



Life Journey Work Guide for Social Workers and other Professionals

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1. The importance of planning

Planning Life Journey Work (LJW) is essential as there are so many things you need to consider and agree and people you need to consult with before starting out on this journey with the child. The LJW Good Practice Guide provides guidance to assist you in this.

A checklist is also provided to assist you in thinking about what needs to be considered and agreed. Ideally this would be discussed at a planning meeting. A sensible time to hold an initial LJW planning meeting is at the placement planning meeting or at the first Child Looked after review, please refer to your Adoption Regions implementation plan for LJW as it will outline the expectations of your Region.

Who should be involved in planning LJW?

- Anyone who has a key role in working with or caring for the child e.g. foster carers and their supervising social worker, residential staff / child's key worker, adopters / adoption staff etc.,
- Any other staff who may be supporting the life journey work.
- The child and their birth family could also be invited to attend, depending on the circumstances.
- If the child is receiving any therapy, the therapist must be included in the meeting.
- Education and health services



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2. LJW planning meeting checklist

		Who?	Review	Review	Review	Review
1	Consider if / how you will involve child / introduce the work to the child. (Coram BAAF has a useful booklet designed to explain LSW to children and young people).					
2	Agree the specific focus for this work i.e. why are you doing it? (helping children to understand their past / get in touch with feelings/ enable you to understand the child better / help the child to move to another placement / a record of memories / preparation for adoption etc.					
3	Detail the information you need to gather and who is responsible for collecting what (make a checklist).					
4	Where will information be held and by whom?					
5	Have written consents been obtained from the Foster Carers, and any other third parties as appropriate?					
6	Identify 'gaps' and how to gather missing information. Think about all the people who may hold information /					

	memorabilia / photos / anecdotes who can contribute to the life story work.					
7	Find out what information the child already has and clarify who gave it to her/him (Is it accurate?).					
8	Assess child's developmental stage, attachments, how child communicates including expressing feelings.					
9	Anticipate likely issues for the child / any risks in undertaking LSW with the child? Will additional therapeutic involvement be required?.					
10	Find out what direct work / life story work has already been done with or for the child. What messages has the child received previously e.g. about why they are in care?					
11	Discover what the child enjoys doing to inform what media you will use e.g. arts and crafts, digital, apps etc.					
12	Prepare a written agreement with the child.					
13	Choose a model that is tailored to fit the child's developmental needs and personality and which is acceptable to the care-givers.					

14	Consider what direct tools you might use to help child make sense of difficult information and how you will record / include sensitive information.					
15	Who will take the lead in carrying out the life story work with the child?					
16	How will birth family / foster carers / prospective adopters / residential staff be involved? Who will lead on this? What training will they require?					
17	What time will be allocated to this task?					
18	Where will this work be undertaken?					
19	What resources - equipment / tools will be needed to support this work? Is any financial support required?					
20	What support & supervision is available to the staff / carers / adopters / residential staff undertaking this work?					
21	Who will keep a copy of the life story materials?					

3. Life Journey Work quality assurance checklist

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Evidence of the following Life Journey materials should be provided for quality assurance:

(These may include good quality drafts)

Family history information: Providing comprehensive details about the Child's birth family, including siblings. This should be done in conjunction with birth family members. (The Edith Nicholls "The New Life Work Model" provides comprehensive guidance on what should be included here including, a summary of this can be found in the toolkit.)

A memory box: Containing carefully labelled items such as the wrist band provided at birth to the Child. (See the toolkit for "Ideas- what to put in a Child's memory box.")

A photo album and Foster Carer record: This should contain details and photographs of significant events and milestones, together with day-to-day accounts of memories that can often be overlooked and thus lost. (See "A record of my life for foster carers" in the toolkit.)

Life Journey Information / Book (the narrative): This should be written to meet the developmental needs of the child as they are now, or if for a baby, be pitched for the needs of a young child. Life Journey books and Later Life Letters should provide children with many of the answers, to many of the questions they will likely have in the future about their early life experiences (Rees, 2017).

There are two examples of Life Journey Work books within the toolkit.

A Later Life Letter (the narrative): This should provide greater detail than the Life Story Book and be pitched for the Child to read in adolescence. There are two examples of Later Life Letters within the toolkit.

Evidence that the Prospective Adopters have been consulted in regard to the above documents: Prospective Adopters views should be actively sought at the time of matching, thus ensuring the Life Journey Materials are provided in a format the Prospective Adopters are confident in sharing with the Child.

Child for Adoption Report / Annex B (the narrative): This report should be comprehensive and fill in missing gaps within the Child's Life Journey information and later life letter. A separate document could also be provided to Prospective Adopters (and for the adopted person in the future) providing further detail if required.

