



# **Kent Foster Care Association**

## **Transition to Independence KFCA Project 2011**

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## **Introduction**

The Kent Foster Care Association (KFCA) undertakes to carry out one project per year looking at specific areas of fostering LAC. Our project for 2011 is the Transition to Independence.

### *Objectives*

Our objective is to examine the processes around the move towards independence, identify the weak points and look for practical and realistic ways to reduce the problems and improve outcomes for LAC.

- We aim to provide foster carers with more information on what services are available and how to access them.
- Identify the legal framework for LAC leaving care with particular emphasis on the recent changes to legislation.
- Review training available to foster carers.
- Discuss problem areas with the appropriate service providers in KCC.
- Identify those areas where there is scope for improvement and note the steps currently being taken to improve the service.
- Identify and make recommendations on areas where we would like to see improvements made. We aim to be practical and maintain realistic expectations given the current economic environment while striving to make significant steps towards improving the transition to independence for LAC.

### *Project Process*

To kick start the project, we made it an agenda item at the KFCA Foster Carers Conference in March 2011. We outlined the objectives of the project and asked foster carers to contribute to the aims of the project and identify areas they would like to be addressed.

We ran workshops with carers in each of the 4 areas to achieve a greater understanding of the issues perceived.

We attended a Fostering Network Conference on Supported Lodgings and Staying put.

We attended a KCC conference on Narrowing the Gap for LAC.

A KFCA representative has been appointed to the Corporate Parenting working group which is part of the KCC improvement initiatives.

We have met with managers from the Catch22 and Connexions to gain a better understanding of the services and plans for improvements already in process.

We plan to hold a conference on 18 January 2012 to bring together the foster carers and the service providers addressing the findings, recommendations and changes taking place.

We will then place our final report on the KFCA website.

## Key Recommendations

Now is a period of time when many changes are taking place within the care sector and budgets are strained but we believe there are a few areas where we need to focus our attention if we are to improve the outcome for LAC.

- The most vulnerable young people are those with learning difficulties or emotional development issues that do not qualify for adult services. They are often not ready for independence at 18. We need to target this group to ensure they have the support they require to move into independence successfully when they are ready.
- We also see far too many young care leavers becoming pregnant before they are mature enough to cope with parenting.
- Many of our young care leavers drop out of education and fall into the habit of alcohol and/or drugs often leading to other activities that bring them to the attention of the police.

1) We are especially concerned about the YP with emotional or special needs who are liable to have difficulties living independently. We recommend that KCC investigates a “Staying Put” policy that would enable those YP identified as unprepared for independence to remain with foster carers beyond 18 years of age. The policy needs to consider the foster carers position for payment of fees, taxation and benefits. No carer should be expected to incur financial hardship for continuing to provide care to the YP.

2) When young people are moved to supported lodgings, attendance at college (or other education) often becomes sporadic or they drop out. All YP should have the option of completing their education year before moving to other accommodation even when they have reached 18 years of age.

3) Following a long term placement when a young person is moved to alternative accommodation, wherever possible, this should be in the same area as the foster placement to enable the young person to maintain contact with the foster family and friends.

4) The transition to independent living should be made easier with ‘taster’ weeks leading up to the transition enabling both the YP to gain experience and to identify areas of training for the YP that should be dealt with. A more flexible approach could be considered where the young person could return to the previous foster home for weekends or holidays.

When independent living is not progressing well, we could offer the young person respite with the foster family to allow a period of recovery and further planning.

We further recommend that the YP coming from stable placements should continue to be included in foster home activities and celebrations including holidays. To enable this inclusion we recommend a discretionary fund of about £500 for the first year, controlled by

the social worker and paid to foster family. For those YP with special needs the LA could consider extending this for addition year(s).

5) We need to establish/expand schemes to encourage employment. We currently place more emphasis on accessing the benefit system than we do on achieving constructive employment. At a much earlier age we should be encouraging a work ethics, thinking with the young person about what they need to do to improve their attraction to employers. Areas such as encouraging children to take part in the Prince's Trust, volunteering or part time employment should be encouraged.

6) We need to ensure appropriate YP training in independence skills is provided in the foster home. From an early age, the child should be encouraged to take part in house hold chores and responsibilities. Budgeting is a real area of concern and more effort needs to be extended to ensure the YP acquire appropriate skills. We probably need to address independence training more formally (and from an earlier age) with the supervising social worker checking on foster carers and the IRO checking on progress. Training for foster carers should be reviewed for adequacy in this area.

7) Early pregnancy of girls leaving the care system is considered to be the result of emotional issues (need to be loved) rather than lack of information on birth control. Often these YP are not able to care for themselves let alone a baby. We would recommend a program of hard hitting factual training for the YP covering sex, birth control, relationships, self esteem, emotional maturity, baby care, sources of help, etc. be introduced.

Foster carers are generally aware of risk taking behaviour and should make more use of the LAC Nurses who are more than willing to assist. Attendance at LAC Health Assessments is important and carers should ensure that this takes place.

