



Fostering Permanence Report

February 2022

Background Context:

For those children in the care of the Local Authority the legal framework of the Children Act 1989, subsequent guidance and regulations set out the arrangements the Council must make for looking after a child (children in care). The making of a care plan is central to these requirements and will contain information about how the child's current developmental needs will be met as well as the arrangements for the current and longer-term care for the child. It ensures that there is a long-term plan for the child's upbringing (referred to as 'the permanence plan') to which everyone is working, including the team around the child, the child and, where appropriate, the family.

One of the key functions of the care plan is to ensure that each child has a plan for permanence by the time of the second Children in Care review.

Permanence means making a long-term plan for how a child will be cared for which lasts throughout their childhood. There are a range of options for permanence, inside and outside of the care system. All should deliver good outcomes, giving children security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging to ensure future positive life chances. Permanence options for children include returning home to their families; living with kinship (family/friends and connected persons) carers, including special guardians; living with adoptive families; living with long-term foster carers; or living in residential care.

The impact of Instability:

Although children and young people are brought into care because it is deemed to be in their best interests for safety and wellbeing, children and young people will still experience a sense of grief and loss, even for the loss of those that have caused them harm. These emotions are further compounded if they go on to experience multiple placements arrangements. Children and young people that are unable to feel secure in their home and family arrangements will have many more challenges in relation to their sense of identity and establishing a sense of belonging. This can be observed through the behaviours of children and young people that have an uncertain future or have experienced grief, rejection, and repeated loss.

Permanence:

Many children across the UK live with their foster families for many years, and sometimes for the whole of their childhoods and beyond. In 2015, regulations and statutory guidance came into force in England which together introduced a legal definition of long-term foster care and the conditions that need to be met and strengthened it as a permanence option. The changes introduced in 2015 were very helpful in terms of introducing a consistent definition of long-term foster care placements across England, and in setting out the key steps and commitments involved for all parties. The changes rightly strengthen the importance of foster care as a permanence option for children and young people in care.

Permanence is about having a family for life, supporting the development of a sense of belonging and connectedness. At its core is the continuation of the quality of good relationships built between children and their foster carers, regardless of the type of placement. Placement stability is an essential element of permanence as it creates the opportunity for children to develop relationships in a safe and secure arrangement. The development and continuation of high-quality relationships between children and the adults

that care for them, supports the building of security, secure attachments, a positive reference point on which children can model their own future relationships and develop a strong sense of belonging and identity.

Permanence for children can be reached through a variety of options, all of which can deliver good outcomes for individual children.

Types of permanence:

For many children, a **return to their birth family (reunification)** is possible after those issues that led to a period in care have been supported and overcome.

Kinship Care remains a good option and involves a child living with a relative, friend or other **'connected' person** as a child in care. Kinship care is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or friend who is not their parent, usually because their parents are unable to care for them. That relative or friend is called a 'kinship carer', and it's estimated that around half of kinship carers are grandparents, but many other relatives including older siblings, aunts, uncles, as well as family friends and neighbours can also be kinship carers. There are clear benefits to children if they are kept within their family network. Research shows that children in kinship care benefit from increased placement stability compared to children in Local Authority care and can maintain family relationships. Even so, many children who go to live with kinship carers have had a very difficult start in life, and their behaviour is often greatly affected by past experiences.

For a proportion of children permanence is achieved through **Adoption** which is the legal process by which a child or a group of siblings who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent, and legal members of their new family.

Adopters become the child's legal parents with the same rights and responsibilities as if the child was born to them.

The majority of adopted children have suffered significant abuse, violence, or neglect in their birth families and most have spent time in foster care.

Adoption gives children a second chance of stability, permanence, and the love and nurture that all children need. The outcomes for adopted children are better than for those who stay in care.

Special Guardianship is a formal court order which places a child or young person with someone permanently and gives this person parental responsibility for the child. This could be a grandparent, close relative, or a family friend.

Special Guardianship means that the child lives with carers who have parental responsibility for them until they are grown up. If the child was looked after before the Special Guardianship Order was granted, they will no longer be the responsibility of the Local Authority.

The order usually lasts until the child is 18 years old.

Child Arrangements Orders is an order that regulates with whom a child is to live, spend time or otherwise have contact, with any person. Each Child Arrangements Order is decided on the circumstances of the individual family and on what is in the best interests of the child.