LJW Quality assurance Checklist (Page 2 of 2)

	Details	Quality assured by	Date
Are there any outstanding issues from the LJW planning checklist? For example: Have all consents been obtained?			
Is there evidence of family history information? Is this comprehensive?			
Is there evidence that birth parents have been consulted in the creation of family history information?			
Is there evidence of a carefully labelled memory box?			
Have LJW materials been provided by the Child's Foster Carer? Are these of good quality?			
Is there evidence of Life Journey Information / a book? Is this age appropriate and does it answer the questions the Child is likely to have?			
Is there evidence of a Later Life Letter? Is this of good quality?			
Is there evidence that Prospective Adopters have been consulted in regard to the Child's LJW materials and that their views have been taken into consideration?			
Does the CAR/B sufficiently fill in any the gaps in LJW information? If not, is there a separate document that does so?			

4. TRANSITION ACTION PLAN TO MINIMISE THE TRAUMA OF MOVES AND TO KEEP THE CHILD CENTRAL

TASK	ACTION	PERSON RESPONSIBLE
<p>Foster carer starts the process of making a memory box with the child. List of things to be included in the memory box.</p> <p>Make a start on the Memory Book all about Me.</p> <p>Feelings work begins with child to help them express their thoughts and feelings.</p>	<p>Memory Box prompt list provided by Family Finder</p> <p>Foster carer starts or continues making of the Memory Box with the child. Ideas for memory box-first socks, Babygro, teddy, favourite book, toy, hospital arm band, first tooth, lock of hair, school certificates and badges.</p> <p>Foster carer start making feeling faces, using the feelings cards/ charts with the child and also start filling in All about me Memory book with child.</p> <p>Foster carers could write a story of the child's life with them to go in the memory box.</p>	<p>Social worker Supervising social worker Foster Carer IRO'S responsible for overseeing that this is happening</p> <p>Children carrying their memory boxes when transitioning from foster placement to adopters.</p>
<p>Inform the child that the decision has been made by the Judge not to return home but do not say at this stage that the plan is for adoption. Social worker responsible for sharing this.</p> <p>Child has a copy of their story-child can share this with important adults in his/her life. Give the child this at the point of placement order. This will then go in the memory box.</p>	<p>Child's narrative to be shared with the child explaining in simple terms what has happened and why they cannot live with their birth parents.</p> <p>Narrative story may be shared with teachers at school.</p> <p>Read child Maybe days (book about foster care)</p>	<p>Supervising social worker to discuss narrative with Social worker.</p> <p>Examples will be provided.</p> <p>IRO triggers the sharing of the simple narrative in the first LAC review.</p> <p>This should be done verbally followed up with a written version.</p>

	Build a wall to provide a representation of the child's needs.	
Referral is received by WBAS for family finding to commence.	<p>Family finder to visit Foster placement, meet child and gather information for profiling and to keep foster carer up to date with actions being taken and progress made.</p> <p>This should happen within a few weeks of PO being granted.</p>	Family Finder. Foster carer. Supervising Social worker.
Once adopters have been identified a meeting is to be convened with Social worker, Family Finding social worker, Fostering social worker and foster carers to plan transition work prior to matching panel.		Social worker, Family Finder, Fostering social worker and foster carers.
<p>Agree a plan of work and who will be taking the lead.</p> <p>Commit to working together. Family finding social worker to coordinate advise and support with Social worker and foster carer undertaking the work.</p>		
Family finding social worker to inform the school that transition work is being undertaken with the child and it may have some impact on the child's behaviour.	Inform school about the work being undertaken and the plans for the children.	Family finder.

<p>Foster carer/social worker begins work with the child.</p> <p>Bring stronger emphasis to feelings work and children's story books and films which support the notion of moving on and adoption.</p> <p>Building a wall. Sensory cushions. Charts-today I feel charts-use bluetack to put feeling faces on. Relationship based play. Feelings Pin wheel.</p>	<p>Feeling Faces / wheel shared with the children to encourage healthy expression of feelings.</p> <p>Books about moving on / adoption provided for foster carer to start reading with the children. Morris and his Big Bundle of Worries.</p> <p>Book list to be provided by Family finder.</p>	<p>Family finder, foster carers and social worker to start using feeling faces / feelings wheel materials.</p> <p>Fostering social worker to provide books.</p> <p>Family finder to provide booklist.</p>
<p>Explanation is given to the child about the difference between Birth, Foster and Adoptive families.</p>	<p>Explanation shared with the child.</p> <p>Family finders need a booklist to share with foster carers/Social workers. The Teazles Baby Bunny.</p> <p>All of this work with the child goes into their memory box / Life story book.</p>	<p>Foster carer to sharing explanation sheet with child and to read books describing different kinds of families.</p>
<p>Help the child explore the different kinds of families there are eg same sex single parents etc.</p> <p>Family tree for birth family and foster family.</p> <p>Colour pictures of their birth family and foster family.</p>	<p>Share books and photos which depict the different kinds of families there are.</p>	<p>Fostering social worker to share books. Foster carer to read the books and share the information and support child with expressing feelings.</p>
		<p>Family finder / fostering S.W. to teach carer three</p>

