FOSTERING SERVICE

LIFE STORY WORK

February 2015
**Introduction**

All children and young people in care and separated from their family of origin, have experienced some trauma and loss and they will all need 'life story work' to help them make sense of their history and their experiences.

The principles of the Children Act 1989, the Adoption and Children Act 2002, the Leaving Care Act 2002, the Foster Care Regulations 2002 and Adoption Agency Regulations 2005 underpin North Somerset’s approach to life story work.

All direct work with children and young people, including life story work, should be undertaken with a sound knowledge of child development, including brain development and with some understanding of attachment theory. The timing and nature of any life story work will thus vary, and depends not only on the chronological age, but also on the emotional and cognitive stage of development.

All children/young people are unique and in life story work, as with all other areas of work, individuality is respected and diversity is valued. Needs must be fully addressed in terms of ethnicity, religion, culture, disability and sexuality.

The same principles and the need for careful preparation and an open and honest approach apply when embarking on life story work for all children and young people. When working with those from black and ethnic minorities, those with a disability, with children who have been sexually abused, or with refugees and asylum seekers, the worker has to be particularly sensitive to the extra and complex issues involved. In some instances specialised consultation should be sought and advice taken about when, and who is best placed, to do this work.

**Principles of Life Story Work**

Children and young people separated from their birth families, especially those who have experienced multiple moves may have a very fragile sense of themselves and a very fragmented understanding of their own history. Life story work is an attempt to help children and young people to develop a stronger sense of their own identity and it is a way of helping them to make sense of their history. In essence life story work aims to answer the many questions - what happened, when and why questions - they may have about their lives.

North Somerset encourages a holistic approach to life story work, recognising that any significant adults in the child/young person’s life could make a valuable contribution e.g. birth relatives, foster carers, teachers, residential workers, family support worker, and social workers.

It is generally agreed that the main purpose of life story work is:

- To give details and understanding of the child/young person's history.
- To build their sense of identity, including religious, cultural and ethnic identity.
- To enable the child/young person to share their past with others.
- To give a realistic account of early events and to dispel fantasies or fears about the birth family.
- To link the past to the present and to help both the child/young person and the carer or parent to understand how earlier life events continue to impact on behaviour.
- To acknowledge issues of separation and loss.
- To enable carers/parents to understand and develop empathy for the child/young person. To enhance the child/young person's self-esteem and self-worth.

Life story work should also be used to help children, young people and care leavers to prepare positively for the future and any planned move. This could be:

- Reunification.
- Moving to another foster carer.
- Moving to a permanent placement.
- Moving towards adulthood and independent living.
- Moving towards supported or residential care arrangements for adults.

If the plan is Permanence, whether this is for adoption, long term fostering, Special Guardianship or a Residence Order life story work should be used to help the child or young person to understand their history but also to help them develop a sense of security and Permanence and to promote attachment.

In all life story work, those involved must develop an awareness of the needs and level of understanding of the child/young person, and the work must proceed at their pace.

Life story work can be informal, continuing throughout a child/young person’s life and into adulthood, or more formal, structured and time limited. But some elements of this work should start from the time that a child or young person is in care.

**General**

All children and young people in care have the right to understand their history and know about their family of origin.

Life story work is a complex and continuous lifelong process but has to start from the time that a child or young person is first in care and progress discussed at each review.

The work must proceed at the child/young person’s pace and it should be developmental and age appropriate and culturally sensitive.
Life story work, in all forms, belongs to the child, but depending on child’s age it may be the social worker, family support worker, the foster carers, adoptive parents or residential worker who has to keep the information safe for the child or young person, to be shared and given to them at the appropriate times.

Further consultation, guidance notes and literature are available in relation to this work from the Adoption and Permanence Team.

To enable fairness and inclusion, we have a number of strategies, policies and practises that will help our staff to consider the needs of children, young people, their parents and carers, within the context of life story work. We aim to promote equity of access and to respect individuality to eliminate discrimination and promote good relations between diverse groups. We believe in promoting a positive identity for all children and young people to meet their needs regardless of race, gender, disability etc.