8) We need to place emphasis on foster carers helping the LAC achieve self confidence and self esteem during their period in care. Carers should make this a priority as it will build the resilience to help cope during transitions. Taking part in out of school activities is one good way of improving self confidence and carers need to take advantage of community activities (scouts, guides, cadets etc) and address other ways to build confidence. Find an activity the child enjoys and encourage this.

9) When a LAC manages to reach university, we should celebrate this achievement and not make life difficult. Too often the YP and/or foster carer have to fight the system to enable the YP to get the support they require particularly around accommodation with foster family during university holiday periods. The numbers involved are small and the LA would not be financially stressed to ensure that positive support is made available.

We also need to ensure carers are aware of organisations such as Aim Higher who are there to assist.

## **KFCA Workshops Findings**

### *Timing and Process of Leaving Care*

The process of leaving care begins when the child approaches his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. A Pathways Plan is prepared and the social worker that supported the child hands over to a new social worker on the 16+ Team. A new Placement Plan is drawn up between the LAC, foster carer, supervising social worker and 16+ social worker. A prerequisite for this is the child must have a passport, a national insurance number and a current bank account.

Foster carers note that many young people find the move to 16+ stressful with a change in social worker and change in emphasis towards leaving care. Some of the problems are historical from the time when children would leave care at 16 and not all the people the children are in contact with are aware of current legislation and processes. However, these changes can come at the critical stage in the young person's education when they are facing GCSE exams.

### **Recommendations**

- We need to ensure that the young person's routines are not unduly upset by the change in status and move to 16+. This needs to take into account the young persons vulnerability and the education pressures.
- We need to ensure that all concerned are aware of what and why the changes are and how they will be introduced.
- Timing of the move to 16+ should be delayed if exams are immanent.

### *Pathway Plan*

When a child reaches 16 a Pathway Plan is produced. It identifies the advice, assistance and support the child will need based on the needs assessment contained in the Care Plan. The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 lays out the Regulation and Guidance. It states that responsible authority should take into account:

- The child's health and development.
- The child's need for education, training or employment.
- The support available to the child from his family and other relationships.
- The child's financial needs.
- The extent to which the child possesses the practical and other skills necessary for independent living;
- The child's needs for care, support and accommodation.

The corporate parent must take into account the views of the child and the foster carer as well as birth family and others involved in supporting the child when preparing a Pathway Plan. The plan should cover the period until the young person is 21 years old and beyond when the young person is in education or training.

The Pathway Plan should be regularly updated to reflect changes in circumstances.

## **Recommendations**

The Pathway Plan is an important document which lays out the services and support to be made available and the young person's plans for the future. We need to ensure that such plans are of sufficient quality and depth to meet the current and future requirements of the young person. We should be particularly diligent when there are special needs involved. The plans need to be regularly updated and discussed with the young person to ensure understanding. In some cases we need to improve the quality of these documents. We must ensure that the YP understands their options and the plan.

### *Supported Lodgings*

Foster carers note that there is a variable quality of support available in Supported Lodgings and that there are insufficient lodgings available in some areas.

We note that some supported lodgings' agreements specifically lay out the support required for an individual child and records are kept. In other establishments there is not even full time support available and it would be better classed as bed and breakfast. (From discussions with Catch22, we understand that these establishments are probably private and not part of the 16+ provision).

Applications to become a person providing supported lodgings can take a considerable time to be processed.

We also note that there is a high level of drop out of education following a move to supported lodgings. To move a YP as soon as they reach 18 years of age causes major disruption to their continual education/training or work placement.

Providing Supported Lodgings are considered one way of allowing the YP to remain with the fostering family. However, many foster carers are entirely dependent on income from fostering for their livelihood and due to the reduce rates for provision of supported lodgings as well as significant tax and benefit issues, they are not in a position to offer to extend this facility to children who are not ready to move on or want to remain as part of the family. Another issue highlighted is when other children are fostered, it creates inappropriate differences between status and financial benefit for the young person.

There are income tax and benefit regulations to be considered and these have recently changed and are likely to have further changes once the Universal Credit is introduced in 2013.

## **Recommendations**

- Any move to supported lodgings or other provision should not take place until after the school/education year have been completed when they are 18.
- Supported lodgings should always be provided in the area the child has been in placement (unless they prefer elsewhere) to enable continued contact with carer and friends and allows the child to be in an area they are familiar with.
- We have heard of one LA which provides the young person with a 3 week taster of supported lodgings. The taster is used as a means of establishing how well the YP is

equipped for independence and gives the YP a chance to experience independence. It is an idea that would be worth exploring in Kent. (See Right2BCared4 Interim Report<sup>1</sup>).

### *Foster Carers Providing Care Leavers Support*

Care orders end when the child reaches 18 years of age. If they are not in education, they are expected to leave foster care. Some children will return to birth families, others move on to some sort of supported lodgings.

We should note that the average age of children leaving their parental home is reported as 24 years of age. The parental home remains a base for these young people to return home and to obtain support for many years afterwards. Parents do not generally cut their ties with their children at the age of 18. This fallback position is usually not available to LAC. Their bedroom is made available to another foster placement and they may have nowhere to call 'home'.

