

## **Feedback from the Life Story Work Breakout Rooms – 13 January 2022**

### **Group 1 – Facilitator Paul McIntyre**

#### **Q1**

The group noted that non-CLA children have access to wider family contacts and stories about traditions and culture in the family. This can be as simple as favourite songs or old Christmas tree decorations. They also have access to stories about their parents as children and small but important details. We noted that photos do not replace the above, but they play a role in reinforcing memories.

#### **Q2**

The group noted the impact on CLA of pre-care experiences linked to abuse, neglect, loss and family breakdown. An understanding of trauma is important in delivering Life Story Work. The Life Story Workbook is important but only as part of a wider approach that captures belongings, history and stories. The book must capture achievements and development in the same way as a birth parent would file important things away – swimming badges, school certificates, artwork etc. Older children inevitably question their identity as a normal part of adolescence and this needs to be supported through skilled conversations across the range of people working with and caring for the child. It is not just about baby and early years life story work. This will inevitably require some 'difficult conversations' but we need to be clear about whether it is our own instinct that makes us avoid this, or based on a sound judgement of the child's capacity to understand and process. If they are old enough to ask the question, they are old enough to have an answer.

Launch discussion was more limited by time – involve children and care experienced adults as well as foster carers and adopters who can sell the benefits of being open and transparent.

### **Group 2 – Facilitator Moya McKinney**

#### **Q1**

- Family memories and stories around and build (not stopped at any age) during childhood and adulthood.
- Physical evidence available and generally not lost – birth/school certificates, school reports.
- Grandparents sharing stories to our children/partners about us when we were young – sharing household ornaments/paintings/etc that have meaning and connection to family members and handing down to our children.
- Lived experience of loved ones are shared – with immediate and extended family – eg, family holidays, parties, etc – connections build, consolidates identity, security and belonging - the fun and love is shared and grows! The memories and triggers for them bring comfort at times of worry/uncertainty.

- Family times – good and bad – prompt memories - shared with connections made to the past – remember when...
- Friends/family note you look just like your mum – oh, you have same mannerisms as your dad, etc.

## **Q2**

Much of the discussion was lead, by our care experienced young people – talked about how difficult it is to live with uncertainty – not knowing when you might be moved – knowing it could be out of area – far from friends/school and so they felt unable to make connections and thus felt they built few meaningful relationships to inform life story book/work.

Our young people were asked what they thought we should do when considering this area of work – who we should include, etc – they talked about how they had a great relationship and memory of the taxi driver who drove them to school and back on a daily basis for a long time – they would have liked his memories/views, but nobody asked them who should be involved in their story. Similarly – their experience of a particular school dinner lady was positive, and they had good memories of how this woman was lovely to them – would give them a pat on the back and encouragement – again, nobody asked about the dinner lady.

We concluded therefore young people need to be asked about who is significant in their life at various different stages – our work should be directed by them – we should not assume we know best – what do young people want to know, the relationships most significant to them may not be obvious to us. Sometimes it the little things that actually mean the most and stronger memories/emotions are attached to them.

We were really moved by this and didn't really get past it to talk more extensively.

A "this is your life" approach was noted as something which some young people might appreciate – film, photos, etc of the event.

Re the launch – needs to be directed by young people, they need their voices all over it - needs to be launched across Children's Social Care, children's services, our partners, etc.

## **Group 3 – Facilitator Gina Power**

### **Children need/ need to know:**

- Info re birth/hospital
- First's - steps/walking/crawling
- What they liked/didn't like when they were younger
- What people around them or how they felt about their first's – so for example – what happened on their first day of school, how the person who dropped them off felt and what the child reported about their feelings

- Family traditions
- Pets
- Family

**Needed to save/ have access too:**

- Toys and baby's clothes
- Certificates from school and hobbies
- School reports and books
- Holiday and school photos

**Difference between our children and other children:**

Most children have access to the above as their family save special items routinely and have frequent informal discussions about the above.

Our children may have had multiple moves, experienced trauma and abuse. This means that the information about them – their memories is scattered around and not held by those who may be caring for them.

**Thoughts:**

How can we collate the memories from everyone who has contact with our children and where can we store them ? Maybe within existing forums such as reviews. We need to think wider than just the foster carer – the child has a team around them who see and speak with them. Maybe memoires could be wrote as letters for the child to read back. We could consider doing these at key moments – births, moves etc.

Can we have an electronic memory box so that anyone involved with the child can send important items to it?

Later life/ Life letters need to have more detail it them.

**Launch:**

Online event, lead and informed by our children and young people, Mary would love to do it. Would be great if a similar activity is done with the participants like what we did tonight – so discuss memories – every thought provoking and will help the penny drop!! Jenny and Caroline from health would love to be involved in the event – let's get all corporate parents involved.

## **Group 4 – Facilitator Andreas Feldhaar**

### **Q1**

- Parents who have kept memorable items like first hair lock, baby wrist band, pictures etc.
- Using the items trigger positive memories.
- Family members to talk about memories in different situations (often day to day activities like tidying up and seeing something that triggers a memory) and being able to share the feelings at the time with their child. Not only being able to share the memory but also the feelings attached to that memory.
- Giving the child a sense of identity through the knowledge of the family history.
- Being able to 'recover' any memories even if an item is lost or one member of the family has forgotten about it.

### **Q2**

- Young person contribution: Doing a family tree and life story book with their social worker to know about their life and family. However, the family tree got lost and it is now difficult to 'recover' the information.
- Having a memory box.
- Being supported to maintain or establish links with the birth family.
- Practical challenges around non-digital and virtual storage, GDPR.
- Important for all professionals, not just the carer and social worker to contribute to the life story and memory box.
- Supporting the child continuously (not as a one off) to develop a positive identity knowing personal and family history, the meaning of names, where do I come from.
- Understanding the personal history can be difficult at an older age and support needs to be provided by all around the child to help for this to be a positive process.
- Being open and transparent why a child grows up in care and to interweave this information into day to day practice.

### **Ideas for the Launch Event**

- Big launch event with members of the Corporate Parenting Board, multi-agency partners, neighbouring authorities, representative from Department for Education.
- Making sure children & young people are involved in the planning and presentation of the new policy.
- Include our children's parents and families.
- Use social media and other means of advertising to promote the event and new policy.