Children and young people in care come from diverse background. They all need to be respected and to have positive messages about their culture, religion and identity. Some children and young people who are in care have a disability and have to be treated as children first and to be provided with additional help to deal with their disability.

**Procedures**

Life story work is a complex and multi-layered concept and the various elements will overlap and should be incorporated as and when this is appropriate for the child or young person. North Somerset is aiming for a comprehensive and seamless approach.

Depending on age and level of understanding, some informal life story work should begin from the time that the child or young person is in care. The social workers, family support workers, foster carers or residential workers will have to be mindful of this. Everybody has a role in life story work - from social worker/family support worker to foster/residential carer to birth family. Life story work is an integral part of the care planning process and the plan to start life story work with each child/young person should be developed early on in the care planning and a decision made about ‘who will be doing what’ in terms of life story work. Information gathering is a key part to starting the life story work process.

A 'Life Story Work Plan' should be part of the Care Plan. The child/young person's social worker will discuss this with their supervisor and other relevant professionals. The supervising social worker should ensure that the carer has a memory book, a memory box and a photograph album for the child or young person. The social worker or the supervising social worker from the fostering team will be able to support the carer or supported lodging’s host in this role and will ensure that they have the appropriate tools to help them.

At the first statutory CLA review the IRO will focus on the care plan and the need for any life story work will form part of this consideration. Life story work will be
addressed more fully at the second statutory CLA review, when Permanence options are being considered. The most appropriate type and level of life story work will be discussed and the different roles and responsibilities agreed. A formal decision and Life Story Work Plan will be noted on the review form, by the IRO.

The timing of the decision to start direct life story work with a child will vary according to the child's individual needs and circumstances. Formal life story work sessions will have to be time limited, regular and carefully planned and reviewed.

The social worker should resist overloading the child or young person and the work should proceed at the child's pace. Life story work is never actually complete, and at different stages of the child/young person's cognitive development, and over time, the social worker or others may have to help the child to revisit their history and retell their story.

If workers from other teams or from other agencies are already involved with the child or young person, the social worker should consult with them and advice should be sought prior to undertaking any direct work with the child or young person. If it is thought that formal life story work is not appropriate at this time, the reasons should be discussed at the review and recorded on the review form and on the child/young person's file.

All decisions relating to life story work will also be recorded by the social worker on the appropriate section of the child/young person's file by all the professionals involved (this function is available on the ICS picklist).

Progress in relation to the life story work plan will be discussed at all subsequent statutory reviews and noted by the IRO and by the social workers on the child's file.

Any information and materials relating to the child's life story work could be placed along with the child's life story work plan in the appropriate section of the child's file.

Where adoption is the plan, a Life Story Book and a Later in Life Letter must be given to the adoptive parents within 3 months following the Adoption Order (Adoption national minimum standards). This will be incorporated into the life story work plan and progress will be discussed at reviews, matching and planning meetings. Although not a statutory requirement, the provision of a book and a later in life letter is also good practice when other permanence options are planned.

The life story work plan will also be incorporated into the Child's Permanence Report and will be discussed at the Adoption Panel. The date that this work will be completed and given to the adoptive parents must also be identified at the Adoption Placement Planning Meeting.

A copy of the Later in Life Letter and the Life Story Book must be placed on the child/young person's file. (See appendix 1).
Preserving the Record

One life story record is not enough because it can be lost, damaged or destroyed.

Ideally there should be three records of all the life story work:

- One for the child to own.
- One for the carer (this should move to the next carer if the child moves placement).
- One to be held by the social worker as part of the child’s file.

Care and judgement should be used about which copy should hold original documents. The child’s copy may be lost, damaged by other children, even damaged by the child themselves. It is important that if this does happen the copy can be replicated for the child.