When a foster carer and the young person have built up a lasting relationship this moving on is upsetting for all concerned. Many foster carers would like to be able to (and often do) offer longer term support to the young person. Many of us will continue to treat the young person as an extended family member welcoming them at family celebrations and Sunday dinners etc. Some of us carry this much further providing financial and other support to the young person.

Most foster carers' livelihood is dependent on their income from fostering – they cannot afford to leave a bedroom empty. We also consider ourselves to be professional foster carers and cannot be expected to act as a charity – many just cannot afford it.

We also feel strongly that in the early period of independence that the young person needs the support of a family and often the foster carer is the only family these children have.

We should consider making it easier for foster carers to provide continued care in some form of supported lodgings; this requires a more in-depth understanding of the tax and benefit issues.

### **Recommendation**

Financial support (termed a transitional fund) is provided for the first year of independence. The suggested approach is that a discretionary allowance of about £500 is made available to the social worker to control and distribute to the foster carer to enable the young person to take part in family holidays, birthday and Christmas presents, continuation of family leisure activities or hobbies, etc. This could be restricted to those LAC who have been in final placement for at least 2 years. It would be available for one year except for the most vulnerable children with special needs where this could be extended at the LA's discretion.

### **Staying Put**

The government initiated a pilot program allowing children to stay with foster carers beyond 18. The Staying Put initiative, which is part of the Care Matters reform program ran in 11

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<sup>1</sup> Right2BCared4 Interim Report: <https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DFE-RB031.pdf>

areas and was due to end on March 2011. The final report is due in October 2011 but an interim report has been published<sup>2</sup>. Each area developed their own process for implementing the pilot but the objective was to replicate the experiences of young people in the general population in allowing young people to remain with foster carers until they were ready to leave. There were a range of financial arrangements utilized but the financial basis ensured the carers were in a position to continue caring for the child.

HM Revenue & Customs introduced tax relief for shared lives carers which include staying put carers based on the existing foster care relief. Note that this is not applicable when the YP is in receipt of housing benefit which is standard practice once the YP reaches 18 resulting in carers not being able to benefit.

### **Shared Lives**

Similar to Staying Put above, Shared Lives schemes have been introduced to allow adults to remain with foster carers. Generally, this is introduced for those young people with special needs or disabilities who are moving to Adult Services. Taxation relief is as per Staying Put.

### **Recommendations**

When a young person leaves care, the foster carer should be enabled to provide a level of continual support to the young person. This should include:

- 1) If the young person fails to thrive in supported lodgings they may be allowed to return to the foster home for a period to regain some stability and allow further planning / support to be put in place. Likewise the young person should be able to ask for 'respite' to enable them to return to the foster home for short periods.
- 2) KCC to investigate a Staying Put policy particularly for the most vulnerable young people which would enable young people to stay with foster carers beyond 18 years of age. The financial impact needs to be evaluated against cost of supported lodging while at the same time evaluating benefits to the young person. The government's interim report indicates that the young people are Staying Put for a relatively short period. We can also expect most LAC will not want to Stay Put and this will reduce the financial implications.

### *Vulnerable LAC Leaving Care*

Some LAC have a developmental age far below their chronological age. They tend to be very vulnerable. In the ideal world we would not consider these YP for leaving care until they were ready and had the skills to cope with independence. The reality is that many of these YP will go on to reinforce the statistics on prison populations, homeless, drugs, early pregnancy etc. It is this group that should be targeted with a Staying Put policy enabling them to stay in care until they are better prepared.

A particularly vulnerable group of young people are those with mild learning difficulties who fall beneath the adult criteria for receiving services, and who may not be developmentally ready to move on at the age of 18 or even 21. Many of these young people may not be formally recognised as having a disability; they may not have a statement of special

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn\\_id=2008\\_0115](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0115)

educational needs, for instance, or have been on the special needs register at school. Consequently, when the time comes for them to move into adult services there is little provision or support available for them.

This group will often lack the skills and confidence to gain and retain employment.

### *LAC Attending University*

Kent has 55 LAC attending university. We encourage YP to go onto further education and should be celebrating their success. Unlike 'normal' families, the young care leavers often do not have a birth family behind them to offer support. They need a place to call home and a place to come home to and this will usually be their long term foster family.

Often foster carer's cannot keep beds open for the YP who has left. We have discussed and would encourage carers who want to be able to have the YP to come home to them, to arrange with Fostering to use the room for respite purposes leaving it available for planned university holidays.

We have heard where the foster carer is not allowed to provide paid respite for the YP at university as their accommodation at university is paid for via social services creating double payments.

We heard many instances of carers having to 'fight' to get paid for placement.

### **Recommendations:**

- KCC to provide appropriate storage for YP belongings while at university if the foster carer does not have the space and intend to use the bed for respite during term time.
- KCC should offer the university attending YP the opportunity to spend holiday periods with the previous foster carer and the foster carer should be paid normal rates for age.
- KCC Fostering to be flexible to enable university placements to return to the foster home during holiday periods. This may be by using the 'bed' as planned respite placement during term time.
- The Pathway Plan must make adequate allowance for holiday periods. With so few LAC reaching university, we should be doing our utmost to support their continuation not making it necessary to have to challenge the system to get the support needed.

