

# Telford and Wrekin Children's Services

## Life Story Work Strategy



# Life Story Strategy

## Child Protection and Family Support

### Policy Governance

<b>Title</b>	<b>Life Story Strategy</b>
<b>Purpose/scope</b>	Life Story work is intended to help children and young people in care have a better understanding of their identity and self-worth and to process their life experiences  To help them understand why they are Looked After
<b>Subject key words</b>	Life Story Strategy – Version 1
<b>Council Priority</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put our children and young people first.</li> <li>• Protect and support our vulnerable children and adults.</li> </ul>
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<b>Approver</b>	Jo Britton Assistant Director: Child Protection and Family Support

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## 1. Policy Statement & Purpose

The importance of life story work cannot be emphasised too much, and all children placed in the care of Telford and Wrekin are entitled to and must have life story work undertaken with them. For most of our children this will include the formulation of a life story book.

Children and young people separated from their birth families, especially those who have experienced multiple moves, may have a very fragile sense of themselves and a very fragmented understanding of their own history. Life story work should aim to help a child / young person develop a clear understanding of their early history and journey as well as their cultural identity and should also assist their understanding of why they are looked after; this is essential for all children and young people where a decision has been ratified at a looked after child review that they will be placed outside of their birth family with adopters or long term foster carers.

Life story work should also be used to help children, young people and care leavers prepare positively for future transitions; including, reunification, moving to another placement or a permanent placement, moving to a new school, movement to independent living, moving towards supported or residential care arrangements for adults, a change of social worker or any other significant change of circumstances. For those children / young people in long term care, life story work should not be viewed as a one off piece of work, it should be an ongoing process revisited and reviewed periodically for the length of time they are looked after.

Although life story work is not therapy, it can be therapeutic and can be used to help a child/young person in very difficult circumstances understand what is happening to them, express their feelings, contribute to decision making and share their story with others.

Life story documentation should follow the child/young person to every placement and be continually updated and added to throughout the time the child is in care. Thought should always be given to who holds the information (in a safe place) with additional copies available in an electronic format should the original be lost or destroyed.

## 2. Who should complete Life Story Work?

All direct work with children and young people should be undertaken by someone with a sound knowledge of child development, including an understanding of attachment theory.

- 2.1 The overall responsibility for co-ordinating life story information and ensuring that this work is completed with or for the child / young person is the responsibility of the child's social worker under the supervision of their manager.
- 2.2 Where therapeutic life story work is required, this should be completed by a specialist life story worker or a commissioned therapist.
- 2.3 Carers are responsible for recording or keeping significant information or items about the child or young person's experience whilst in a particular placement to add to or begin the child or young person's life story book / memory box and this should include a brief overview of the child.

### **3. When should Life Story Work begin?**

The timing and nature of any life story work will vary, and depends not only on the chronological age of the child / young person but also on the emotional and cognitive stage of development.

- 3.1 Life story work will formally be considered at the initial looked after child review and a decision will be made as to when the work should commence and additionally whether therapeutic life story work is required. Progress should be discussed at second and subsequent reviews (including consideration of therapeutic life story work if not considered at the initial review).
- 3.2 For older children / young people consideration must always be given to their age, understanding and whether they are emotionally ready to engage in this work.
- 3.3 Where a child has a plan of adoption and there has been no pre-existing involvement with the child, the social worker will make a referral to the Joint Adoption Service.

### **4. Recording and Maintaining Life Story Work**

Life story work can be undertaken in a variety of formats and careful consideration must be given to how it will be presented. Depending on the age of the child / young person, he or she should be included in this decision.

- 4.1 Any discussion around life story work should be recorded on Protocol under the “life Story” tab. This is the responsibility of the allocated social worker and or Independent Reviewing Officer.
- 4.2 A work plan with proposed frequency, content and duration should be completed by the social worker / specialist life story worker and uploaded to Protocol.
- 4.3 Updating the progress of life story work should be discussed along with evidence in subsequent looked after child reviews.
- 4.4 Where adoption is the plan, a life story book and later life letter must be given to the adoptive parents within three months of the adoption order being made. This should also be incorporated into the care plan under life story work and progress discussed at reviews, matching and planning meetings.
- 4.5 Life Story work belongs to the child / young person, a decision must be made as to who is best placed to keep the work / book safe.
- 4.6 All Life story work will be recording on protocol including the outcome of consultation meetings. This will form part of the child’s electronic case recording records
- 4.7 A copy of the completed life story book must be uploaded to Protocol.
- 4.8 Whenever a child’s / young person’s case is transferred to another team and at the end of their period in care. A case note must be recorded on Protocol outlining who has the physical life story book and where it is being kept.