Roles and Responsibilities

Social Workers:

The child or young person’s Social Worker holds the key responsibility in relation to the Care Plan and this includes the life story work plan. The Social Worker is also responsible for ensuring that the plan is recorded and updated in the appropriate section of the child/young person’s file.

The allocated social worker, in consultation with their supervisor, is responsible for co-ordinating the work agreed and ensuring that the appropriate ‘layer’ of the work is in place.

The social worker may carry out the direct work themselves, but in some instances a colleague or a worker from another team or from another agency may be identified as the appropriate person. In adoption the social worker can coordinate the life story work but must write the Later in Life Letter (Adoption national minimum standards).

Some informal life story work will be part of the social worker’s statutory visits and the less direct, information gathering and family history element will also be an important part of the social worker’s role.

The direct life story work is a time limited piece of work, and timescales have to be agreed and realistic. It is important that the worker has the space in their workload to be able to plan and commit to this piece of work, and that they should receive appropriate support and supervision. For further advice contact the Adoption Team.
Birth Relatives:

Members of the birth family have significant legal rights in relation to their children and their views must be taken into account throughout the time that a child/young person is in care. They are clearly, the most significant source of information about the early childhood experiences, and about the family's history. They are vital in the whole process of ensuring that the children and young people grow up with as much information as possible about their origins.

Where little or no details about the birth family is known, as with unaccompanied asylum seekers, every effort should be made to gather as much background information as possible by contacting International Social Services, the Embassy and the Red Cross.

If possible birth relatives should be encouraged to contribute directly to the life story work and where Adoption and Permanence is the plan, they can also write a 'background letter' for the child. In some instances this could be a helpful component of any disengagement work, possibly giving the child 'permission' to move on and attach to their new family.

Birth families may be reluctant to share information when care proceedings are being contested and when adoption or Permanence plans are first made, but they may be able to contribute at a later stage. If a letter box arrangement is in place or if there are direct contact arrangements, this will keep this line of communication open.

Foster Carers:

The child or young person's foster carer is in the best position to do much of the informal life story work, as they have responsibility for the day-to-day care. They are also best placed to record all the everyday important incidents, milestones and events.

Foster carers play a vital role in safeguarding the memories of the children and young people in their care. Foster carers' memory books and boxes contain extremely important 'treasures' and are vital if we are to ensure that memories are not too fragmented or even completely lost.

Fostering Supervising Social Workers:

The Supervising Social Worker, in consultation with the child/young person's social worker, has the primary responsibility of supporting and monitoring the work that is being carried out by the foster carers in relation to life story work. They can offer guidance and advice. The Supervising Social Worker should ensure that foster carers have the appropriate tools and equipment to enable them to fulfil the part that they must play in preserving children/young people's memories and helping them to understand their history e.g. cameras, videos, memory books, photograph albums and memory boxes.
**Agency Placements:**
When the child or young person is in another agency placement the timing and appropriateness of life story work must be discussed at all statutory reviews, and decisions carefully recorded by the IRO.

The role of the residential workers or foster carers in relation to life story work must also be explored and negotiated at the reviews, and in such placements it is particularly important that everyone involved is kept informed about the progress of the life story work.

**Care Leaver Personal Advisors:**
Care Leaver Personal Advisors will continue to build on the life story work plan already devised by the previous worker to ensure as much consistency as possible.

For care leavers the same principles and procedures apply and the worker can, if appropriate for the young person, work alongside the foster carer, residential team or supported lodging’s host. Care Leaver Personal Advisors are responsible for ensuring that young people, on reaching independence have a record and have had the opportunity to work through their life history.

For unaccompanied asylum seekers and refugees, this work will have to be handled particularly sensitively. The worker will have to work very closely with any other service providers involved and draw on specialist advice and support from other agencies e.g. International Social Services, Red Cross, Refugee Council and Interpreters.