### *LAC Joining Armed Forces*

We understand that when an YP leaves care to join the armed forces the care order is revoked.

These YP need a family to support them just as much as the university leavers and they need a place to come home to. In the early period of armed forces, they will also need storage of personal belongings.

### **Recommendations:**

The leave from armed forces is much less than the university holiday period but will still need to cover annual leave of about 6 weeks including Christmas and summers. The YP should be able to return to the foster family as a normal YP would return to their parental

home. The foster carer should receive appropriate payment. We should allow these YP the same benefits that those attending further education get.

### *Benefits versus Employment*

We want to see more care leavers employed and not on benefits. Carers need to encourage a work ethic that the child may not be familiar with. We recognise that some of our LAC come from a background of benefit dependent families; we need to break this cycle.

We also recognise that many of the LAC lack the social skills and self confidence to obtain work. Many of these children fall into the trap of drugs, booze and legal problems – again we want to break this cycle.

We know that Connections do a good job in helping to find courses for YP to enable them to achieve work but we need to go further; we need more help in getting employment for school leavers.

### **Recommendations:**

- For those children who lack the self esteem or social skills to be able to obtain employment on their own initiative, we would like to see local employers working with KCC/Connections/Catch22. A small number of work positions would be open to these YP for a period of 1 year. The employer would need to work closely with the social worker and foster carer to ensure the YP has the support and supervision necessary. The employer would be expected to make more allowance than normal for this employee. Such a scheme would get the YP work experience and build on their confidence.
- Encourage more volunteering as it does provide work routines and helps on the CV.
- All care leavers should have support to work whether this is providing transport, clothes, or other – we must ensure no obstacles are there.

### *LAC Early Pregnancy*

We recognise that many of the YP from care go on to become young mothers at a time when they are not yet able to care for themselves let alone a baby. We do note that often this is done with intent as opposed to accident as the YP emotional needs lead them to want someone to love and be loved by. Also noteworthy is the promise of accommodation if you have a child. Some carers also have noted that the YP enjoys the attentions of the professionals during pregnancy and there is a community of young mothers.

Despite these underlying reasons for early pregnancy, we see how this affects the life chances of the young people and feel more needs to be done to encourage responsible approach to parenthood. We also note that many of the babies are taken into the care system when the mothers cannot cope.

### **Recommendations:**

- 1) We must do more to prevent early pregnancy in young care leavers. We are suggesting some hard hitting education for the YP aimed particularly around relationships, emotional

attachments, effects of alcohol, sexual diseases, birth control. Consideration should be given to making these available from as young as 10 or 11. Discussions with LAC nurses were very helpful and they would enthusiastically support such an initiative.

2) More attention needs to be paid by foster carers, IRO, and social workers to self esteem and confidence building from a young age.

3) Foster carers should make use of the LAC Nurses when they see risk taking behaviour. The nurses are well equipped to advise the carer and work directly with the child.

### *Booze, Drugs, and Legal Problems*

Too many YP slip into the world of booze, drugs and legal problems when they leave care. We must do more to help prevent and when it does happen we must help them get off this wagon.

We believe the lack of employment and the tendency to drop out of college when they move to supported lodging is the underlying cause. The young people are not ready for independent living and take advantage of the freedom or slack boundaries in a negative way. Some of the other recommendations for Staying Put etc may help prevent some of the drop out rate but we need to ensure these young people have the appropriate level of support.

### **Recommendations**

1) Consider KCC running group sessions for young people prior to leaving care aimed at preventing this downward spiral.

2) When it is recognised that the young person is vulnerable to become involved in drugs or booze, more social worker support and 'hard hitting' educational material should be put in place.

3) We must also recognise that some young people do not want the help that is available already. We might consider group sessions to ensure the young person does not feel singled out and the group would give them a sense of identity and they would gain peer support.

### *Mental Health Services*

Historically there has been no provision for CAMHS services for 16 and 17 year old LAC in parts of Kent. Kent Corporate Parenting Group is currently working to right this and changes are taking place. We also note that the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is now going to be used to give an early warning of emotional problems. Note that there is a poor rate of return of these forms foster carers are asked to fill in which must be improved on. Some of the LAC do not have the emotional development to enable them to manage leaving care successfully.

We note that many young people are more concerned with peer status than other areas of their life. We have noted that some YP will refuse to attend CAMHS due to the label of 'mental'. One idea being put forward is to provide group therapy for some YP aimed at building emotional intelligence/maturity, self esteem and preparation for adulthood. By using a group (in a setting without a sign including the word 'mental') the YP may gain peer acceptance and support which would be valuable.

### **Recommendations**

Foster Carers need to be made aware of the use of SDQ and be told they must complete this form.

Consider the provision of group therapy for teens to improve emotional intelligence/maturity, self esteem and preparation for adulthood.

### *Supporting Care Leavers*

Young people placed out of borough often have to move back to the area they came from, although they may have limited connections there. This can restrict contact with their former foster carers and other support networks who could offer some continued support.

