



# Vulnerable/looked after children

Directors' summary 4 November 2009

Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services

*It would be hard to overstate how significant the quality of leadership is in narrowing the gap for children and young people within a context of improving outcomes for all ...*

## Narrowing the Gap – Final Year Guidance 2

C4EO's work on vulnerable children – in particular, looked after children and young people (LACY) – supports directors of children's services and their Children's Trust partners by providing the knowledge, data and tailored support to help improve outcomes for this vulnerable group. This summary provides concise and accessible guidance for DCSs drawing on the three research reviews in the Vulnerable/looked after children theme.

Please go to [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to download the full and in-depth research reviews. The reviews set out to answer three questions in regard to looked after children:

- how to improve their educational outcomes
- how to improve their emotional health and wellbeing
- how to increase the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'.

## What do we know?

Many LACY arrive in the care system with high emotional, educational and behavioural needs. These needs can be best met through well co-ordinated education, social care, health and housing provision. Being in settled and safe accommodation is key to LACY's wellbeing when they leave care. Overall, national, regional and local policies are producing better awareness and understanding of the needs of these young people. Early evidence from research on integrated frontline services suggests that coordination between social care and schools is improving. The research reviews highlight how good provision, especially in relation to education, health and residential/foster care, are key determinants in ensuring LACY have safe, stable and consistent experiences.

# What do we know?

## Improving educational outcomes

Strategic leadership is key: for example developing coordinated strategies between education and social care as well as identifying practical support and resources for LACYP.

Ensure that LACYP have a Personal Education Plan and that staff, carers and children know the purpose of the plan; it has measurable outcomes; and it is regularly updated.

Work with your partners to agree principles for information sharing between professionals, carers and young people. Key stakeholders should identify what information should be shared and how to monitor to improve outcomes.

Consider developing specific projects to address the early disadvantages experienced by LACYP for example: extra-curricular activities and innovative support activities.

Develop opportunities to recognise and celebrate achievements by LACYP.

Develop and review your strategy on school exclusions for LACYP. Monitor outcomes to include gender and ethnicity.

## Improving emotional and behavioural health

Agree with partners a set of measures that:

- capture the quality of LACYP care experiences
- measure LACYP's satisfaction.

Develop a strategy to review LACYP who have experienced an unacceptable number or placements: this is particularly important for young asylum seekers and those who have complex behaviours.

Establish measures to ensure regular and consistent contact is maintained between named social workers and their LACYP. This is particularly important for those who experience high levels of mobility or who live 'out of area'.

Work in partnership with the strategic health authority and local primary care trust to agree

access to a range of support for LACYP with mental health issues and advice on general health issues including sexual health.

Ensure that LACYP are able to maintain contact with birth families if they want to and support them in these often complex relationships.

### **For foster carers:**

Establish a support network/forum for foster carers.

Provide them with training and advice about:

- supporting LACYP in order to achieve positive educational outcomes
- providing emotional support for teenagers and young people during their transition into adulthood.

## Increasing the number of care leavers in 'settled, safe accommodation'

Recruit and support foster carers able to care for young people up to the age of 24 years.

Re-designate some foster care placements as 'supported lodgings' to accommodate those who need longer to transfer to independent living.

Ensure sufficient time is given in leaving care transition plans to enable young people to move through the different stages of transition to

adulthood. Plans need to include the views of the young person as well as timely support from the relevant services.

Agree procedures between your partners – health, social care, housing and the third sector-to provide quality housing for young people leaving care.

Ensure a designated teacher provides support for LACYP, and that they have time and training to undertake the role. Provide greater access to Looked After Children's Education Support teams (LACES).

Share evidence in your partnerships on what works to support LACYP with complex learning and behavioural needs.

For LACYP who move on to further or higher education:

- establish protocols to ensure ongoing support between LACYP and their

- social worker
- foster carer
- identify provision for support/advice during vacation periods.

Establish a partnership between all agencies (including district/borough councils in two-tier authorities) to provide those who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) with creative employment, training and education options. Monitor outcomes.

### **Interventions/Programmes**

When selecting an intervention for LACYP consider the evidence. The review found that:

- enhanced foster care (EFC) can help to improve children's behaviour and placement stability
- multi-systemic therapy (MST) can be effective in improving emotional health, educational outcomes and reducing offending behaviour
- mentoring is more likely to have a positive impact when the mentor has a helping or professional role, receives ongoing training, and organises structured activities.