**Adoption Social Workers:**
Where adoption and permanence is the plan, the Adoption Social Worker can give further advice regarding the format and content of the life storybook and the later in life letters.

The Adoption Social Worker should ensure that the adoptive parents, guardians or carers are given all of the information, including the Child's Permanence Report, and other age appropriate 'tools' to help them continue the life story work throughout the child/young person's life and into adulthood, e.g. the life story work folder, the birth family history, the memory book and box, the later in life letter and the child's life story book.

**Managers/Supervisors:**
The life story work plan should be addressed during case discussion in supervision. Realistic targets and timescales will have to be agreed, and in some instances the manager may feel that it is more appropriate for the work to be undertaken by another worker either within North Somerset or from another agency.
Independent Reviewing Officers:
The Independent Reviewing Officer plays a key role in planning, monitoring and reviewing the life story work plan. The plan and progress should be discussed and recorded at every review.

When the Independent Reviewing Officer has concerns about progress in relation to the life story work plan these concerns should be shared with the supervising manager.

Terminology/Elements of Life Story Work

Life Journey Work, also referred to as Life Story Work, is the process of helping a child or young person to understand their history and a way of helping them to develop a more integrated sense of themselves and their identity. A variety of approaches can be used to help children to remember their life journey and unravel their confusions and misunderstandings about their past: Listening, talking, drawing, painting, playing, storytelling, compiling ecomaps, family trees or other diagrams, using sand trays, puppets and interactive packages - It is about processing and internalising the information. When completed, appropriate life journeywork should be placed in a folder or book and retained by the child.

This Life Story Work Book or Life Story Work Folder is often regarded as the end product of the work, although the process or life story work will continue

Life Story Books must be compiled for all children and young people when adoption and permanence is the plan. As with life story work books, life story books may be the culmination of the life journey work, but for some children, in particular very young children, the social worker will have to prepare the child's story book first and the life story work will follow. The life story book will contain some of the elements of life story work but it is not the same as the life story work book. This book tells the child/young person's story in a sensitive, honest but age appropriate way. It provides the child or young person with a coherent narrative. It is their story.

The Adoption Team hold life story books for children in adoptive processes and can advise about how to obtain suitable books for other children.

Foster carers' Memory Books and Memory Boxes: This book is a folder or ring binder with information, anecdotes, developmental milestones, photographs, cards, certificates and other mementos gathered while the child or young person lives with the foster family. This is an extremely helpful way of preserving the child/young person's precious memories. Foster carers should also gather, or help the child/young person to gather, other memorabilia - a favourite toy, item of clothing or other possessions, a lock of hair, those first milk teeth, copies of school reports, certificates, prizes and any other special trinkets or little souvenirs the child has gathered, and store them in a customised box.

Residential workers can have a similar role in relation to preserving memories.
Photographs are an important element of life story work and every effort should be made to gather pictures of birth parents, siblings, other birth relatives, foster carers, friends and any significant people in the child's life, with names, relationships and dates. Although copies of some of these photographs may be placed or scanned into the child's life book or life story book, all looked after children should have a separate and clearly labelled photograph album.

For some children or young people audiotapes, videos or DVD's and computers and IT packages could be used constructively and creatively as part of their life story work.

The social worker must compile a genogram and a chronology giving a list of significant people, events, changes and movements since birth/pre-birth, with dates and ages. A chronology may also be produced for or with the child in the form of a life graph or flow chart and this should be placed in the child'/young persons life story work folder.

The social worker must gather detailed information about the child/young person's birth relatives and the birth family history for the Child's Permanence Report, prepared for the Adoption Panel. This is a fundamental element of the life story work, but there is a danger of overloading the child or young person with too much of this information too soon. A 'simpler' version could be included in their life story work book/folder or in the later in life letter. The Child's Permanence Report gives a very detailed account of the circumstances of the child or young person coming in to care and details of the birth family's history. The adoptive parents will have copies of these to share with the child at a later stage and when they feel it would be helpful. At the age of 18 years and at any time in adulthood, the adopted person can also apply to the adoption agency for access to this report, and to other background information, so that access to the adoption records may also be part of the ongoing life story work.