There is a lack of recognition of and support for the ongoing help many foster carers already provide to young people post-18.

We hear many accounts of poor relationships between care leavers and social workers.

### *Foster Carers Role*

The new National Standards include Standard 12 – Promoting independence and moves to adulthood and leaving care. It states:

**Outcome:** Children are prepared for, and supported into, adulthood so that they can reach their potential and achieve economic wellbeing.

12.1) Children are supported to:

- a. establish positive and appropriate social and sexual relationships;
- b. develop positive self-esteem and emotional resilience;
- c. prepare for the world of work and or further or higher education;
- d. prepare for moving into their own accommodation;
- e. develop practical skills, including shopping, buying, cooking and keeping food, washing clothes, personal self-care, and understanding and taking responsibility for personal healthcare;
- f. develop financial capability, knowledge and skills;
- g. know about entitlements to financial and other support after leaving care, including benefits and support from social care services.

12.2) Foster carers contribute to the development of each child's care plan, in collaboration with the child, including the pathway plan for an "eligible" child, and work collaboratively with the young person's social worker or personal adviser in implementing the plan.

12.3) The fostering service ensures there are comprehensive arrangements for preparing and supporting young people to make the transition to independence. This includes appropriate training and support to foster carers caring for young people who are approaching adulthood. Arrangements are consistent with the young person's care plan, including their placement plan, pathway plan and transition plan for children with disabilities and special educational needs.

12.4) The fostering service has a policy and practical arrangements which enable children to remain with their foster carer(s) into legal adulthood, for example so that s/he may develop appropriate life skills before being required to move to more independent accommodation. Any such decisions are agreed with foster carers at a placement meeting and are detailed in a child's placement plan.

The new National Standards emphasize the role of the foster carer in planning for the child. It also clearly lays out the need to improve the YP training for adulthood in key areas. This training in life skills needs to start at an early age and the foster carer must be prepared to put considerable planning and attention to detail in achieving this. It cannot wait until a child is 16+; from a much earlier age the child should be involved in household chores. Every child is different and we therefore need to plan for each child.

### **Recommendations**

- IRO should be prepared to question independence training progress.
- Supervising social workers should discuss training needs with the carer and C&F should be noting the progress being made.
- Foster carers should ensure they have had appropriate training.

### *Self Esteem & Resilience*

Very often when a YP fails to achieve employment or falls into the trap of drugs and booze it is because they lack the self esteem and confidence to seek the employment or assert themselves.

While there is practical help available to prepare CV's, interview techniques, etc.; the YP lacks the social skills to actually put this training into practice.

Younger LAC will benefit from joining clubs and other out of school activities and should be encouraged to do so. Self esteem and resilience should be part of every carers training.

### *Taxation and Benefits*

From April 2010 there are changes from the Inland Revenue which need to be considered. In conjunction with the government led Staying Put pilot, these changes enable those foster carers to continue to care for a young person between 18 and 21 years of age to benefit from the Qualifying Care Relief Tax rules as per foster carers. For the most vulnerable young person who may become an adult placement the Shared Lives scheme enables the tax benefit to continue.

Those people who provide supported lodgings to those LAC up to 21 years of age (and the host has been assessed under Schedule 3) the same tax benefits apply. If the host has not been Schedule 3 assessed, then the tax rule for rent a room is used eg. a tax relief of £4250 a year is allowed.

The benefit issues for supported lodgings are complex. If the YP is a 'relevant child' (former foster child) under the Qualifying Care Relief tax rules and pre 18, the payments are disregarded in terms of benefit income. For those with YP post 18, the payments are disregarded if no housing benefit is claimed by the YP. This rule related to claiming housing benefit is a major problem preventing carers from providing Staying Put or Supported Lodgings. Currently, when a child reaches 18, they are placed on housing benefit which pays part of the supported lodgings payment. This prevents the carer from claiming the tax benefit and if the carer is on benefits, these will be effected. It is hoped that the government will

make changes following the publication of the final Staying Put Pilot Report – the issue is one of which budget the money comes from but has serious implications to carers.

When the Universal Credit is introduced in 2013 which will consolidate benefit payments, then the rules may well change.

### *Legislation*

The primary legislation covering this area are:

- Children Act 1989/2004
- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children & Young Persons Act 2008
- European Convention on Human Rights

### *Statutory Guidance*

- Fostering Services (England) Regulations 2011
- Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards
- Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010
- Sufficiency: Statutory Guidance on Securing Sufficient Accommodation for LAC (2010)
- Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010

The new Fostering Services: National Minimum Standards places the child's welfare at the centre of the standards. Foster carers are to be recognised as core members of the team working with the child.

The Fostering Network has produced a new book titled "All you need to know: Fostering Regulations, Guidance & NMS 2011(England)". It is a summary of the major legislative issues and standards.

## **Catch22 / 16+**

We need first to thank Sue Clifton of Catch22 for giving us her time to enable a better understanding of the organisation and services provided by Catch22.

### *Catch22 Organisation*

Catch22 is a national charity which KCC have contracted to provide the 16+ service to Kent LAC. Some people may remember them under the name Rainer; a new name but the same group. This group have been providing services to Kent for 12 years.

