

Life Story Books and the role of the Adoption Service

Introduction

Good preparation for adoption and good life story work contributes towards successful adoptive placements and offers children and young people who remain in the care of the local authority an insight into their current situation and information with regards to their birth family. The Life Story Book (LSB) provides an accessible and child-friendly explanation for the child of how they have come to be where they are today. However, the Life Story Book, while complementing life story work, is not life story work. Life story work is a continuous process for all children whereas the Life Story Book is a tool to enable that work and give children and young people a narrative of their journey to adoption or through the care system.

All children with a plan for adoption must have a Life Story Book and best practice dictates that all children in the care of the Local Authority should have a Life Story Book to aid them to make sense of their current situation.

Life story work

The direct life work should be undertaken by the child's Social Worker from the time they enter care and to help a child understand their identity and how and why they are in care. This will clearly depend on the age and understanding of the child, but guidance should be sought and provided during supervision and a clear plan agreed as to how this work will take place and the content. The life work must be reflected on the child's record and the voice of the child captured.

Life story book (LSB)

The provision of an LSB for Children in care is a statutory requirement for children who are placed for adoption. The regulations state this should be provided by the second Child in care review post placement in an adoptive family. However, experience tells us that often, it is helpful to both the child and the adoptive parents for them to have the book sooner, so they can spend time looking at it together and it may help a child to open up and ask any questions about their birth family and/or to express any feelings they might have.

The guidance states that the LSB should be completed by one person, preferably the child's Social Worker. Whilst this is the preferred option, experience had shown that often children's Social Workers do not have the space needed to complete the LSB in a timely way and the quality of the book is less than good. For this reason, the option of the adoption service contributing at various levels to the creation of LSB's has been explored. It is agreed that the child's Social Worker must remain involved in the creation of the LSB and contribute to it, but there is a recognition that the compilation itself can be done by someone other than them. It is most important that there is a good quality life story book for child which captures details of their birth, history, family, and experiences.

Adoption Partnership south east will now complete all the Life Story Books for children across Bexley, Kent and Medway who are being matched and placed for adoption. Children with agreed adoption plan will continued to be assigned a family finding social worker. The family finding social work will now complete part of the LSB as part of their work as a family finder. The two sections of the book the family finder will complete will be the sections focussing on the child's birth family and history. These two sections will be quality assured by the family finding team manager. These sections will be ready for the prospective adopters to have when the child is placed. Once the child is placed the family finder will end their involvement and the adoption social worker will be responsible for completing the LSB. The adoption social worker will complete the LSB in partnership with the adopters. The final version of the LSB will be quality assured by the adoption social workers team manager before it is printed off and given to the child. This final version must also be uploaded to the child's record.

All the Life Story Books will be completed using the Joy Rees model and will all have a standardised format, which can be adapted according to the child's story. Every book will be child friendly and will be an easy-to-use tool for adopters to support their children with understanding their history and supporting a positive sense of identity.

The Process of the Life Story Books completion

