

# EAST MIDLANDS REGIONAL IRO WORKSHOP ; PRACTICE, GUIDANCE & ADVICE

June 2015

## Care Planning & Effective Management

The June Workshop was well attended and focused on the challenges surrounding permanency planning and reflecting upon key themes which continue to be a challenge Care Planning for children and young people who are close to or are accommodated by the Local Authority.

What we heard was a thought provoking presentation by Bryan Glover Adoption Team Manager for Lincolnshire. The presentation was in depth and thought provoking outline of the issues and realistic approaches to adoption.

Adoption is one option for permanency. The workshop also explored additional questions we face in considering Care Plans of the Local Authority in achieving permanency by a different route.

The Management Group felt the work undertaken was valuable and worth collating as a guidance outline to be used across the region. Utilising the experience and work of the IRO Practitioners.

Feedback from Participants at the event as to what they drew from the workshop

*'The pressure of ongoing change in procedure and policy can outdate your knowledge very quickly.'*

*'To look at long term permanency and guidance'*

*'Meeting up and networking with colleagues, old and new'*

*'Learning from practice—sharing views with other IRO's'*

## To Be Shared and kept for Reflection



## In This Issue

- Pre Planning— Edge of Care
- How far do you reach in exploring extended family
- Planning for children in Long Term Foster Care
- SGO—what we should be looking for
- Issues Pre Adoption
- Exit Planning

## Planning Prior to Accommodation

### - Edge of Care

All guidance suggests it is vital to consider options and develop realistic plans even at the stage before the child or young person is looked after.

The exploration of the issues to consider by colleagues at the 'edge of care' is vital. Key Questions at the start of the process is essential for the timely planning for permanence and support children's and young people's positive outcomes.



## Expectations, What's Needed

Not unexpectedly IRO felt colleagues being clear in their decision making and planning with children and families prior to coming into Care is an essential element in managing the process and exploring outcomes in a timely manner. Good decisions have to be based on effective assessment and analysis. Expectations therefore is that work in the following areas need to be undertaken ;

### Assessment & Analysis

- ◆ Application of Strategies, Strength based models in Early Help
- ◆ Start the story of the child, understand needs, experiences and how they have been affected by their experiences
- ◆ The promotion of links with family members and resources to support within the family



### Clear Contingency Planning

- ◆ Robust Review and whether family members are available to support
- ◆ Being Creative by exploring the use of shared care or SGO viability
- ◆ Clear information and explanation to the child or young person



### Accommodation

- ◆ Agreement as to what needs to happen if S.20, in order for the child to go home
- ◆ SGO and Connected Persons already identified and established progressed using specialist assessment services
- ◆ Attention to permanence from Day 1 & work within court timescale

## Exploring Extended Family

Central to the work undertaken in considering the position of Children and Young People at the Edge of Care and the importance of planning at the earliest of stages. Exploring extended family members is key.

So the IRO's considered how far should we professionally go in both exploring and keeping children and young people in the family?



## Working with Families

From the work undertaken the clear message was that in considering extended family members, whilst overall direction given has been to consider circumstances that are 'good enough', in examining Care Plans and assessments this needs to be really scrutinized.

Agreement remains that the Best Interest of the child should remain the priority. Essential is that the Assessment / Viabilities undertaken need to be good quality, demonstrating reasoning. A number of elements were identified that are not always considered;

- ⇒ **The Child's needs must be clearly defined and the impact of deficits in parenting to date, and therefore the likely impact on needs in the future**
- ⇒ **Those Core needs should be met— more than good enough parenting may be needed by a family placement.**
- ⇒ **Financial capacity to manage long term should be considered**
- ⇒ **Consider as to the motivation of the extended family to put themselves forward. Do they have the resilience and the ability to manage relationships long term**
- ⇒ **Equality of consideration between maternal family and paternal family should be given. However research suggests vulnerabilities in placing within the extended family of the perpetrator long term due to familial dynamics, long term, families optimism of perpetrators capacity to change and perception of the child, should be considered.**
- ⇒ **There should be an attachment and a relationship with the child.**
- ⇒ **Where preconditions above exist we should not preclude assessment of international familial relationships**

## Long Term Fostering

As new statutory guidance has been issued the workshop focused on the elements of Long Term fostering that are the most challenging and constantly discussed at reviews.

The elements related to the resilience of foster carers long term and the effect of, and management of contact.