If adoption is the plan, the social worker must compose a Later in Life Letter, addressed to the child and written at the time of the adoption placement. This is a statutory requirement and another layer in life story work. The letter must be given to the adoptive parents for safe keeping and contains more information, factual details and birth family history, to be shared with the child by the adoptive parent at a later stage - during the teenage years or earlier if this is appropriate. The Adoption Team can provide exemplar letters and further information.

Life Appreciation Days, sometimes called Life Celebrations Days and Child Appreciation Days, are usually held after the matching panel and before the child/young person is placed with their adoptive family. Such days would be of benefit for those moving to other types of permanent placement too. The new carers/adopters attend the whole session, and depending on the child's age and if it is appropriate s/he may also attend. Anyone who has been significant in the child/young person's life is invited to talk about memories and to share both factual and anecdotal information.

The guest list could include birth relatives; close family friends or neighbours, nursery or school staff, teachers and previous social workers and foster carers.
The day gives the new family a very 'rounded' picture of the child/young person and the facilitator should record the memories and take photographs of the day. The life appreciation record is a valuable addition to life story work.

Life journey work will similarly continue with young people who remain in foster care, in residential care and with those in lodgings and moving towards independence.

Care leavers and post care adults can also apply for access to their Care Records, at any time, and they must be provided with a comprehensive summary of the information held and copies of some original document relating to their time in care.

**Appendix 1 – Beyond Life Story Work**

For many children, life story work will not be sufficient to overcome barriers they have developed to protect their inner painful world. In particular this may apply to children who have experienced numerous moves which have severely damaged their ability to form and sustain relationships beyond a superficial level. Such children can be described as "emotionally frozen".

In such cases, it may be necessary to refer the child or young person for a more in-depth assessment by Child & Adolescent Health Service. Together, a programme of skilled therapeutic work can be undertaken to ensure that effective work is carried out with that child/young person using a range of suitable methods. However, the key to working with children and young people who have deep-seated emotional or psychological difficulties is to recognise that it is essential to seek expert advice before embarking on any kind of life story work.

The effects of separation from a birth parent should never be under-estimated, regardless of the years that have passed. Children who have experienced separation may find it difficult to talk in an adult way about themselves - so different communication methods may be used based on the sort that children themselves favour. For example, communication through play, the use of glove puppets, the "empty chair", the telephone or role play. These methods can be successful in engaging children in positive life story work.

**Appendix 2 – Working with Black Children and Minority Ethnic Children**

When engaging with children and talking about the family history, background and future, you may come across many misconceptions they have about themselves. However, there are opportunities to give them a more positive self-image as well as more information about themselves. For Asian, African and Caribbean children and children of mixed parentage, there is an extra dimension to their feelings about themselves - colour. Preparation for life story work always has to be handled with extreme care and honesty, especially when trying to put things into their true perspective, and possibly even more so when working with
black children and black children of mixed-parentage - particularly if you are white.

If you are white and doing life story work with such a child, you should be familiar with the correct terminology to use when referring to black people, as incorrect usage of words may inhibit rather than help.

Every effort should be made to involve a black worker with a black child as the child may feel more comfortable asking questions which may be answered first hand and a link will be provided with a person with whom the child may be able to identify with. This can be particularly useful for children who have been looked after for a great part of their lives and may have had little contact with black people, or for children who are living far removed from their culture.

Appendix 3 – Working with Groups

Working with Families

When there is more than one looked after child in a family, it is possible to do some of the work of making a life story book together but it is important that each child has his or her own record of their life story work. Work with a family in a group progresses faster than working one-to-one.

Normally, it will be the oldest child who will provide the link for the others from the past to the present. That child may be the family "historian" assisting you in helping the other members of the family to understand what has happened in their past and what is happening in the present. In doing so, the older children are able to extend their own knowledge and understanding too, and can begin to explain to their siblings how they understand things. This can be less threatening than explaining to someone outside the family.

