere Children’s Centre 43 Highfield Way Hazlemere High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP15 7UW Contact Deborah Hulme [Deborah.Hulme@actionforchildren.org.uk](mailto:Deborah.Hulme@actionforchildren.org.uk) (01494) 813762

Waddesdon Children’s Centre Waddesdon Football Pavilion, Frederick Street, Waddesdon, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire  HP18 0LX (01296) 655218. Available Thursday and Friday only.

Bearbrook and Elmhurst Early Years Excellence Hub (Free if available.)

Bearbrook Combined School, Fowler Road, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire  HP19 7QP

(01296) 437618

Elmhurst School, Dunsham Lane, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire  HP20 2DB (01296) 437618

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Appendix 3

Information leaflet – What is a Life Appreciation Day?

A Life Appreciation Day is an opportunity to bring together individuals who have significant knowledge and experience of a child with the purpose of sharing this with prospective adopters. It is a guided chronological journey through the child’s life to date and the circumstances which led to a plan of adoption.

A Life Appreciation Day is a meeting where the child is “brought alive” by sharing stories, anecdotes, memories, photos, DVDs, toys, pictures or anything else participants can contribute, for the adopters who will be building a relationship with the child. The meeting is designed to help prospective adopters make sense of and appreciate the child’s life journey.

This unique information is recorded in writing and given to the adopters to be shared with the child over the years, in order to help the child and family have a fuller understanding of the child’s history.

Life Appreciation Days are an invaluable way of helping to recognise the trauma children can experience when moving between placements and acknowledging the importance of planned transitions.

This meeting recognises and validates the many people who can contribute to the child’s story, however brief or difficult their time with the child and/or their family has been. It is not a professionals’ meeting, neither is it a meeting focussing on adults. It should be recognised that participants will have different experiences and perspectives of the child and their family and as such it is asked that mutual respect of this is shared.

At the end of the Life Appreciation Day, participants will be asked for their feedback about the meeting. They will also be asked to complete a short document about their memories and hopes for the child, which can be shared with them as part of their Life Story record.

Appendix 4

TEMPLATE EMAIL TO ALERT PARTICIPANTS

Dear (NAME OF INVITEE),

I am writing to inform you that a Life Appreciation Day is being provisionally arranged for (CHILD’S NAME) on (DATE AT TIME) at (VENUE) and that your presence at it would highly appreciated and valued.

The Life Appreciation Day at this date and time is subject to the outcome of a meeting on (DATE) to agree for this child to be presented at Adoption Panel to be matched with prospective adopters.

Confirmation of the Life Appreciation Day and further information about the purpose and process of if will therefore be sent to you following this date.

Kind regards,

(YOUR NAME)

Appendix 5

TEMPLATE INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear (NAME),

I am writing to invite you to a Life Appreciation Day that is being held for (CHILD’S NAME) on (DATE AND TIME) at (VENUE).

The attached leaflet gives information on the purpose and process of Life Appreciation Days.

Due to your involvement with (CHILD AND/OR FAMILY NAME) it will be greatly appreciated if you could attend for (all/part) of the meeting as your contribution will be highly valued.

Please bring with you any significant memories, anecdotes, photos, pictures of the child or anything else you are willing to share and give to the child and their future adopters.

Photos of the day may be taken as a pictorial record for the child and their adopters and your permission would be greatly appreciated.

We look forward to meeting you on the day but if you have any questions beforehand, please do not hesitate to contact (FAMILY FINDER) on (TELEPHONE NUMBER).

Please respond to this email and cc (FAMILY FINDER’S EMAIL) to indicate the following:

**- Whether you are able or not to attend?**

**- Whether you require any specific access requirements?**

**- That you agree to respect the highly personal nature of the information that may be shared and to keep this knowledge confidential.**

**- Whether you give/do not give you permission for your photograph to be taken during the Life Appreciation Day for it to be used as a record of your attendance for the child and adopters and for no other reason.**

Yours sincerely,

(NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS)

Encl. Information leaflet, Memories and Hopes From (please complete and return if you are NOT able to attend the meeting)

Appendix 6

TEMPLATE INVITATION LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Dear (NAME),

A Life Appreciation Day is to be held for (CHILD’S NAME) on (DATE AND TIME) at (VENUE), prior to a match with you being sought from the Adoption Panel on (DATE OF PANEL).

The attached leaflet gives information on the purpose and process of Life Appreciation Days.

We look forward to seeing you on the day but if you have any questions beforehand, please do not hesitate to contact your social worker or (FAMILY FINDER) on (CONTACT DETAILS).

Yours Sincerely,

(NAME AND CONTACT DETAILS)

Encl. Information leaflet

Appendix 7

LIFE APPRECIATION DAY

FEEDBACK FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

Held for:

Held on:

Your attendance and contribution to the above day was greatly appreciated by all and we would like to thank you for your time and effort involved.

We would very much value any feedback you may have.

Please comment on the value of the day:

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Please comment on any ways in which you feel that the meeting could have been improved:

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Name: ………………………………………. Signed: ……………………………………………

Appendix 8

LIFE APPRECIATION DAY

FEEDBACK FORM FOR PROPSPECTIVE ADOPTERS

Held for:

Held on:

Your attendance and contribution to the above day was greatly appreciated by all and we would like to thank you for your time and effort involved.

We sincerely hope the meeting was of benefit to you and has helped you gain a better understanding of (CHILD’S NAME) and their history. We will be providing you with a written record of the meeting and a copy will be place on (CHILD’S NAME) file.

We would very much value any feedback you may have.

Please comment on the value of the day:

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Name: ………………………………………. Signed: ……………………………………

Appendix 9

Memories and Hopes form

Appendix 10

SAMPLE EXPLANATORY LETTER TO CHILD

2nd May 2018

Dear John,

You don’t know me but my name is Helen. Your social worker Tracey asked me to help with a meeting called a Life Appreciation Day on 24th April 2018.

Some important people came to the Life Appreciation Day. This included your nursery teacher Donna, your foster carer Susie and your social worker Tracey. Take a look at the list at the end to see how many people came. Some others wanted to come but couldn’t make it and send their best wishes.

Tracey showed us a DVD of you jumping on your trampoline and playing with your PJ Masks toys.

People spoke very kindly about your birth parents, your brother, your birth uncle and cousins and your dog Shadow, but everybody agreed that when you were home it wasn’t safe or healthy for you to stay there.

We talked about your experiences of growing up and how you love your family very much but how you also grew very close to your foster carers and we talked about all the caring things they were able to do for you.

One thing I will always remember from the meeting is everybody smiling and talking about you and your playful personality. Here are some things they said:

Caring towards friend at nursery Loving – enjoys cuddles on the sofa

Polite – always says please and thank you Likes drawing and painting

Loves PJ Masks Loves jumping on trampoline Likes to be with grown ups

The people who came to your Life Appreciation Day were:

Tracey – your social worker

Susie – your foster carer

Steve and Kim – your adoptive parents

Jack – your social worker when you were a baby

Donna – your keyworker at nursery

Karen – Children’s Centre Worker that ran the stay and play class you went to with your birth mum

Helen – your family finder and the person that chaired the meeting

Liz – the person that recorded the meeting and helped to set it up

I hope that you find this letter useful. As you get older, you can ask your parents Steve and Kim for more information to help you understand why you could not live with your birth family.

Best Wishes

Helen

Social Worker

Appendix 11

Sample record of Life Appreciation Day for Adopters

To be completed and sent to team by 15th June