<p>Start using a calendar to help the child orientate themselves in time.</p> <p>Timeline-day to day things. Theraplay techniques - beanbag drop, feather blow, hand cream, bubbles.</p> <p>Foster carer to use these techniques. Also teach the same techniques to the adopters so they can continue them.</p>	<p>Foster carer to buy calendar and start using it with the child.</p> <p>Build in social worker visits and contacts etc with every day activities.</p>	<p>relationship based play techniques to be used with child on a daily basis.</p> <p>Foster carer to keep calendar up to date with information.</p>
<p>Prepare the child and family for Goodbye contacts.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to siblings who are saying Goodbye even those who are not moving on and time should be allowed for the children to have their space and opportunity to spend time saying goodbye to one another.</p>	<p>Social worker and foster carer to prepare child and to write cards chose small gifts to share at the final contact.</p>	<p>Social worker and foster carer.</p>
<p>Facilitate Good bye contacts with birth family members - a minimum of 3 weeks before matching panel to allow the child opportunity to grieve before a new family is introduced.</p> <p>Photos should be taken and cards /small mementoes should be shared to mark the ending.</p> <p>Goodbye contacts should be managed carefully to ensure the child is aware</p>	<p>Social worker to facilitate goodbye. Child to be prepared for the possibility that family members may not turn up.</p>	<p>Social worker / contact worker.</p> <p>Foster carer to support in purchasing cards and small gifts and helping to write a goodbye message to birth family members.</p>

<p>that this is the last time they will be seeing their family.</p> <p>Plan B needs to be in place in case family members do not turn up.</p>		
<p>Family finding social worker / supporting social or Teach Foster carer 3 or 4 Relationship based play techniques to be used daily with the child.</p>	<p>Family finder to teach foster carer.</p>	<p>Foster carer to undertake the activities on a daily basis with the child.</p>
<p>After the Final contacts the child should be provided with a simple narrative story about their situation and the plan for permanence.</p>	<p>Social worker adds the next stage of the narrative for the child to include the plan to find a Growing up family for the child. Foster carers can include the narrative of the child's life in placement.</p>	<p>Social worker and foster carer.</p>
<p>Social worker will explain to the child how the search for an Adoptive Family happens and reassure them that they will go to the best family for them.</p>	<p>All about me books-what makes me happy / sad / things I like and don't like.</p> <p>The child needs to know that the all about me book will be shared with their Adoptive family-to tell them all about them.</p>	<p>Social worker.</p>
<p>Need reassurance from all of those they trust that this is the case i.e. foster carer, social worker, fostering social worker and family finder</p>		<p>Family finder foster carer and social worker.</p>

Foster carer to help the child identify their hopes and fears of moving to an Adoptive family.	Make a chart of hopes and fears.	Foster carers.
Foster carer works with the child on their self - identity, who they look like what are their likes and dislikes what makes them happy and sad.	Make an inside out book with the child. All about me book.	Foster carer and social worker / family finder.
Start a moving on collage help the child in their understanding of moving, visiting writing letters etc.	Different kinds of houses, -adopter's house, number colour of their car. Road mat-route to adopters home, possible use a map of UK.	Foster carer, social worker / family finder.
When the family been identified inform the child and share family book/DVD with them. If appropriate-child can take book or DVD to share with school (if appropriate-consider confidentiality).	Foster carers to support the child in looking at photos DVD etc. Respond to questions and identify more hopes fears etc.	Social worker and family finder. Foster carer. Family finder to ensure photos of local area and new school etc. are included to bring familiarity to the child.
Allow the child to share with school before saying goodbye.	Support child in sharing the info about the adopters with school.	Foster carer.
Say goodbye to school and extended foster family just prior to introductions starting.	Ending parties should be facilitated.	School and foster carers to plan and facilitate their own goodbyes with the child.
Introductions planning meeting to include the work that has been undertaken	Introductions plan to be drawn up alongside the adoption support plan.	Social worker family finder fostering social worker foster carers.

with the child and how it has been received / any ongoing needs identified in the adoption support plan.		
Moving Routines Morning/Bedtimes. Child can fill these in. Moving calendar-this is their plan for introductions.	Family finder to draw up moving calendar. Foster carer to draw up morning and bedtime routines.	Family finder. Foster carer.
Review introductions.	Child should be aware that a meeting will be taking place to review how the introductions are going before a final decision is taken about the move. The child should NOT be moved on that day.	Social worker and Family finding Social worker.