Where all above options have been duly considered and a decision is reached that the child/ren is unable to exit care **long-term foster care** can have similar outcomes to adopted children and this is a positive permanence option for those children who still identify with, and maintain links to, their birth families. It can also be a positive option for children with complex care needs or who are harder to place for adoption, such as sibling groups or older children, providing them with long-term stability and ongoing care and support.

Living within a family setting will be the preferred permanence option for most children, including those for whom residential care is a positive short-term option. However, for a small number of children and young people a **long-term residential placement** could equally be the best option when all other options have been comprehensively exhausted. This can be the case for children who are unable or unwilling to participate in family life due to previous experiences or the emotional demands of family living.

Permanence through an unrelated Foster Carer:

Foster Care can provide permanence within the care system and is an important option for children. It can provide children with the security and stability they need until adulthood. Thereafter, 'Staying Put' offering an important option to extend the foster family role into early adulthood as a Leaving Care option.

Nationally, Foster Care is the most common placement choice for children in care: three-quarters of children in care are in foster care (85% of them with unrelated carers). 17 per cent of all fostered children between ages 5 and 18 have been in the same placement for more than five years (DFE 2013).

Lincolnshire – Context and Recruitment:

There are different types of fostering that carers and their families can choose to specialise in with the assessment considering their motivation and preferences amongst several other key significant factors that are considered as part of their approval and statutory review in accordance with the Fostering National Minimum Standards 2011.

For some carers they consider their strengths and commitment to a certain type of fostering and this can change once they have gained invaluable experience and upon reflection of their experience and skills. It is not uncommon for carers to be approved at fostering panel for several types of fostering before carers choose to progress with offering that longer term and more permanent option.

Irrespective of a carers approval a robust assessment will determine the most appropriate route to secure any permanent arrangement. For some children this may mean they remain with their current carer if it is felt this is in the best interest of the child and the foster carer long term. The fostering service works in partnership to establish a match for a child using 'Family Finding' process where all efforts and opportunities for permanent homes are considered for children with this care plan. We will consider those carers that are approved for permanence, we will also use targeted marketing to recruit possible matches for children in care. We currently have 4 children where we have been unable to successfully match them with foster carers in house.

There is a marketing and advertising strategy in place for attracting members of the public that feel they would be able to offer a child a long-term home. Finding permanent placements for sibling groups is particularly challenging. Nationally there is a shortage of people coming forward to care for sibling groups and older children.

Matching:

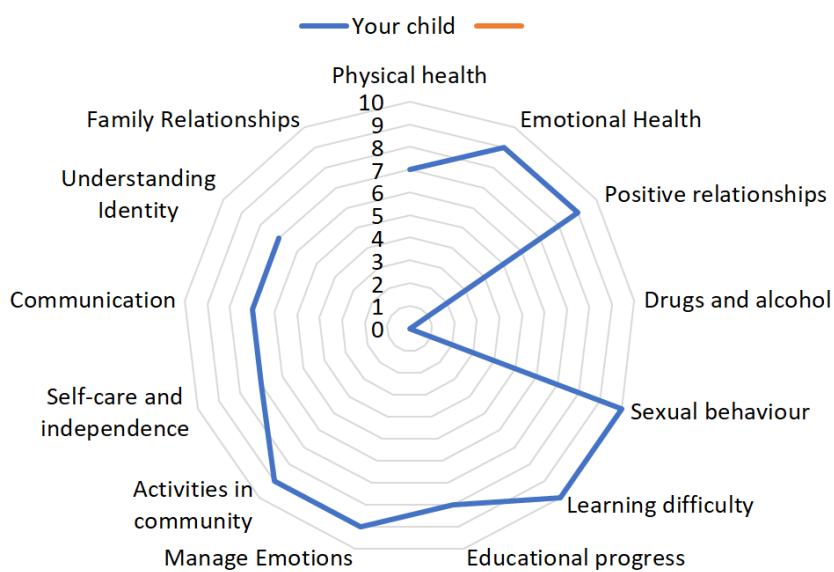
A key factor in stability and permanence in foster care is the 'match' between child and carers, which often depends on the 'chemistry' between them. The matching process is applicable for all children in care.

