**Lifelong Links: one-minute guide**

**What is ‘Lifelong Links’ ?**

Lifelong Links is a new and important service offering children and young people in care the chance to connect with their support network for the years to come. Sadly, we know that however hard everybody works, and whatever good intentions we have, the greatest failing of the care system is that all too often it breaks rather than builds, long term relationships for children. Placement moves, changes of social worker, separations from siblings, family, friends, teachers, community : these unacknowledged losses can harm children’s sense of identity.

The Lifelong Links worker identifies a potential network to provide ongoing support and contact for the child/young person, by locating family members, friends, professionals and other significant people. For some children and young people this can mean reconnecting with key people in their lives after some years, and having them as part of their lives in the future.

**How does it work?**

When a child or young person is referred to Lifelong Links, we will meet with the referrer and make a plan for finding the people who are important to the child, and consider any potential risks. Support for the child will be considered, as the process can be quite emotional. It is not unusual for professionals to have some anxiety about ‘unsettling’ the child or the placement, and it is important to have the key professionals involved in the oversight of the process – social worker, team manager, Lifelong Links worker, FGC manager, IRO, foster carer etc.

The Lifelong Links worker meets the child, and then sets about locating the people that are potential members of the Lifelong Links network. As they locate people they check back with the group and – crucially – with the child, before engaging them in the process.

Eventually, a Lifelong Links Family Group Conference is held. This is similar to standard FGCs, except the meeting can feel more like a celebration than other meetings. The Lifelong Links plan will include some details about how people are going to stay in contact and support the child/young person in the future.

As with other FGCs, the social worker will agree the plan if it is a safe plan.

**What happens after the Lifelong Links FGC?**

The plan is recorded and **should be integrated into the child’s care plan**. The social worker and other professionals working with the child will help the network and the child to carry out the plan, which should be reviewed at a Lifelong Links review meeting and at the child’s LAC review meetings.

**How do I refer ?**

Someone with parental responsibility has to give consent for the referral for Lifelong Links, and obviously the child’s consent will be required. Their consent needs to be informed. During the process the child may withdraw consent at any time. All people who are contacted have the option not to participate.

In the first instance, please contact the Family Group Conference service to discuss your possible referral: [Familygroup.conference@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:Familygroup.conference@towerhamlets.gov.uk) or Jane Towey 07950 209497 and we talk be able to talk it through with you.

**Early Referrals**

Whilst Lifelong Links can help all children and young people who have been through the care system, do remember that an early referral – soon after a child enters care, could help ensure that social networks will be available for them whilst they are in care, helping add stability to their care experience and support through transitions into independent living.