Child moves.	Child should be given their Memory box as a parting gesture to carry with them as they leave. This should include the narrative story, the story and photo album of life with the foster carers and the Memory book All about Me along with everything else that has been collected along the way.	Foster carer.
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Adopters:

Mother bridge of love

I wished for you

Claiming star

Carry on with memory Box

4. Holding a child appreciation day

A child appreciation day is a meeting where matched adopters / carers have an opportunity to meet significant people who have known the child throughout the child's life. The day is designed so that the matched adopters / carers can make sense of and appreciate the child's life journey.

The idea is that these significant people will share as much information as possible with the matched carers / adopters, including factual information, photos, DVDs, memorabilia, toys, anecdotes, memories, etc.

This unique information is recorded and collected and will be given to the matched adopters / carers to share with the child over the years, in order to help the child and the family have a fuller understanding of the child's history. A memory box will be provided to collect material objects.

Child Appreciation Days are an invaluable way of helping to recognise the trauma children experience when moving between placements, acknowledging the importance of planned transitions and helping with the transferral of attachment between the child's present carers and future family.

The Chair of the Child Appreciation Day will take participants on a journey through the life of a child, helping them to understand how the perceptions and reactions of the child have been influenced by their developmental stages.

This day recognises and validates the many people who can contribute to the child's story, however brief or difficult their time with the child may have been. It is not a meeting focusing on adults and it is not a professional's meeting.

Ideally the day will be run chronologically through the child's life. Most participants will benefit from attending all day but others will be allocated time slots.

A written record of the day will be prepared for the child's file, including photos taken on the day and a copy will be sent to the adopters / carers. A child friendly report can also be produced for the child, if necessary.

Note: Whilst traditionally child appreciation days have only been held for children who are to be adopted, they provide an effective means of gathering information for any child looked after. Alternatively you could run this as a paper exercise using the sample letter in Section 6.

For more information: Coram BAAF has a publication called 'Life Appreciation Days' by Andy Sayers and Roanna Roach.

Written by Roz Waterhouse, Associate Trainer, AFA Cymru

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5. Writing a 'later life letter'

The provision of a Later Life letter is a statutory requirement for all children placed with adoptive parents. They are usually written by the Child's Social Worker in conjunction with the Adopters' Social Worker and are given to the Prospective Adopters.

If it is deemed appropriate, the Child's Birth Family could be asked to write either their own letters to the child or make contributions to the Social Worker's letter.

The expectation is that the letter will be addressed to the child, but given to the adoptive parents for safe keeping. The adoptive parents should receive the letter after the Adoption Order is made and no later than 10 working days after the adoption ceremony, i.e. the ceremony to celebrate the making of the Adoption Order. The precise timing of this will be considered at the placement planning stage and at subsequent Adoption Reviews.

The purpose of the later life letter: the Later Life letter has two purposes: the first is as a letter to be read by the child when deemed appropriate by the Adoptive Parents; the second is as a tool to be used by the Adopters when talking to the Child about their background and history.

What should be included in the letter?

- An explanation of why the Child came into care / was adopted and the reasons and actions that led up to this decision being made. This should include, whenever possible, the people involved in this decision, and the facts at that time. It must be a true account of the process.
- If the Child's birth parent expressed any wishes about the choice of adoptive parents these should be included, e.g. would like them to have a sibling.
- As well as being a detailed and honest account of events, the letter should contain descriptions and anecdotes of what the writer remembers about the Child and the Birth Family.
- Birth Parents - try and give a descriptive picture of the Birth Parents. This should include details about their first names, ages, physical characteristics, their personality, academic and employment history, health, their interests and skills. Also with whom they were living at the time of placement.
- Siblings - If the Child has brothers and sisters, similar information should be given. Are they adopted? If they live with the Birth Parents, explain why. The Child needs to know what happened to their brothers and sisters, who cares for them, and if relevant, why there is no contact. Do not provide addresses or other identifying information.
- Child's birth - Information needs to be given about the Child's birth if not already provided in earlier life journey work including weight, time, day, any complications or health issues. Also include the name of the

hospital, who was present, what happened next? Who cared for the Child after their birth?