The workshops considered what elements to examine for a successful placement



## Achieving balance

IRO's recognized the importance in long term fostering of the need to achieve a balance in foster placements and continued participation in families. There was an acknowledgement that in transitioning to adulthood the long term links remain with their families and plans should be made accordingly. IRO's should therefore be looking for the following in Care Planning.

### Point 1.— The Child should remain central in thinking

- Child should understand that their home is long term - permanence celebration when achieved
- Child should continue to be updated, consulted and understand purpose of familial links

### Point 2 - Foster Carers fully understand expectations and role

IRO's emphasized that the success of a placement as long term, is dependent upon appropriate training and a clear understanding of role and ongoing relationship with birth family. The implications of family participation and foster carer role should be based on reliance of understanding their role rather than goodwill discussions, a foster carer has an active participation as part of the role.

This therefore has to be part of discussions from those not internally trained but provided by IFA's. The foster carers commitment therefore should be part of the matching process and be mindful of any form of disguised compliance. The role therefore of the Supervising Social Worker is **essential**. Drift in commitment should be challenged.

The final element is clarity in the Care Plan about who manages contact, finances relating to contact and what is expected? The management of contact therefore has to include delegated authority responsibilities of the foster carer.

### Point 3 - Integrated Familial Participation.

IRO's recognize this area tends to be the weakest element of care planning and therefore we are reminded that we have a responsibility to ensure the Local Authority exercises the duty to update parents about Care Plans and child's activities, and keep families involved.

It is recommended that if parents are not able to care, work should continue to offer counselling and support change, discuss pressures or guilt and work to look forward. Work with families to maintain a level of participation. Indeed if not then look to extended family members who would be able to offer emotional support to the child over the years in a long term placement. Always remember SGO is also an option.

## Special Guardianship Orders

An ever increasing area utilized in Care Planning. However how much do we examine plans in detail and what should we be looking at in achieving a successful outcome.



**‘ Which way, is the right way to go ? ‘**

## Covering the Base’s

IRO’s in their deliberations felt whilst considering the use of SGO embedded in Care Planning there was further scope to improve in looking at assessments in more details and consider post Order support and the resilience long term of the plans.

### Key Message

**‘ Should be approached in the same way as Long Term Foster Placements, the same detailed outline should be undertaken. The only difference is permanence is delivered in a different way ’**

It was recognized the IRO should see the assessment and reflect both on the matching, the financial elements and the post order support package that is envisaged.

Clarity should be sought both in matching the child’s needs, whether there is any leaving care support and the capacity of carers to cope with changing needs.

IRO’s should consider what elements, where there are concerns, could be tested prior to placement or discussions in court.

Of particular note and requires close scrutiny is how inter family relationships will be managed, the management of contact, carers roles and responsibilities in that.

IRO’s also recommended that prospective carers should not just receive legal advice but also have further detailed training / discussions regarding their legal responsibilities and exercising Parental Responsibilities, to supporting and protecting their charge.

Further changing needs means not just in respect of the child’s current profile but what they are likely to present in adolescence.

## Pre Adoptive Placements

.Moving to an Adoptive Placement is a significant event , one which is the final stage before a final and irreversible decision.

Yet IRO's still review the Care Plan and progress and have a participative role in finally agreeing to lodge, the application for an Adoption Order.

What should we be doing during this stage.



## Getting it Right!

Once an Adoption Order is granted there is an absolute finality to the match of child and family. IRO's felt it is critical to double check and address any identified difficulties at this time to give the best chance possible to a successful outcome. Broken down into three distinct areas.

1. Checking placement is working
2. Ensuring reflection on key areas that can disrupt a placement
3. Clarity regarding Post Adoption Issues

### 1. Checking placement is working

IRO's felt they should be looking at the interactions between the adopters and child and the quality of the relationship. This involves reflecting on the introductions, how day to day routines are working and all parties feelings about the placement. Where possible this should include observations of the interactions between carers and child. How evidence has been collected, who has visited and observed.

Further to direct interaction, it was felt there needs to be an understanding of the Adopters expectations, are they realistic ? And what support continues to be available for example the interaction of extended family. Have they **all** the information about the child and family and understand the implications and challenges long term that may present.

Beyond the familial support and immediate professional support. IRO's should check that they have access to support by access to other adopters. Also they remain aware of the stresses and strains of contested adoptions.