Catch22 has 3 sites in Kent with their main office at the Ashford Family Centre in Godfrey Walk, Ashford. Also in Ashford at the Invicta Business Centre is the Housing Support team. There are offices in Hearn Bay and Swanley.

Each of the 3 areas (Ashford for Mid Kent; Hearn Bay for East Kent; and Swanley for West Kent) has a team leader, social workers for the LAC and case workers for those the 18 to 21 year olds. In addition there are 4 accommodation officers. Catch22 have their own mental health worker on their team. They work closely with Connections.

These teams are supporting 700 young people in Kent e.g. those LAC 16 to 21 years old (24 if in higher education).

### *Supported Lodgings*

Catch22 manages the supported lodgings on behalf of KCC. There are currently 145 supported lodgings. Those people who undertake to provide supported lodgings are recruited and assessed to Schedule 3 standards (the same as foster carers). They have training similar to foster carers including NVQ3. There are support groups. There are annual health and safety checks.

The people who provide supported lodgings are paid £190 per week for each placement, £40 of which is provided as rent. If meals are provided they are paid an additional £20 per week and the young person is expected to pay £5 a week towards utilities. The young people are expected to be provided with a minimum of 14 hours a week support.

In exceptional circumstances such as the more vulnerable young people, these rates may be increased based on the assessment of needs.

### *Transition to Leaving Care*

From the young persons 15<sup>th</sup> birthday, a 16+ social worker will attend the Statutory Reviews. Within 3 months of the young persons 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, the 16+ social worker will take over from the Children & Families social worker in providing the support to the young person.

The YP has the right to stay with the foster family until they are 18 years of age when they leave the care system. Some may choose to leave before this and 16+ will provide the supported lodging accommodation until they are 18. At 18 years of age those who are still in education can be provided with supported lodgings until they are 21 years old (24 for those who are in higher education).

### *Foster Carers Providing Supported Lodgings*

For continuity for the YP, 16+ may offer the foster family the opportunity to provide the supported lodgings for the YP who is 18 years of age. As the YP is no longer in the care system, the foster family will be paid at the current rate for supported lodgings (currently £190 per week). There are significant tax and benefit issues to be considered. The foster carer will not have the same tax benefits as they do for foster children if the child is provided with

housing benefit. The only tax provision will be the 'rent a room' tax deductible (currently £4250 per year); income above this will be taxable. Benefits will be impacted.

### *Higher Education Post 18*

During the first year of university, the YP who has been in foster care will be provided with accommodation in the university residence; thereafter they will be entitled to supported lodgings.

The YP will be given £500 towards the cost of books plus a once off £2000 bursary. Many universities will have additional bursaries for YP who have come from foster care. The YP must fund their own course at university via the bursaries and student loans.

There is the potential for the YP to have their university holidays with the previous foster carer if the foster carer will accept supported accommodation status and pay.

### *Homeless 16 & 17 Year Olds*

In April 2010, the government issued new guidance<sup>3</sup> on providing accommodation for homeless 16 and 17 year old young people. Under this guidance those young people of this age group who have nowhere safe to stay will be classed as looked after under section 20.

In Kent, this brought an additional 53 young people into the care system in the last year that have required supported lodgings. Catch22 will work with the young people to try and bring reconciliation with their families while ensuring they have safe accommodation.

## **Connexions**

Connexions services are viewed by both foster carers and young people very positively.

We met with Hazel Solly and Mair Dyer to discuss the services available to LAC in Kent. Previously, Connexions was funded via the central government but this has now become a function of the local authority. There has been some restructuring with a resulting lost of 60 staff. While Connexions has a major role in career advice in schools and colleges (referred to as career specialist), about 50% of the staff work directly with the vulnerable groups such as LAC and young offenders under the Intensive Support Services.

Connexions work with young people until they reach 19 years of age; 25 for those with learning difficulties or disability; 21 for educational issues. *Note that the group defined as having learning difficulties are those with a Statement of Special Needs. Given that it is now more difficult to get a SEN statement generated, this can prevent those with milder forms of learning difficulties from accessing the service post 19.*

We have been given the following brief description of the activities of the Connexions Kent Personal Advisers:

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.proceduresonline.com/enfield/pdfs/provision\\_accom\\_hmls\\_16\\_17.pdf](http://www.proceduresonline.com/enfield/pdfs/provision_accom_hmls_16_17.pdf)

- Connexions Kent provides a service to young people aged 13-19 years old. It also supports young people up to the age of 25 who have a learning difficulty or disability.
- Connexions Kent provides an integrated and impartial approach to guiding and supporting young people through their teenage years.
- Any information shared with a Personal Adviser is dealt with in confidence. Connexions Kent will not share this information with any other agencies unless we believe that what they have told us could put them or someone else at risk, or if it would help or be of benefit to the young person, such as a job or training opportunity.
- All young people within this age group, including those who are Looked After Children and Care Leavers, have access to the universal services provided by Connexions Kent.
- In addition the Connexions service has nominated LAC Personal Advisers (PAs) who work closely with each of the three teams within the VSK (Virtual School Kent) in order to provide a dedicated service to this group of young people.
- These PAs have a key role in ensuring that the service to LAC and the VSK works effectively by brokering their knowledge across the wider Connexions Service.
- They develop effective links with Connexions PAs in the twelve Locality based teams within Kent and colleagues within other priority group teams as appropriate.
- They are responsible for reporting to the VSK on the outcomes of referrals, ensuring intervention is undertaken in a timely fashion and informing of progress against agreed actions.
- The LAC PAs are supported by a Team Leader with responsibility for the operational management of the services provided by Connexions Kent to LAC and Care Leavers.