- Contact - Include comments by the Social Worker on any contact between the Child and his or her Birth Parents and any information about any events that relate to the child around this time. Give details of how any agreed contact was decided - whether it is "face to face" or Letter Box. The Child needs to know that Birth Parents and other relatives want to hear about their progress, and that the Adoptive Parents agreed to the contact arrangements prior to placement.
- When writing the letter, try to be balanced about the strengths and the difficulties.
- In the letter, the Birth Parents should be called by their first names and the adopters referred to as "your Parents" or "Mum and Dad".
- Think of yourself as an adopted person, what information would you want, what questions would you ask your Birth Parents?
- It is a good idea to write the letter in sections, for instance the legal situation could be separate from the more personal information. In very difficult situations for example incest or sexual abuse, writing in sections can be helpful so that the story unfolds in manageable parts.
- Some Social Workers may prefer to write two letters to be given at different ages. This practice can also work well where there are difficult messages to communicate.
- Brothers and sisters must have separate letters even when placed together, and this includes twins.
- You should give the date the Adoption Order was granted, the name of the court, and you could include the names and office bases of all the Social Workers involved, although in each case care should be taken to ensure Social Workers are not exposed to any risk; first names may be preferable rather than full names.
- It is most likely that the Child will be given the letter during their early adolescent years, and so the letter needs to be written using language appropriate for the young person.

Talk to the adopters about the letter(s).

- When you have drafted the letter in consultation with the Adopters' Social Worker you must show it to the adopters; they may have extra information that needs to be added. They may also wish to ask for some amendments / different wording. They need to feel comfortable with the content as this will inform the way they help their child to process the letter. If they don't like your letter they most likely won't show it to their child.
- Acknowledge that possible negative issues around the events leading up to a child's birth and subsequent placement may be difficult to convey. The Adopters have to tell this story, and they may need ongoing support from the Post Adoption Support Service to enable them to do this.

And finally...

- Date and sign the letter.
- Keep a copy on the adoption file and send the letter to the Adopters' Social Worker who will give it to the Adopters and explain their responsibilities in sharing the information with the Child at a later date, i.e. that the information should be made available to the Child at a time the adopters consider is appropriate, but before the child's 18th birthday, as at this stage the young person has the right to apply for access to the adoption records, and the information in the Later Life letter will prepare them for this.
- The Adopters should be asked for written confirmation of receipt of the letter and their intention to share the information with the Child.

When should the letter be given to the Child?

- The decision on actual timing of this letter being shared is at the discretion of the Adoptive Parents. They will be in the best position to know when the Young Person will be ready to read the letter.

Note: Later life letters have traditionally only been used in adoption cases but increasingly they are being used to convey factual information and memories / anecdotes with other children and young people who are looked after as part of a child's life journey memorabilia. For example a Social Worker who is changing jobs could write a letter about the time they have known the Child or a residential Social Worker / Foster Carer when the Child leaves a placement.

For further information:

- The BAAF publication 'Writing a Later Life Letter – Practice Guide' by Fran Moffat includes a number of example later life letters.
- The South East Wales Adoption Service has Practice Guidance, developed by BAAF Cymru, which they are willing to share.
- Example later life letter from Joy Rees 2016 is available on line.

Adapted from a piece written by Roz Waterhouse, Associate Trainer, AFA Cymru.

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6. Messages from research about transitions for children placed for adoption: 'The Children Were Fine'

Abstract:

“When children move from foster care into adoption the transition tends to take place within a tight timeframe, usually between seven and 14 days, with no contact between the child and the foster carer for several months after the move, if at all.

Very little attention or research has been aimed at understanding the rationale for these procedures.

Together with social work colleagues in a Looked After Children’s team, two child psychotherapists carried out a piece of qualitative research, interviewing foster carers, adopters and social workers to analyse in detail five children’s moves into adoption.

We found that the emotional experience of the child, particularly their experience of losing their foster carer, became less prominent in people’s minds during this transition.

It is a highly anxious time for the adults and in the grip of these anxieties they can lose sight of what is happening emotionally for the child.

The child’s outward compliance with the move and lack of obvious emotion at losing her or his carers can be interpreted as signs that they are ‘fine’.

These research findings are explored in the light of our understanding of attachment and loss in childhood, and of individual and organisational defences against pain and loss.

Implications for future practice are discussed”.

Sophie Boswell and Lynne Cudmore, Child Psychotherapists, Accessed from

<http://www.thechildrenwerefine.co.uk/the-children-were-fine.html> on the

11/12/2017

To read more: <http://www.thechildrenwerefine.co.uk/>

7. Edith Nichols' New Life Work Model (2005)

Edith Nichols' *New Life Work Model* (2005) incorporates a "Family History Book" that acts as a comprehensive reference book for the child of their personal history to promote genetic identity and preparation for moving on. The Family History Book has a proposed outline of 12 sections that aims to facilitate the child's maturing needs:

Section 1 – About Me

Section 2 – 6 for the birth parent

Providing information such as:

- Childs birth
- Child as a baby
- Parents likes and dislikes
- Parents health
- People who were special to parents
- Parents Hopes for child future
- Parents story

Section 7 – About brothers and sister

Section 8 – About my Birth Family's Culture, Ethnicity and Origins

Section 9 – Birth Family Photographs

Section 10 – Messages from birth family

Section 11 – Other information (supporting information for the child as an adult)

Section 12 – Who made this book?

