

Corporate Parenting Panel

19 July 2024

County Wide Specialist Services: Lifelong Links – Family Finding



Report of Rachel Farnham, Head of Children's Social Care, Children and Young People's Services, Durham County Council

Electoral division(s) affected:

None

Purpose of the Report

- 1 This report is to provide an update to Corporate Parenting Panel on the Family Finding Lifelong Links (LL) project, including future developments.

Executive Summary

- 2 The Lifelong Links Project is part of Durham County Council's commitment to achieving the reform set out in '*Children's social care: stable homes, built on love, put loving and stable relationships at the heart of children's social care*'. This includes the mission that by 2027, every care-experienced child and young person will feel that they have strong, loving relationships in place.
- 3 The DFE funding was to develop the existing successful Family Group Conference Service that sits within Countywide Specialist Services and the wider commitment to Family Networks being at the core of the work we do.
- 4 The Lifelong Links Project aligns to the Care Leaver Service Development Plan and with our Staying Close Project.

Recommendation

- 5 Corporate Parenting Panel are asked to:
 - (a) Note the progress of the Lifelong Links Project and provide any comments.

Background

- 6 The Service Manager for Countywide Specialist Services submitted a bid with the DFE on 25 August 2023 to gain funding for the Family Finding – Lifelong Links project, this bid was placed alongside the Peer Mentoring Scheme bid and submitted by Lesley Baldry, Service Manager.
- 7 We were told the bids for both projects were successful on 1 December 2023. The funding gained for the Family Finding from the DFE is as below and this ends on 31 March 2025.

23/24	24/25	Total
£56,524.00	£140,963.00	£197,487.00

- 8 Lifelong Links aims to ensure that children in care have a positive support network around them to help them during their time in care and into adulthood.
- 9 In January 2021, the report of the independent evaluation into Lifelong Links was published. The DFE highlight, stable support network and loving relationships are crucial to supporting children in care and care leavers to thrive. The report says:
- (a) 6% of care leavers report having no one at all providing emotional support
 - (b) nearly 10% of young people only had support from their leaving care worker.
 - (c) 22% of care leavers feel lonely always or often, compared to 10% of the general population.
- 10 The programme will enhance existing developments targeting young people in care who are repeatedly missing / exploited. Providing safe stable loving networks will improve the young person's emotional well-being and mental health, creating the conditions to access Full Circle, a specialised, integrated children's mental health service for those who have experienced complex trauma.
- 11 Improved stability for young people, will mean more young people in employment, education or training, creating cost avoidance through:
- (a) Reduced reliance on benefits.
 - (b) Reduced demand to adult mental health services.

- (c) Reduction in homelessness and demand on emergency temporary accommodation.
- 12 The principles the of lifelong links ensures all actions are guided through the young person's wishes. Therefore, the young person's views will be captured throughout the process and to measure success and future developments.
- 13 A project plan has been in place since December 2023, the focus for the first funding period until March 2024 was the following:
 - (a) Identifying key stakeholders and ensuring senior managers understood and promoted the scheme across Durham Children and Young Peoples Service and Partners.
 - (b) Recruitment of the Lifelong Links Coordinators.
 - (c) Promote the offer across the key teams such as Children in Care, IRO service, Fostering and Residential Services.
 - (d) Train the newly appointed and existing FGC staff in Lifelong Links via the Family Rights Group
 - (e) Develop criteria and begin to identify young people who would be offered LL.
 - (f) Recruitment of admin support.
 - (g) Developing key performance indicators and working with LCS systems team to capture outputs.
- 14 During the period from December 2023 to March 2024, we appointed two Lifelong Links Coordinators, from within the existing FGC team, and are currently recruiting to backfill these positions, one candidate has accepted full time temporary post and is currently completing the onboarding process and we have readvertised for the part-time temporary post.
- 15 Training by the Family Rights Group: seven FGC staff are trained in the Lifelong Links Project, leaving three to complete. One-day Manager awareness training has been delivered to eight managers and three members of Lifelong Links staff have completed one-day care leavers training.
- 16 Promotion and Publicity: we have delivered awareness sessions as part Team Managers Briefing, Head of Service monthly briefing and weekly e-mail, IRO team meeting, CiC site briefing, 2 x Families First team meetings, Fostering Team Meeting, Children's Residential Team Manager Meeting, Teenage Foster Care Support Group, Lunch & Learn