### **Universal Services:**

This includes impartial IAG<sup>4</sup> to young people on career options, finding work, staying on in education, training/Apprenticeships, volunteering, managing money, benefits as well as issues affecting a young person's health and emotional well being. This is delivered by a combination of face to face interviews, group work and signposting to information.

### **Targeted / Intensive Support:**

In addition to the universal services referral can be made to the Intensive Support Service. This is delivered by individual work with those young people facing multiple barriers to achieving their potential and planning/supporting them at transition periods. It includes the use of focused support and tracking of key targets, including attendance at IAG (Information, Advice & Guidance) interviews, September Guarantee<sup>5</sup> and the use of the Six Session Approach for face to face work. This approach involves clear action planning and regular review of progress with the young person in order that work undertaken provides results which improve outcomes for the young person.

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<sup>4</sup> Information, Advice & Guidance

<sup>5</sup> The September Guarantee is a commitment that every Year 11 learner will be supported into an offer of an appropriate learning programme (with a school, college, work-based learning provider or employer) or employment by the end of September after the completion of year 11.

The Personal Adviser working with the young person may be a dedicated LAC PA or it may be a colleague from one of the other priority groups ( YOT <sup>6</sup> / Health / LDD <sup>7</sup> ). This is determined by the primary need for the young person at the time of referral and reviewed as necessary.

## **Aim Higher**

Aim Higher is a national program aimed at widening participation in UK higher education for specific groups including LAC. It was initiated in 2004 by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) now the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) working with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

Kent and Medway have a Aim Higher organisation which works in partnership with Connexions and the new Virtual School Kent to specifically target those LAC learners with the potential to benefit from higher education. Their aspiration raising activities and mentoring programmes aim to encourage able young people to continue in education post 16. They can provide assistance in achieving bursaries for university and providing a wide range of information.

Aimhigher have produced “ A Guide to Further and Higher Education for Young People Leaving Care in Kent and Medway”<sup>8</sup>.

The Aimhigher Summer School programme aims to give young people a taste of university life that will help them decide whether to apply to university and what to study. There are 14 universities / university colleges across the south East region offering 2 to 6 day residential courses designed to give learners from years 10 to 12 the opportunity to experience university life at first hand. All course and travel costs, meals and accommodation are provided free. Until recently designated teachers have been limited to primary schools and high schools. Aim Higher have worked with other service providers to develop a scheme whereby each further and higher education institution in Kent and Medway will designate and train at least one member of staff to support care leavers.

## **Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team**

LAC are at higher risk than others of adopting risk taking behaviour including the use of drugs, alcohol and offending. Kent Drug and Alcohol Action Team (KCA) aim to help young people to choose not to misuse drugs and alcohol so that they can achieve their full potential in society, particularly those most vulnerable and at risk. They have a number of programmes across Kent that support, educate, and prevent alcohol and drug misuse plus specialist treatment where required. There are advisers who work with schools to make sure young people can make informed choices and understand the risks associated with drug and alcohol use.

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<sup>6</sup> YOT – Youth Offending Team

<sup>7</sup> LDD - ???

<sup>8</sup>

<http://www.aimhigherkentandmedway.org/Resources/Aimhigher%20Kent%20and%20Medway/PDF%20Documents/AimHigher%20YCL%20bookletWEB.pdf>

For further information see their website: [www.kdaat.co.uk](http://www.kdaat.co.uk) .

### *Payment by Results Pilot in Kent*

Payment by Results (PbR) for drug and alcohol recovery is a national initiative being piloted by the Department of Health and National Treatment Agency (NTA). In April 2011 Kent was one of eight areas selected to pilot PbR over the next two years.

Information on this pilot can be found on

[http://www.kdaat.co.uk/developments/payment\\_by\\_results.aspx](http://www.kdaat.co.uk/developments/payment_by_results.aspx)

This appears to be aimed at adults only.

### *Young Persons' Drug and Alcohol Use Screening Tool (DUST)*

DUST is a paper based screening tool being introduced to identify where young people are misusing drugs or alcohol.

### *Talk To Frank*

Talk to Frank is a web site ([www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)) with comprehensive information on drugs and information on support services. It is aimed at the young person as well as the parent or carer who is worried about drug usage.

## Links and Publications

### **Ten Top Tips for Preparing Care Leavers** by Henrietta Bond

Book available from BAAF ([www.baaf.org.uk](http://www.baaf.org.uk)) aimed at the social worker or similar role.