(Edith Nicholls, 2005)

Adapted from Adapted from AFA Adoption Life Story literature review, Joan Hunt, Associate Trainer / Consultant, AFA Cymru

To read more:-

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/New-Life-Work-Model-Practice/dp/1903855810>

8. Life Journey Work and the Secure Base Model

Schofield and Beek's Secure Base Model (2006) provides a useful framework for Life Journey Work. The application of the Life Journey to the Secure Base Model is an integral part to the re-parenting of a child in re-framing their internal working model (Schofield and Beek, 2006).

When children's attachment needs are not met their internal working model forms within the context of emotionally unregulated and insensitive care giving. Children with these experiences commonly have difficulty with **STRESS, TRUST, IMPULSE, RAGE, and SHAME (STIRS)** (Cairns and Fursland, 2008). These difficulties limit the child's internal working model of the external world and their ability to navigate through it. The five domains of the Secure Base, Availability, Sensitivity, Acceptance, Cooperation and Family Belonging, provides us with a structure that addresses STIRS by reducing a child's anxieties and, by helping them to be emotionally regulated, it promotes exploration and permanence (Schofield and Beek, 2014).

By utilising the Secure Base Model through Life Journey Work we can see a holistic approach rooted in the caregiving cycle reinforcing the carers / parents role as a secure base for the child.

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/documents/33962/0/caregiving+rc.jpg/f72324af-7f90-4ecf-a122-da3ac6f59745?t=1486479173000>

The model draws on the significance of the caregiver – child relationship that acknowledges the need for the parenting task to be informed by the thinking and feeling of the child and the adoptive parent.

The five domains of Secure Base Model can be applied to Life Journey Work as shown below:

- AVAILABILITY - *helping the child to trust* - the emotional availability of the carer to offer verbal and non-verbal support for safe exploration of their past.
- SENSITIVITY - *helping the child to manage feelings and behaviour* - reading the child's cues for support and comfort and expressing interest at a level that is comfortable for the child in his or her thoughts and feelings.

- ACCEPTANCE - *building the child's self-esteem* - ensuring that the child's ethnic, religious and cultural background is valued and celebrated, and model acceptance of difference in words and behaviours. Helping a child to think about times, events occasions when he or she felt valued and special.
- CO-OPERATION - *helping the child to feel effective and be co-operative* – respond promptly to child's signals for support, comfort or reassurance.
- FAMILY MEMBERSHIP - *helping the child to belong* - develop or build on an existing life story book that contains information, pictures and a narrative that links the child to birth family members and birth family history. Ensure that conversations about the birth family happen appropriately and are carefully managed within the family so that the child does not have to make sense of negative, contradictory or idealised ideas about the birth family. The Child can think “*I am safe and secure in this family but I can also think and talk about how it feels to be a part of another family*”

Schofield and Beek (2014)

By providing the child with a cohesive narrative as a shared experience with their carers / parents, the child experiences acceptance from their parent and a developing view that their personal history is not shameful. This promotes a positive adoption identity and sense of self, thus reducing the pervasive shame (that developed as a result of inconsistent and abusive parenting in the infancy) which has often come to dominate the child's thinking and feeling (Cairns and Fursland, 2008). The child is thus supported throughout their developmental and key life-stages that are important for positive personal identity formation. The personal identity of the child and the adoptive family can comfortably co-exist and become a shared and shameless experience.

Information on the Secure Base model can be found at:

<https://www.uea.ac.uk/providingasecurebase/the-secure-base-model>

Adapted from AFA Adoption Life Story literature review, Joan Hunt, Associate Trainer / Consultant, AFA Cymru



AFA Cymru offers advice, training and consultancy to professionals and to members of the public.

9. The Joy Rees model for Life Journey Work

Joy Rees (2009, 2017) offers a Back to Front approach to creating Life Journey Books. She states this “*promotes a new family-friendly way to compile a life story book and one that promotes a sense of permanency for the child and encourages attachments within the adoptive family*”. Instead of starting with the child's birth and early history, the Rees’ model begins in the present and engages the child, before moving gently into the past. Rees (2009) states:

“My life story books aim to reinforce the child's sense of belonging and security within the adoptive family before addressing their history and early trauma. The book brings the child back to a secure present and leaves them with a sense of a positive future... This approach stresses the child's need to be claimed and to belong, it raises the profile of adoptive parents and emphasises the importance of their involvement in contributing to the book.”

This model of Life Story Book anchors the child within the adoptive family, supporting their role as a secure base for the child and in doing so it acknowledges the need for the adopter to be a party to the creation of Life Story book. In recent research into their views of Life Story (Watson et al, 2015(a)), adoptive parent’s indicated that they preferred the Joy Rees Model as they felt that it reinforced the position of the child as a member of their adoptive family, providing much needed security and reassurance.

