

**Bradford Children’s Social Care Life Work and Life Story Policy 2021**

*“How do you make sense of who you are, as you grow older, if you don't*

*Have information about your early experiences and family of origin”*

*(Winter & Cohen 2005)*

**Introduction to the Policy**

Children and young people who are in care or adopted may have little understanding of why they do not live with their birth parents; the reason for them entering care and events that took place in their early lives. That lack of information can be confusing and will have a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing and self- esteem which is likely to impact further on the trauma that they may have already experienced.

Life work, life story books and later life letters help children and young people who cannot live with their parent/s to begin to understand and accept their personal history and have a more positive view of themselves, their identity and help them to understand why they became looked after.

**Policy Statement**

Bradford is committed to ensuring that life work, a life story book and a later life letter will be provided for all the children we are involved with who do not live with their parent/s; we understand the importance of this for the child and young person’s identity and emotional well-being and sense of self.

All children and young people who do not live with their parents are entitled to, and should have access to life story work and a life story book which will give the them a realistic and honest account of their circumstances, their family history, identity and an age appropriate understanding of how decisions have been made about them and the reasons they cannot live with their parents. For children with a plan for adoption, life story work will be completed and available for the child before the adoptive placement starts.

Life story documentation should follow the child/young people and be continually updated and added to throughout our involvement with them and for their carers to add to so that there is a full account for them to access.

**Life Work**

Life work is an integral part of the child’s life journey; it may be referred to as direct work but whatever it is called it is intended to help children make sense of their situation and ensure that they -

* Have a better understanding of who they are and their life journey;
* Increase in his/her sense of self-worth;
* Understand why he/she is not living with their birth parents;
* Have a firm connection to their past;
* Have a sense of identity.

Consideration needs to be given to how the child’s life work will be completed; this should include direct work, collecting memorabilia in a special memory box, creating a life story book and writing a later life letter. This will depend on the child’s age and stage of emotional development and individual circumstances. It should be carefully planned and any work with a child and young person should be undertaken at a point where they are emotionally ready to do this as this is likely to bring up some difficult and upsetting feeling for them.

Life Work sessions need to be safe for the child or young person to process and express their feelings, good and bad. The purpose of doing this work directly with the child/young person includes:

* emotional safety and strengthening support networks – helping the young person consider how they can access people or things that make them feel safe when they need to.
* emotional regulation – helping the young person recognise, reflect on and express feelings.
* emotional literacy – helping the young person recognise, reflect on and express feelings.
* strengths-based work – helping the young person to develop and build resilience and a positive sense of self.
* Information sharing and integration – helping the young person to consider which parts of their life story they wish to share with others, and which to keep private.

Life story work requires social workers, foster carers, and support staff to agree a plan about who will contribute what; this must be co-ordinated by the child’s social worker. It is an on-going process which requires revisiting and reviewing throughout the child’s involvement with us and can and should be updated by the person/s the child is now living with as it provides them with a coherent narrative of their journey. It is their story.

Life story work should also be used to help children and young people and care leavers to prepare positively for the future and any planned move; this could be -

* Moving to another foster placement
* Moving to a permanent placement
* Moving towards adulthood and independent living
* Moving towards support or residential care arrangements
* Moving to a connected person placement
* Returning home

For children who remain living at home with their parent/s under Placement with Parents (Care Planning Regulations) this would be a useful tool in helping them to understand why they live at home but are in the care of the local authority; what this means and the implications of this.

**Responsibilities**

The child’s social worker has overall responsibility for the completion of the life work, the life story book and the later life letter and memory boxes. The child’s parents and carers and other people may have a significant role in contributing to this but the co-ordination of the completion and roles will be the social worker’s function. Therefore, it is the child’s social worker’s responsibility to ensure that relevant information regarding the child/young person’s life is collected and put into a format that the child/young person can access and understand.

Contributions from others is also vital to ensure that all relevant information is captured so contributions from other is expected; the following is not an exhaustive list:

* The child/Young person
* Parents
* Family members
* Foster carers
* Residential Workers
* Supervising Social Workers
* Schools
* Previous Social Workers
* Independent Reviewing Officer.
* Child protection chair

The child/young person’s own contribution to their life story is crucial and must be encouraged and facilitated taking into consideration their age. They are the best author of their own story.

**Compliance Measures**

It is important that we have measures in place to ensure that the commitment we have made is adhered to and the following are the expectations to ensure compliance.

The Team Manager/Line Manager will be responsible in ensuring that social workers are completing Life Work in a timely manner through monitoring this in supervision discussions and through quality assurance activity.

At the child’s statutory review, the IRO will seek an update from the social worker and the child’s carer as to the progress in collating information for the life story work and what progress has been made in relation to direct work with the child, taking into account their age. The carers will be asked if they need any further support, training or materials to maintain the life story work.

At the carer’s annual review, the reviewing officer will ask the carer what information, documentation including photographs, certificates etc. they have collated for the child.

This policy must be adhered to by external, independent fostering agencies, internal foster carers, connected carers and residential placements.

How to complete Life Work is outlined in the Practice Guidance which can be accessed via Tri-x

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