

Children's Profiles for Long Term Fostering

Permanence through long term fostering

The objective of planning for permanence is to 'ensure that children have a secure, stable and loving family to support them through childhood and beyond and to give them a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.'

The Children Act 1989 guidance and regulations Volume 2: care planning, placement, and case review (pages 22-23)

For children who remain looked after there is an emphasis on long term fostering offering an important route to permanence. The regulations provide a definition of a long-term foster placement, being when all of the following conditions are met:

- foster care is the child's plan for permanence, as recorded in their care plan
- the foster carer has agreed to be the child's foster carer until they cease to be looked after
- the child's responsible authority has confirmed the arrangement to the foster carer, the child and their birth parents

Before making a long-term foster placement the local authority must assess the ability of the foster carer to meet the child's needs now and in the future, and identify any support services or bespoke training that will be needed to achieve this. The child's wishes and feelings must be taken into consideration, it must be considered that the placement will safeguard and promote the child's welfare, the IRO must be consulted, the child's relatives must be consulted where appropriate, and a new placement plan must be prepared and signed by the foster carer.

Staying Put

'Staying Put' arrangements apply to young people in a foster placement when they reach 18 years old and continue to access education and training. It enables a young adult to remain with their existing a foster family until they reach 21 years old.

For young people with a stable foster placement, continuing to live in their former foster home 'Staying Put' can offer a transition to independence closer to that experienced by most other young people and avoid social exclusion and be more likely to avert a subsequent housing and tenancy breakdown. The term 'arrangement' should be used rather than placement; the term 'placement' denotes a situation where the local authority arranged and placed the child with a foster carer.

What is a profile for?

Writing a child's profile is an important part of finding a long term foster family for a child. Prospective foster families will know nothing about the child, and they rely on the profile and the accompanying photograph for their first impression. Writing the profile is part of the complex and difficult task of linking a child with a foster family. The dilemma is to try and meet not only the child's current needs, but also their anticipated future needs. Profiles also need to present a rounded picture, while attracting appropriate enquiries from foster carers.

When should I complete a profile for long term fostering?

Once you have identified that a child requires a long term foster family and the *CYP Placement Request* has been completed on Carefirst, the family finder in the fostering team will contact you to discuss the child and send you the template for the child's profile. In the first instance the social worker should complete the profile as they are best placed to provide information but the family finder is able to support you with this. Once the profile and placement request are complete the search can begin to find a long term foster family.

How do I write a profile?

The profile should communicate something about who this child is and make readers want to know more. The clearer the profile, the less they will have to second-guess what is meant. You can use quotes from people who know the child, and it's also vital to convey the child's perspective and their personality. Where possible, a quote, picture, a poem, or an anecdote from the child, can often speak volumes. If a child is currently placed in foster care ask their carers to say what it is like to care for them. Teachers or leaders of after school clubs can also contribute to say what it is like to care for them in a different environment.

Be aware that profiles could be read by the child or someone who knows them. Therefore, the profile should not include in-depth background details, or sensitive information that could potentially embarrass or distress anyone involved. This includes information relating to abuse (including sexual abuse), sexualised behaviour, 'soiling' and 'wetting', or sensitive information regarding third parties, such as the child's birth parents. These issues should be explained in more detail to appropriate enquirers. For example, if writing a profile, for an older child experiencing enuresis, you could for example write that they "need support with some aspects of their personal care". The challenge is to convey the 'spirit' of the child and include all relevant information.

Photographs

Photographs make a direct, emotional impact on prospective foster families, and the quality of the photograph plays an important part in their decision to make enquiries about children. One or two photographs will be sufficient but make sure that these are recent and are good quality. These do not have to be professional photos but they should clearly show the child's face and expression.

Writing about siblings

If the plan is for the children to be placed together then you should write one profile. This should include a general paragraph about the children, any shared characteristics and their relationship. A separate paragraph on each child should be included giving a sense of them as individuals. Comparisons should not be made

between siblings. If siblings are being placed separately they will require a profile each.

Including children in the process

Children who are aware that they are moving to a long term foster family could be involved in creating their profile. They can contribute their wishes and feelings for their foster family and aspirations for the future. They could perhaps write something for the profile, draw a picture or write a poem. Direct quotes from a child will help bring a child to life on the paper.

The child's description

You should describe the child in one or two paragraphs including the following information:

Personality: Start with a few descriptive words. Be positive, yet realistic. Find ways of being constructive about any emotional or behavioural difficulties (which may well be temporary or linked to the child's past or current situation). There is no need to describe the child's physical appearance as there will be a photograph where these are clear.