Conversely, in the follow up research from Watson et al (2015, (b)) children’s views of Life Story Books were sought and the research found that the children surveyed were not as enthusiastic of this model, saying that they found it confusing and it jumped around too much. They preferred the “*story*” to follow the traditional story telling format of a beginning middle and the now. One young person stated that it (the Back to Front model) made it difficult to read and that you had to read it “*backwards*” But most importantly, what young people wanted above all was for the book to have a clear structure with more detail (Watson et al, 2016(b)).

<http://thejoyoflifework.com/life-story-books/> (please add link)

Adapted from Adoption Life Story Literature Review, Joan Hunt, (2016) AFA Cymru Associate Trainer.



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References:

Rees J., (2009) "*Life Story Books for Adopted Children: A Family Friendly Approach*". Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

Rees J., (2017) "*Life Story Books for Adopted Children: A Family Friendly Approach: Second Edition*", Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

Watson, D. et al (2015 (a)). *Adopters' views on their children's life story books. Adoption and Fostering*, 39(2), 119-134.

Watson D. et al (2015 (b)), *Adopted children and Young People's views of their life Storybooks: the role of narrative in the formation of identities*, Children and Youth Services Review, Volume 58. Pages 90 – 98.

 <p data-bbox="475 219 877 425"> Western Bay ADOPTION SERVICE GWASANAETH MABWYSIADU Bae'r Gorllewin </p>	<p data-bbox="906 197 1385 228">Checklist re content of later life letters</p>
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This 'template' provides a structure for later life letters. More can be added but, all of the fields relate to issues / areas that have come up in adoption support enquiries where children and their adopters have 'missing' information.

The letter needs to be informative, comprehensive and should not be a series of cut and pasted details from other documents.

<p>Introduce yourself and your role in relation to the child.</p>	
<p>Give reasons for writing the letter.</p>	
<p>Other key people involved with the child and any information from them e.g. foster carers, contact worker, previous social worker, birth parents and extended family etc.</p>	
<p>Acknowledge that this may be a difficult letter to read, they don't have to read it all at once; they should have someone who they can talk to about the letter on hand.</p>	
<p>Refer to other reports that contain additional information and how they can access these (and at what age).</p>	
<p>If the family/background is complex include a family tree giving full names of extended family.</p>	
<p>Remember what information children have said they want included in their life story information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why they couldn't stay with their birth family. • Details about their birth family. • Their life before they were adopted. • Where they were born. • If they had any brothers or sisters living somewhere else and why they were split up. • Whether they could make contact with their birth family. • Names – why given and meanings – identity. • Appearance and descriptions – affirms value. • Photos – recording history, family. • Memories of pets etc. 	

(Children need to know that coming into care/being adopted was not their fault).	
Information about child's ethnicity, their birth family's culture, religion and sexuality – where parents came from and customs common to that culture.	
The hopes of the birth family for the child and how these hopes were addressed in the plan for the child.	
Description of birth parents – their physical characteristics, their personality, academic and employment history, interest and skills (be honest but avoid being negative).	
What support was offered by the extended family, Social Services, other agencies to keep child with the birth family?	
Information about the child's birth mother – full name, date and place of birth, ethnicity (as above), physical description, personality, style, attitudes, talents, her family background etc.	
Information about the child's birth father – (as above with mother) who has provided the information? (See example 2 explaining when birth father is not known). Relationship with birth mother.	
Pregnancy and birth details – weight, length, any complications, breast or bottle fed etc.	
<p>The child's history</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different places where the child has lived – names of caregivers, addresses, dates, reasons for move. • Name of schools, nursery playgroup, names of teachers, friends school reports. • Milestones – first words, first tooth, first steps, when they learnt to read etc. • The child's particular characteristics e.g. the things the child used to say or do, activities, interest, favourite toys, books etc. 	
Reasons why birth parents couldn't look after the child/Reason for adoption – different stages in the planning process and your role in this process and what happened before your involvement. Reasons for any delay. (Phrases that may have been sufficient in the life story book now need to be explained further).	
Giving information about the birth parent's experiences in childhood and adolescence can aid understanding of why the parent did not learn good parenting skills, why they had low self-esteem, why they were vulnerable to forming relationships with violent partners etc. See example 3.	
Provide details/explanations of birth parent's health conditions – consider if you need to say if this condition can be inherited or is this something that the adopters will tackle?	
If the child has a disability this may make them more vulnerable to feeling rejected or more likely to be bullied at school – it is important that the later life letter clarifies that it was not their disability that led them to be adopted but parents lack of skill/confidence, support, inability to prioritise child's needs etc.	