Careful consideration must be given to the ongoing needs of the child and the support available. The right match is critical for the stability and long-term outcomes for the child and so great care and a shared commitment across Children's Services is established.

The **Re-Think Fostering Workstream** is a partner in practice collaboration, jointly promoting fostering as a partnership, working with foster carers every step of the journey by providing the right support, training and resources when needed through evidence based and relational practices.

This workstream has been fundamental in exploring new innovative approaches in fostering, with the creation of the In-House Matching Event, being one of them. This event brings together the opportunity for those that know the children to present a profile of them, which has been developed using the Valuing Care approach. This in conjunction with the carers profile Valuing Care toolkit embedded within their Annual Review and progress reports aim to identify whether a match is achievable.

Valuing Care assessment profile



Female Child, aged 8

It is possible through this assessment tool and using a holistic view to consider the needs that will need to be met and understood by those that are going to care for this child.

- High needs identified within the area of positive relationships and sexual behaviour. Due to the type of abuse that this child has experienced they have a distorted understanding of relationships, and this can result in sexual behaviour towards others. This child needs a carer that understands the impact of sexual harm, an adult that demonstrates patience and understanding and can support the child to learn how healthy relationships are formed, how we should act with one another and explain that her private parts are on her body are not for others to play with. A carer would need to consider if they could support these types of behavior and support the child to process previous experiences and develop a new mental model for her future.
- It is clear to see the impact of developmental trauma for this child, as they struggle with those skills and understanding that rely on the foundations and structure of cognitive function. Social and communication skills, understanding other intentions and social cues, regulating her own emotions, controlling impulses etc... The primary caregiver for this child would need to have a good working understanding of child development, be able to provide this child even at the age of 8 with an early year's education to ensure that the structures and foundation on which learning is built can be established and then built on. The child would need to grow up in a household that understand education and learning widely and actively supports learning and development in partnership with education and social care.



Foster Carers have their own profile, which clearly highlights their strengths and those areas that need to be developed.

The intention and purpose of these events was developed to ensure the right children are being presented at the right time to the right potential foster carers. This aims to avoid drift and delay in care planning for children with a continued aim to promote stability at the very earliest point.

This event is pulled together over numerous stages which includes a permanence course for all foster carers that are currently considering this type of fostering. This builds upon the information in the fostering assessment and carers annual reviews which supports reflection, planning and their development whilst they develop a profile that will help support them and the fostering service to consider the 'right match' for them and their family.

The family finders/permanence lead within fostering holds both the profiles for children and carers and with a team of representatives will highlight possible matches and brings these to the attention of the child's and foster carer's social worker. The carers would then be encouraged to attend an in house matching event.

The in-house matching event was first piloted virtually in June 2021. This enabled valuable evaluation and feedback from those foster carers in attendance to help shape up a future one. In January 2022, a further event was held which was well attended and received by foster carers. This event will now be held on a regular basis and built into business as usual to support all the permanence work.



The event welcomes the children's social workers who will present the children, offering a good overview and insight into the strengths, challenges and needs of the child; they will also offer further informal discussions to those that want to understand more about the child. The support is discussed. The social worker at the event will explain the type of care that the child requires, the style of care, the skills, knowledge, and experience that will be needed to help them meet their full potential. Any possible matches and interest from foster carers are carefully considered, more detailed information is shared and where it is felt to be a potential match a transition plan and support offer is put in place. Every plan for permanency revolves around the child's needs, and that means listening to their wishes and feelings. We have a duty to make sure

that children not only understand what's going on but are fully involved in the decisions that will have such a fundamental impact on their lives.

Placement Support:

Placement stability can be undermined if the placement is not adequately supported, as well as an Adoption and Special Guardianship support offer, where permanence is sought through unrelated foster carers careful consideration is given to a wraparound offer that is designed with the carer and child in mind.

All foster carers in Lincolnshire have access to a range of support which offers different levels of intervention and services to ensure the right support at the right time.

All Foster Carers regardless of the type of fostering they do have access to support through the Hub within the frameworks developed by Caring2Learn. This includes a local community network for peer support, social networks, a training and development offer and support from Foster Carer Champions and Placement Support Workers for the delivery of targeted intervention.

In permanence this is further developed and built upon within planning to help support both shorter term and long-term actions.

This can include support that is not routinely on offer to the general carer population.