### **The Leaving Care Handbook:** helping and supporting care leavers by Ann Wheal.

A handbook for anyone working in the area of leaving care. Available to purchase from [www.russellhouse.co.uk](http://www.russellhouse.co.uk).

### **Caring for a Young Person Aged 18+** (2006)

This booklet is available from The Fostering Network. It looks at the financial implications for carers offering continuing support, supported lodgings or adult placements to formerly fostered young people who reach the age of 18.

### **Stepping Out,** The Fostering Network (2002)

Stepping Out is a handbook which provides young people with information about the key responsibilities of adulthood including taking care of yourself, housing, education, training, work, money and the law.

### **Aim Higher**

The Aimhigher website has a wealth of information for carers and young people who are considering further or higher education.

[http://www.aimhigherkentandmedway.org/parents\\_carers/Young+People+in+and+Leaving+Care](http://www.aimhigherkentandmedway.org/parents_carers/Young+People+in+and+Leaving+Care)

Aim Higher has produced an online booklet “A guide to Further and Higher Education for Young People Leaving Care in Kent and Medway” covering all aspects of entering higher education from how to select a course to finance and other assistance available.

<http://www.aimhigherkentandmedway.org/Resources/Aimhigher%20Kent%20and%20Medway/PDF%20Documents/AimHigher%20YCL%20bookletWEB.pdf>

### **Supported lodgings schemes and care leavers’ survey** by Bob Broad

The Fostering Network, 2009

This survey is the result of the Fostering Network’s Supported Lodgings Action Research and Practice Project 2008-2009. It contains the findings of a survey questionnaire into supported lodgings schemes and care leavers' experiences in England.

Available free at [www.fostering.net/resources/reports/supported-lodgings-schemes-and-careleavers-survey](http://www.fostering.net/resources/reports/supported-lodgings-schemes-and-careleavers-survey).

### **The Children Act 1989: guidance and regulations. Volume 3: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers including The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010**

Department for Education, 2010

This guidance is intended for local authorities and other agencies that provide services to care leavers. Its main aim is to ensure that care leavers are provided with the necessary personal support so that they can achieve their potential as they move into adulthood.

Available free at

<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/p/volume%203%20planning%20transition%20to%20adulthood%20for%20care%20leavers.pdf>

### **National Standards in Leaving Care**

National Leaving Care Advisory Service (NCLAS) 2007

The good practice standards for leaving care.

Available free at [www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/3023-6450.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/3023-6450.pdf)

### **Foster care conversions to supported lodgings** by Sue Baxter

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), 2009

This paper discusses making arrangements for when a fostered young person turns 18, but wants to remain with their foster family.

Available free at [www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5706-11718.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5706-11718.pdf)

### **Transitions to independence: briefings on accommodation pathways for young people**

by National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), 2009

Provides an overview of the possible pathways for young people after they leave foster and residential care.

Available free at [www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5336-10748.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/5336-10748.pdf)

### **A guide to employment for anyone starting out in employment**

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), 2010

A handbook written in consultation with young people and care leavers, designed to prepare and support young people leaving care into employment. The guide was developed as part of the Care2Work project, a scheme that encourages partnerships so that young people leaving care can engage with the community and develop their skills.

Available free at

[www.leavingcare.org/admin/uploads/78880b1f98b88771730d16cb042c3d07.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/admin/uploads/78880b1f98b88771730d16cb042c3d07.pdf)

### **Who cares? about going to university**

The Who Cares? Trust, 2008

Two separate guides, one aimed at all those who are in the position to help and encourage looked after-children and care leavers to continue into higher education and the other at care leavers who are thinking about going to university.

Available to purchase at [thewhocarestrust.org.uk](http://thewhocarestrust.org.uk)

### **WOW: World of work**

The Who Cares? Trust, 2007

An interactive resource on CD-ROM, designed to help young people navigate their way in the world of work. Includes supporting material for adults working with young people.

Available to purchase at [thewhocarestrust.org.uk](http://thewhocarestrust.org.uk)

### **Know your rights, know your benefits: a guide for young people in and from care** by

Carol Packman

National Care Advisory Service (NCAS), 2010

A guide to the different benefits available to young people in and from care.

Available free at [www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/6189-13107.pdf](http://www.leavingcare.org/data/tmp/6189-13107.pdf)

**Evaluation of the Right2BCared4 pilots interim report** by Emily R. Munro et al

Department for Education (DfE), 2010 ISBN 9781847757937

The interim report evaluating the Right2BCared4 pilot schemes - a three year project, taking place in 11 different local authorities, which supports fostered young people to stay with their foster carers until they are 18.

Available free at [www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DFE-RR031-WEB.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DFE-RR031-WEB.pdf)

**Evaluation of Staying Put 18+ family placement pilot programme** by Emily R. Munro et al.

Department for Education, 2010, ISBN 9781847757920

The interim report evaluating the Staying Put pilots - a three year project, taking place in 10 different local authorities, which allows fostered young people to stay with their foster carers beyond the age of 18.

Available free at [www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DFE-RR030-WEB.pdf](http://www.education.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DFE-RR030-WEB.pdf)