Working with Adolescents in Groups

Working with children from the same family can help in the process of life story work. Working with a group of children who are not related can also be successful. Providing a setting in which children share their pasts, their feelings about the present and their hopes for the future with others who have experienced similar difficulties can be a help and a comfort. A group preparation can be a way of reducing the sense of isolation many children feel and a means of freeing them to share similar feelings with others.

Appendix 4 – Working with Children with a Learning Disability

Children with a learning disability have the same "child" needs as any other child, and this means having an accurate account of their personal history.

There can be a reluctance to become involved in life story work with children who have a learning disability, and those involved with these children have to examine their own feelings about this. One of the most common reasons is that some social workers are themselves quite uncomfortable with learning disabilities
and may as a result avoid contact. It is important to either recognise this and either accept it and not become involved in work with people with learning disabilities or undertake additional training to help overcome any difficulty. A second problem with undertaking this work is where the worker has difficulty in communicating with a disabled person, and is unable or unwilling to take time to learn how the disabled person most readily communicates. Thirdly, there is sometimes a wish to be overprotective of the child with learning disabilities, thus avoiding any work which has the potential to be upsetting or painful.

Another barrier to life story work is the continuing belief that families who would wish to take on a child with learning disabilities will not be found. This can lead to deferment of vital work until a family has been identified, which does not allow the disabled child space and time to internalise their own life history and grieve the loss of their birth family before moving to a new family.

In deciding how to tackle life story work with children with learning disabilities, it is also important to consider who would be best able to do this work. Since being able to understand and communicate with children is paramount, this should be undertaken by the person who communicates best with the child, rather than assume it is always done by the child's social worker. (The same principle is important for children with special communication needs).

Using Different Methods

For children with a learning disability who perhaps have difficulty in communicating by speech, or who may lack the use of one or more of the senses, it is possible to develop life story work, which does not depend only on visual methods but involves stimulation of other senses. For example, for a child who is blind, life story work can be interspersed with tactile stimuli, for example, buttons from a favourite person's jacket, a shell from a seaside outing with the family or dried flowers from the garden. It is also more helpful to use audio rather than visual methods of life story work, and written life story work can be recorded on to audio tape.

Appendix 5 – Working with Children Who Have Been Sexually Abused

To carry out life story work with children who have been sexually abused, you will have to adapt some of the skills already described in this document. The sexual abuse of some of the children you will work with will be known about and may have resulted in their being removed from their families of origin. Work with these children is less problematic than with those children where sexual abuse in their family of origin has NOT been disclosed.

Children known to have been sexually abused

It is important that, if you are working with a child where it is known that they have been sexually abused, you acknowledge the abuse. This can save a lot of time in doing life story work. Many children in the care system do not know what
other people know about them. They may not know if it is alright to talk about their past experiences. By raising the subject of sexual abuse early on, you are signalling to the child that you will talk about it with them. You may also want to know who else has talked about the abuse with the child. If very little work has been done with the child about their experience of abuse, you have to prepare yourself for a longer task than you originally bargained for. Life story work should not replace therapy. The life story work should remain task-centred, recording important past experiences that they can keep. Talking with you now will make talking in therapy easier later on. It may be whilst doing life story work that it becomes clear to you or to the older child with whom you are working that further work has to be done.

Belief

It is important that you demonstrate your belief that the sexual abuse did happen. You may also want to explore why it is difficult for children to talk about the sexual abuse they experience. You may also explain that sometimes, after children have disclosed the abuse they experienced, they sometimes remember other things about the abuse.

Right and Wrong

You have to offer some comments about the rights and wrongs of sexual abuse, for example: "It is right for children to tell adults about the abuse" and "it is wrong for adults to sexually abuse children".