- Specialist training
- Specialist equipment
- Access to specialist services and therapeutic intervention
- Regular, planned respite with a long term connected respite carer

Conclusion:

In Lincolnshire we are committed to supporting our children in care to be happy and healthy, having the best start in life and being afforded every opportunity to reach their full potential. For children who are no longer able to remain with their birth family, research indicates that outcomes are significantly improved for children when they are in a safe, secure, and stable environment.

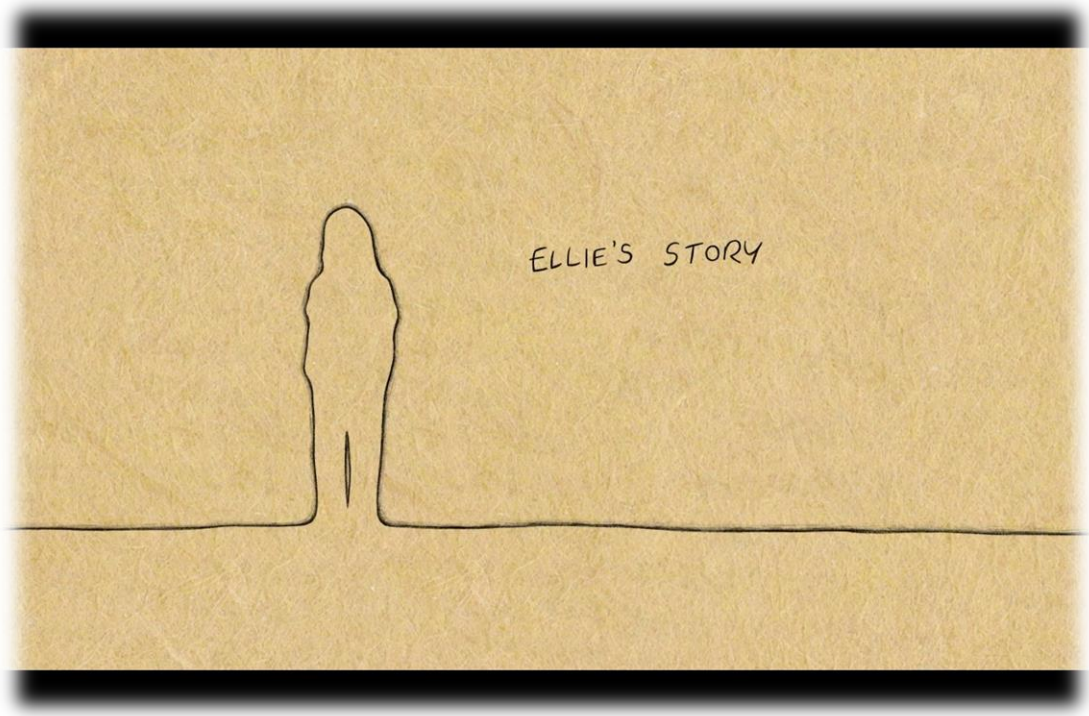
The research and good practice guidance reinforces and underpins the efforts made to secure permanent arrangements for those children requiring long term placements in foster care. There are various options as identified above yet the new dedicated initiative in respect of the In-House Matching events promote the efforts alongside our general family finding activities to secure a longer-term protective and nurturing environment in a family setting.

The continued focus on planned transitions for children in care which focus on meeting the child's needs can provide reassurance and help children to settle and start to build relationships, as well as develop a sense of belonging. Good matching of a child's needs with a foster carer's skills and expertise, alongside child-centred transition planning that always has the child's best interests at heart, is central to good decision making.

All children and young people in need of permanent foster care should be placed with a foster family who is able to understand what each child needs to thrive, build relationships, learn, and develop while supporting them to navigate life's challenges. If it is decided that the permanency plan for a child is to be in long-term foster care, then the matching process is critical.

Finding the right foster family for any child is vitally important to help them achieve good outcomes. This matching event ensures sufficient, child-centred and up-to-date information about the child is shared with the prospective fostering family which offers an efficient method to match children with carers who want to offer children a longer-term home.

There are clear advantages for identifying and matching children with permanent carers and this continues to be a service priority however the national and local shortage of foster carers continues to be a significant barrier in a challenging yet hugely rewarding environment.



[Ellie's Story - Bing video](#)

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