Interests, hobbies, talents, likes and dislikes: These help describe the child more holistically and could match the interests of prospective foster family members.

Child's development and needs: Give relevant details of social, emotional and behavioural development, including any special needs. Describe children with disabilities or special needs using the social model of disability. Mention recent developments and progress. Remember that enquirers can ask the child's social worker for more information.

Cultural needs: Give information about the child's heritage, ethnicity, culture and religion. Note if there are any expectations of the foster carers, such as attending a place of worship with the child or dietary requirements.

Health issues: Where appropriate, include details of specific conditions and genetic risks, as well as the implications in terms of treatment. If the child has a particular diagnosis or disability, please ask your agency's medical adviser to put together a short paragraph explaining how this condition or disability affects this particular child. It could be useful to mention the birth parents history of mental health, substance dependency or if they have learning disabilities if this is relevant to the child's health.

Education: Mention the name and type of school that the child currently attends as this will be important when considering the location of the prospective foster family.

Highlight if a child is able to move school to be closer to the foster family home. An assessment of special educational needs, additional support, teachers' and child's views should also be included. It is helpful to know what the child enjoys about school and how they interact with their peers. What are the child's aspirations for college, work or university?

Support in place: Is the child receiving any additional support from other services? Has the child received any life story work to help them understand their journey in care? If there is a package of support in place then this should be summarised and it should be mentioned if a child is on a waiting list for CAMHS or other similar services.

Contact: It is useful for prospective carers to understand how often contact happens, who with, where this will take place (and how it is organised i.e. we want carers to support contact wherever possible particularly in long term placements). If siblings are placed elsewhere in care, what are the arrangements for informal contact between carers?

Language

The profile should be written in clear and concise sentences, with simple, lively language, avoiding jargon and clichés. The language you use should be considered carefully as some words carry negative meanings or could be interpreted differently.

Suffered or experienced? Although 'suffered' could be seen as more realistic, it could label the child as a victim and possibly lay blame on their birth family, which could compromise future relationships for foster carers and the child. 'Experienced' feels more neutral, as in 'he experienced lack of care'.

Struggles or tries? From the child's point of view, 'struggles' conveys the idea of failure, while 'tries' highlights the child's efforts and resilience.

Poor/limited or some/a little? The aim is to focus on what the child can do, rather than on what they cannot do. So a child who 'has poor concentration' could become one 'with a short concentration span' or 'needing help to concentrate more'.

Aggressive or challenging? The profile needs to present a realistic picture of the kind of behaviour future carers might have to deal with. It should not mislead, but should also avoid labelling the child too early and too publicly. Another carer and the prospect of more stability might lead to a change in their behaviour.

Bossy or taking on too much responsibility? 'Bossy' may well describe the child's behaviour towards their siblings, but it implies this is an enduring characteristic. It

may be more helpful to suggest that they can be helped to be less controlling and learn to let go of their previous role as caregiver.

Identifying future needs

The profile should also indicate the future needs of the child through to their adult years. Think about what areas they need support with and how a carer can prepare them for independence. Would the child benefit from remaining with the family beyond 18 under Staying Put? This will help the carers think ahead about how they could meet the child's needs and remain committed to them into adulthood.

What sort of family is needed?

Highlight if the child should be placed in a solo placement, or can they be placed with other children? Do they need to be the youngest child in the family? Has the child experienced living with siblings or other foster children previously and how do they get on with children in school? Is an experienced foster carer required to meet the child's more complex needs? Do the carers need specific experience of caring for children with learning disabilities? Would a one or two carer family suit the child and is there a preference towards a male or female carer? Are there any geographical risks placing a child in certain areas? Do the carers require any specific training to enable them to care for the child?

It is not always possible to find a family that will meet these exact requirements so prioritise what is most important to the child.

Useful Links

Matching Reports:

http://northamptonshirechildcare.proceduresonline.com/chapters/docs_library.html#foster_and_adoption

Staying Put:

<http://ccl/sites/scs/NCC%20policies%20procedures%20and%20flowcharts/Staying%20Put%20Policy.pdf>

[Staying Put – Fostering Network](#)

<http://ccl/sites/scs/adoptfoster/Fostering%20Panel%20Templates%20%20Procedure%20s/Staying%20Put%20Guidance%20Sept%202017.pdf>

For support in relation to writing children's profiles please contact:

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