These may be important clear messages to give those children who are showing signs of sexual bullying, or who are clearly sexually offending against other children. You may have to show that you understand why a child might sexually offend against other children, but that a history of sexual victimisation is not an excuse to do it to others.

What Happened

It may be useful to record from the child's point of view what happened when they told. What did their mum say or do? What about their dad? It can be helpful to record what the child would like to have happened. This is important as it not only identifies and records what did happen, but also provides the child with a model response that can inform both their current carers and the child as a future parent.

If the child is in care and the offender is still in the family, the child may have strong feelings that they are being punished for telling. Be honest about the unfairness of the situation; it is unfair that children are deprived of their family because an adult won't own up to having a serious problem. You may be able to identify whom the child would like to have contact with and what might be safe circumstances under which contact could occur.

You will have to be prepared for the confusions children and young people will express if no one has talked about the meaning of their abuse with them before.
Some children who have been sexually abused may not be ready to do life story work when you are. This may be because remembering their past abuse is too traumatic for them and makes them feel worse. Workers should always go at the pace of the child - if the child is clear they do not feel able to talk about the abuse in more details at this time, you should let them know that is okay. It may also be advisable to record that this is the case.

**Undisclosed Sexual Abuse**

If a child has not disclosed sexual abuse but it is suspected, workers may wish to suggest to the child that they or other professionals were worried that the child had been sexually abused. Before doing this, the workers have to feel clear that the child is safe (i.e. not currently being abused) and to know what their agency procedures are in the event of a clear disclosure.

If a child discloses abuse in their current placement, this will have to be investigated in line with child protection procedures. Sometimes a child may make a partial disclosure - he or she may tell about being sexually abused but not identify the perpetrator. You can still carry on with life story work, perhaps speculating as to why it is hard for the child to identify who sexually abused them.

**Appendix 6 – Working with Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Young People**

Why do unaccompanied children and young people seek asylum?

Most unaccompanied children and young people who come to the UK to seek asylum are often 15 or over, but many are younger. Most are boys. They come from many different countries of origin - the particular mix of countries at any given time reflects the world's trouble spots. In recent years, most children came from Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, Somalia and China.

These children and young people have taken the frightening step of leaving their homes, their families and friends and everything they have ever known - and they have done it because to stay is an even more frightening prospect. Often they have been made to leave for their safety. Some of them will be escaping from danger or ill treatment, such as:

- War or other armed conflict or serious civil unrest, and the breakdown of normal society;
- Forced recruitment into military service, perhaps being forced to engage in violence;
- Persecution of them and their families, perhaps because of their political or religious beliefs or ethnicity;
- Being taken from their families and trafficked for the sex industry or to be a domestic servant;
- Seeing their parents and other family members being killed or, imprisoned;
Having their parents go missing and not knowing their fate;
Having to go into hiding, unable to go to school or go out;
Having to rely on people other than their parents, on relief agencies or refugee camps, for their survival;
Having been beaten up or sometimes raped or tortured because of ethnic or tribal conflict or political repression.

Some come to the UK in the hope of escaping extreme poverty and deprivation in their own country, where they have no opportunities to survive.

When a young person arrives in the UK, they may struggle to cope with grief, loss and/or frightening and horrific experiences and he or she may have had or witnessed in the country or origin. They are probably feeling confused, afraid, vulnerable, lonely and far from family and home.

Life story work can be a gentle but effective way of allowing the child or young person to express, explore and overcome some of their experiences, however, one of the key challenges for the child or young person is likely to be communication. If this is the case, arrangements will have to be made for an interpreter when carrying out work, although non-verbal communication is equally important, and life story work can be carried out with the use of pictures, illustrations and drawings. See Translation services.