Ensure each LACYP has:

- a full and comprehensive assessment completed before an intervention commences
- clear measurable desired outcomes. These should be carefully monitored and evaluated
- an experienced social worker assigned to them.

Agree with partners minimum accommodation standards for young people. Standards should ensure accommodation is in good physical state, has access to good facilities and helps the young person feel safe. Particular consideration needs to be given to those with mental health problems; young parents, disabled children including those with learning disabilities); and black and minority ethnic groups.

Establish agreements within your partnerships on providing emergency support for young adults who become homeless.

Agree with partners about how to reduce the number of young people in unsupported accommodation and bed and breakfast provision. Decide how you will regularly monitor this.

## What do you want to do next?

The following are based on the seven Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) questions and are designed to facilitate partnership action:

### Q1 What is your vision for improving the lives of looked after children and young people in your locality? What outcomes (quality of life conditions) do you want for them?

For example, looked after children have improved educational outcomes, are achieving as well as their peers, are emotionally stable and able to cope, and move successfully into adulthood.

### Q2 What would the outcomes look like if you could see or experience them?

*(Experience is the bridge between outcomes and indicators)*

For example, more LACYP are achieving level 4 in English and Mathematics at KS2 and the proportion of LACYP achieving five A\*–C GCSEs at KS4 is comparable to other children living in your area, the take-up of higher education, employment or training by young people leaving care has increased, more LACYP are living in suitable accommodation and there are no children in care living in unsuitable accommodation such as bed and breakfast or emergency accommodation. More children and young people in care are satisfied with their placements, are achieving educationally and are more emotionally stable.

### Q3 And how can you measure them?

*(Qualitative and quantitative measures are needed)*

The indicators for measuring outcomes emerge from descriptions of the experience (Q2). Below are some examples of 'outcome indicators' and some 'programme measures'

- NI 58 Emotional and behavioural health of children in care
- NI 62 Stability of placements of looked after children: number of moves
- NI 66 Looked after children cases which were reviewed within required timescales
- NI 99 Children in care reaching level 4 in English at Key Stage 2
- NI 101 Children in care achieving 5 A\*–C GCSEs (or equivalent) at Key Stage 4 (including English and Maths)

- NI 147 Care leavers in suitable accommodation
- NI 148 Care leavers in employment, education or training

### Q4 Where are you now? How are you currently doing on the most important measures?

The web-based C4EO Progress Mapping Tool provides relevant data on the national indicators and enables you to create charts, undertake comparisons with other areas and monitor your own progress.

### Q5 Who are the partners for improvement?

A very broad range of partners have a role to play in keeping children and young people safe (see 'Who has the information you need?' below)

You may choose to undertake a 'turning the curve' exercise on the measures where improvement is needed. 'Turning the curve' is an exercise from the OBA toolkit which facilitates partnership working.

[www.c4eo.org.uk/obatoolkit/default.aspx](http://www.c4eo.org.uk/obatoolkit/default.aspx).

This will enable you to identify which partners/agencies should be involved.

### Q6 What really works to improve the outcomes you want?

C4EO's three research reviews provide some evidence of what works to ensure that young people develop into settled adulthood. The evidence can be used to support the achievement of the outcomes you have identified.

### Q7 What do you propose to do next?

Having identified with your partners, your vision, the outcome(s) you are seeking to achieve for the group of children and young people, and the outcome indicators to monitor progress on those outcomes, the next step is to agree joint action (possibly from the 'Turning the curve' exercise). A report card format could be adopted which is clear and simple for you and your partners and provides a framework for monitoring progress against your outcomes. (This is available in the OBA toolkit on the C4EO website.)



## Who has the information you need?

- families and carers, children and young people
- family centres and early years practitioners, Sure Start programme managers
- managers working strategically as well as professional staff delivering services including child care, youth services, healthcare, education, housing and primary care services (eg GPs and health visitors, teenage pregnancy coordinators)
- psychologists, psychiatrists, members of CAMHS
- housing associations
- schools
- police
- probation services
- youth opportunity teams

## Directors' summaries

This summary is a concise and accessible overview of C4EO's current work in this theme for directors of children's services.

Please go to [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to download full and in-depth versions.

## How can C4EO support your vision?

C4EO offers wide-ranging support, including:

- validated local practice
- knowledge and progression workshops
- sector specialists and tailored support
- knowledge and research reviews including key messages from research.

Please go to [www.c4eo.org.uk](http://www.c4eo.org.uk) to access full information.