Ultimately that Post Adoptions needs are **fully discussed** prior to Final Hearing and that any difficulties where possible are resolved. Essential to this is reflecting on areas that can critically disrupt a placement.

### 2. Ensuring Reflection on key areas that can disrupt a placement

Critical issues to look for ;

- ◇ Poor Attachments
- ◇ Contact post adoption—Life story work, facebook and twitter
- ◇ Child's perception of journey
- ◇ Behavioural / Emotional Issues
- ◇ Not having the right preparation / planning / support

# Pre Adoptive Placements

Continued.....

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## 2. Ensuring Reflection on key areas that can disrupt a placement ( Cont.)

- ◇ Mismatch of expectations
- ◇ Aggression towards siblings / pets
- ◇ Extended Families Views
- ◇ Lack of therapeutic support

## 3. Clarity regarding Post Adoption Issues

IRO's felt that what should be openly discussed having considered the above two elements during the period prior to adoption should explore what happens post adoption. The following was outlined.

- ◇ What professional support will be available
- ◇ Define what therapeutic services should continue to be provided, the financial support to provide it—Adoption Support Fund
- ◇ Ensure Adopters are aware and access the Pupil Premium
- ◇ Clearly define post adoption contact - trial it prior to final order and test out if it will work
- ◇ Provide support in a clearly defined Post Adoption Plan

It was felt that having these recommendations for further work will provide confidence to the carers in managing challenges they may face and by clearly defining what should happen supports provision of services in a timely way and reduce the likelihood of breakdown.



## Exit Planning.

As well as part of the Care Planning and transitioning young people to adults.

Equally for younger children an assessment process is usually undertaken and reviewed prior to a return home.

However recent guidance emphasizes the importance for safe management of children and young people leaving care and therefore was explored as part of the workshop.



The IRO's recognized that there are a number of routes that children and young people exit care such as SGO's and Adoption or leave at 18 when they become adults however the group explored key elements to consider based on the new statutory guidance issued this year.

### Planning in respect of younger children

IRO's felt that there should be an expectation where permanency has not been established or in long term fostering the child's position as part of the Reviewing process and family circumstances should be constantly under review.

Where at later dates viability to return home is possible or the Care Plan is a return home IRO's felt the requirement placed upon them is to scrutinize assessments and link to the child's wishes and feelings. Therefore the request in the first instance should be that robust assessments are presented and scrutinized regarding the viability. Proposals presented should be detailed in the transition process and a clear analysis of needs upon leaving care.

The recommendation therefore in respect of Exit Reviews is that a focus should be on a very clear and robust step down process where a Child in Need Plan is agreed and support is assured to ensure a successful return home. This requires attendance and assurances that all professionals are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

IRO's as part of the Review process will also need to check that financial commitments of the support package is approved and that the 'nominated officer' has either approved the move in principal or is presented with the plan for approval.

Clear and detailed examination is required before the IRO should end their responsibility and includes chairing a meeting and ensure plans are in place should the child cease being looked after unexpectedly.

### Planning in respect of young people 16 - 18

IRO's acknowledge the same principal's apply for young people in this age group that a robust and detailed plan should be in place, through the use of Pathway Planning and allocated Personal Advisor. Support should be clearly defined and financial implications also explored.

However the only additional change is that the new statutory guidance requires the Care Plan and support plan to be submitted to DCS for approval and agreement for a young person to leave care. The Young Persons view is central to inform planning.

It was acknowledged however this is an area of current development and IRO's felt authorities will need to explore processes in detail to ensure the application of safe management is robust.

# Continue to Move Forward

The IRO Regional Management Group would like to thank all contributors the Workshops this year. It has been a revitalized approach recognizing some of the challenges in identifying relevant and helpful training, which will assist development and enhance practice.

Feedback from these sessions have been to date extremely positive and working with colleagues across the authorities has been universally received as helpful and enriching. The Management Group is committed to continuing to develop this opportunity and would continue to encourage all IRO's to attend and contribute.

## The Next Event

**8th September 2015**

**Child Participation & Inclusion**

## East Midlands Partners

The Workshop involved partnership working between the following Local Authorities

**Derby City**

**Derbyshire**

**Leicester City**

**Leicestershire**

**Lincolnshire**

**Northamptonshire**

**Nottingham City**

**Nottinghamshire**

**Rutland**

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