Useful Organisations:

- **British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF)**
  Saffron House
  6-10 Kirby Street
  London EC1N8TS
  Tel: 020 7421 2600
  www.baaf.org.uk

- **Fostering Network Head Office**
  87 Blackfriars Road
  London SE1 8HA
  Tel: 020 7620 6400
  www.fostering.net

- **Refugee Action**
  Head Office
  The Old Fire Station
  150 Waterloo Road
  London SE1 8SB
Appendix 7 – Children placed with Connected Carers

**Connected Care** means that relatives or friends look after children who cannot live with their parents. Usually the children in Connected care already have a relationship with their carers before they go to live with them.

Connected Care may include people who are not related to the child, but who are still in the child's social network: someone the child knows well and trusts, for example, a good neighbour, a parent of a school friend or a close family friend.

There is nothing new about keeping children in the family and in the community. Relatives and friends have always stepped in when there has been a family crisis and cared for their grandchildren, nephews, nieces, cousins, siblings and "godchildren" for a day, a week, a few months or even a lifetime. What is fairly new is that the importance of keeping children in their own families and in their own communities is now officially recognised, and Connected Care has become the first choice for local authorities.

- Children may have to leave their parents because:
  - They may have been neglected or abused;
  - Their parents may misuse drugs or alcohol.
  - Their parents may be sick or dead;
  - There may have been a family break-up, or domestic violence may put children at risk or harm;
  - A very young parent may be too inexperienced to look after their child;
  - Their parents may be unable to manage if they have many children.

Within the context of life story work with children or young people placed in Connected Care, there are some key points to remember:

- Children have to know that whatever has happened is not their fault and that they are not inferior to sisters and brothers still living at home or with other families;
- Children want help to remain connected to their past, to live in the present and to look forward to the future. Continuity is vital for us all, but particularly for children who have to leave their home and parents.
Children want their parents and their Connected Carers to co-operate if at all possible. It can be scary for a child to be at the centre of hostilities. As far as life story work goes, it is always beneficial where the parents can work with the carers in terms of sharing information for life story work to be carried out (photos, information about family members etc).

**Appendix 8 – Life Story Work In Other Settings**

There are many different circumstances in which life story work can be used to facilitate communication and help children and adults, through painful periods in their lives. For example:

- Life story work with children suffering a life threatening illness;
- Using life story work with families affected by HIV;
- Life story work with adults;
- Life story work with children adopted from overseas.

**Appendix 9 – What should be included (these are prompts, not a definitive list)**

- Birth certificate.
- Pre-birth information.
- Information re: day of birth, e.g. time, weight, delivery (i.e. Caesarean/natural), any complications.
- Name at birth.
- Bottle / breast fed – if so, how long for?
- Child development record.
- Information re: parents when young.
- Significant events, e.g. first steps / bike ride / first day at school.
- School photographs.
- First (if not others) nursery / school report.
- Photographs re: locations of significant places (suggest using Google Earth / heritage sites, which have been used to get a photograph of a grave in Canada. Websites may have image of maternity hospital).
- Dates of birth of family members.
- Awards / certificates.
- Items of religious and devotional significance.
- Cultural items.
- Significant events, eg first fancy dress party.
- Hand / foot prints.
- Drawings.
- Written work.
- Favourite things, e.g. card from best friend.
- Favourite foods.
- Special possessions, e.g. flowers, when bridesmaid.
- Pets (photographs).
- Medical information.
- Court processes (use of 'clipart' for simple explanations).
- Significant people's jobs, e.g. social worker.
- Changes, likes / dislikes.
- Significant fears.
- Pay attention to senses, e.g. special perfumes.
- Can have memory box, family history.
- Therapeutic – issues being worked through.
- Letter from carers writing something about their stay with them.
- Social workers can share their own observations of contact.
- Albums.
- DVDs.
- Life map puzzles.
- Rolls of paper, to gather information.
- Using IT for older children.
- Newspapers.
- Try and reflect how that child has touched other people's lives.
- Anecdotes / family myths can also be part of a child's history.

Appendices 2-7 are adapted from Life Story Work - "A Practical Guide to Helping Children Understand Their Past" Tony Ryan and Rodger Walker.