Legal issues and court orders can either be included as the narrative develops or details can be attached as a separate section.	
Veto and willingness or not of birth parents to be contacted in the future.	
The date the adoption order was made , name of presiding judge and anecdotal information about what happened at the Court. Did birth parents challenge the making of the order?	
What options for permanence were considered?	
Where child is adopted by family/friend: The LLL needs to address changed relationships within the family.	
Contact arrangements and reasons for any changes during the process (information about this may illustrate that the child's birth parents were interested in them or illuminate other aspects of the birth parent's characters. Any anecdotal information from the contact worker(s)? Possibility of contact in the future?	
Information about siblings – names, dob. why they were not placed together – describe the assessment of how children's needs could be met together or apart and what factors impacted on any plans for contact. Explain the term "sibling" or avoid its use and refer specifically to brother/half-brother etc. The LLL can include info about how the siblings are doing at the time of writing the letter – may help young person to feel more connected to them.	
Matching – why this specific family was chosen for the child – any specific wishes of birth family and child? What was the process for finding their adoptive family?	
Concluding the letter – where they can get support/access records. Comment on how much you have enjoyed knowing the child – recall any personal anecdotes. Good wishes for the future.	

Updated July 2020



Western Bay Life Journey Project – outline

Our aim is to significantly improve not only the number of children having life story materials at the time of placement for adoption but to also improve the quality of those materials and to enable and equip adopters to use them more effectively. We are by no means there yet, but are seeing improvements and have changed our infrastructure, processes and resources to achieve our aim. The project is resourced by one social worker (2 days a week) and one project worker (4 days a week).

CARB Training

This is run monthly by the adoption service for social workers with children who are being twin tracked or with placement orders. Within this training there is reference to the role and function of the Life Journey Project (LJP). The CARB is also a vehicle for a strong narrative of the child's journey and this is reinforced in the training by using FAQ's from children (as adults accessing their files), case examples etc.

Referral for Twin Tracking

All children referred for twin tracking become 'eligible' for access to the LJP. As part of twin tracking, a referral planning meeting is held and at this meeting and in the preparation prior to this meeting, staff in the three local authorities are provided with the full suite of LJP documents (minimum standards, good practice, life story book template/ example etc). The quality assurance and action plan checklists are also shared at this point. Awareness of the LJP project is raised.

Should Be Placed

The family finders guide and support the LA workers to ensure that the CARB used for the SBP recommendation has a strong narrative of the child's story. Where workers need additional support and advice, access can be made to the project early.

Placement Order

All children subject to a Placement Order are automatically referred to the LJP. They are allocated to one of the two workers and their social worker is contacted. This ensures each child has a nominated LJP worker and each social worker has a point of call for support. They are offered advice, guidance and support to provide a suitable life story and life story materials from the resources they have been collecting since the child was accommodated/referred for twin tracking. This is also an opportunity to assist in 'plugging gaps' and obtaining additional information if this has not already been done.

Linking and Matching

When a child is linked with an adopter, the Western Bay adopter is also referred to the project. The matching process is expected to include consultation with the prospective adopters as to the

working of the life story book. This reflects research and our own enquiries, which show that where an adopter has been actively involved in the construction of the life story book they are more inclined to use it. It also avoids the use of wording which they may struggle to use and provides opportunity to reinforce with adopters the importance and value of the child having a comprehensive narrative throughout their life of their own journey.

Matching Panel

It is expected that as a minimum, a draft life story book (0-7 template) for each child and a draft later life letter is presented. For children 3 years old and above there also the requirements to include a transition plan and evidence of any work that has been done to prepare the child for a potential move.

We have agreed across all three LA's that a life story book for a child under 7 does not need to have extensive detail. To this end we have provided an age appropriate template to give guidance. Some workers will want to put in more detail, and whilst this is permitted, we have found and adopters have fed back that extensive detail makes the book unusable for the younger children. As a result, we produced a comprehensive later life letter checklist and included throughout the CARB guidance opportunities to capture the detail that would have (in the past) been added to lengthy life story books.

Monitoring

The LJF project contacts every adopter post placement to check they have the draft and in due course the final life story book and Later Life Letter (we have set a local performance indicator of the first review). Where support is needed to add to the life story book or later life letter, the project team worker will assist. Adopters are also invited to access support, reading materials, one to one guidance and can access workshops which WB run periodically. There is an aim in the New Year to run more of these.

Performance

Whilst we are pleased with the improvements in quality and provision, we have a long way to go to ensuring all children have both a later life letter and life story book on placement and a final by the time of the adoption review. The referral for children and adopters is closed only when there is a satisfactory life story book, later life letter and adopters feel able to use both. Beyond the initial involvement. Adopters can come back at any time for additional advice, guidance and support and can access the workshops outlined above.

Karen Williams

25.11.20