Must Do: We will help families to find and use their networks and 3 x Children's Residential Homes team meeting. We have further sessions at team meetings booked in with the Staying Close Team, Care Leavers Teams and other Families First and Residential homes and are to contact external residential homes in Durham, linking in with neighbouring local authorities that also offer Lifelong Links so the information about Durham's offer is available in residential homes in Gateshead, Darlington and Stockton where are young people may be living. We have developed a face book profile, young person's guide, professionals guide, webpage on wider DCC website and development of webpage on the DSCP website.

- 17 Young People: we currently have five children in our care allocated to our Lifelong Links coordinators for their LL programme, a further 19 identified as suitable to progress to consultation. To date four young people have declined the offer to have Lifelong Links and a further three are currently too young for this cohort.
- 18 We have recruited a full time admin who will support Team Leader and Team Manager with Lifelong Links programme. Main tasks include creating and updating Lifelong Links target list, update Lifelong Links referrals spreadsheet, administer and update Circles social networking tool, create and monitor Facebook profile for Lifelong Links, coordinate and minute LL Stakeholder Group, coordinate and minute weekly LL/Peer Mentoring catch-ups, research (e.g. Facebook pages for other LAs), coordinate and minute LL Stakeholder Group, coordinate and minute weekly LL/Peer Mentoring catch-ups, research (e.g. Facebook pages for other LAs).
- 19 LL team leader and peer mentor coordinator have met to discuss linking the two projects and have established a data sheet to track our young people across the projects. They will continue to meet on a regular basis to share learnings and information to embed the joined up working between the projects.
- 20 A dedicated LL email address has also been set-up.
- 21 Moving forward we have the following aims for the next three months:
 - (a) Ongoing FRG training for LL coordinators, FGC staff and senior managers.
 - (b) Continue to identify young people that may be appropriate for lifelong Links through NEET data, PRP, FGC, CYPs Teams, IRO's etc.
 - (c) To have backfilled the FGC posts and have trained firstly in FGC and then Lifelong Links

- (d) Ongoing LCS systems data base development, to support the performance management and impact of the LL project.
- (e) Joint working with the Peer Mentoring Scheme to consider how a Peer Mentor can support a young person through the LL process, providing additional support where required.
- (f) Continue to build the Lifelong Links project in a sustainable way, to achieve the vision of Lifelong Links being available to all of our children in care.

Conclusion

- 22 The Lifelong Links Project is starting to be rolled out, and we are seeing the increased awareness, training and workshops are encouraging social workers IROs and Managers to identify young people who they feel will benefit from the project.
- 23 We are building a sustainable project and performance and impact is captured through LCS case management system. Building a system and resources through the DfE funding that we can continue to use post March 2025.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

There are no legal implications, this project is being funded by the DFE and is supported by DCC, including appropriate employment checks and training and development for mentors.

Finance

There is no financial implications currently as the scheme is DFE funded however we are already building a sustainable low cost business case to continue the scheme beyond March 2025.

Consultation

Young people are consulted throughout the development of the scheme, they are asked for their goals, views on the mentor match and how we should review their goals.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

There is equal access for all care leavers and children in care over 16 to the scheme.

Climate Change

There is no impact on climate change other than the printing of leaflets and travel for mentors and young people they are mentoring however the intention is to keep activities very close to where the young person lives.

Human Rights

This fits well with the Human Rights, the Right to Life and the Right to Work and Education as a stable life with future aspirations is exactly what we want to achieve.

Crime and Disorder

The Peer Mentoring Project should ensure young people have a positive support network which should reduce offending and the risk of exploitation.

Staffing

Staffing of the scheme is limited to the coordinator and part time admin worker.

The mentors are volunteers.

Accommodation

The staff are based with the Stanley Care Leavers Hub and Green Lane within the Care Leavers Team and the activities will take place in the community.

Risk

All mentor's will be DBS checked and carefully matched with young people.

There will be safety plans if required dependant on young people's needs.

Procurement

No implications.