

Information sheet for foster carers:

Family Networking & children looked after or leaving care



Background.

In Norfolk we want to work with and alongside families, rather than taking decisions about them in isolation.

Where a child comes into the care system because no one in the family and wider network can provide them with the stable home they need, those who may have provided love, care and support, through no fault of their own often lose touch with the child. The current system for children who are looked after, and care leavers, does not do enough to ensure those that provided love and care to the child when they lived with their parents, are able to continue to do so when they are in foster or residential care.

Norfolk will be embedding Family Networking to ensure that all those connected to the child who can be a source of emotional, physical, mental, spiritual or cultural support are able to engage with workers and those caring for the child. This will provide opportunities to the child's family network to make a positive difference to the child's everyday life, to give support where required and to have a relationship with the child where this would be in the child's long term best interests.

Our new way of working enables parents and families to take more ownership of the concerns and risks and be part of putting a plan together with professionals to keep children safer and healthier.

What are the principles of Family Networking?

1. Every child/parent has a family and/or network and they can be found if we try
2. A meaningful connection to their family or network helps a child develop and/or maintain a sense of belonging
3. The single factor most strongly connected with positive outcomes for children is meaningful, lifelong connection to their family and/or network

How does it work when the child or young person is looked after/leaving care?

1. Professionals working with a child will set up a network meeting.
2. The child (depending on age and understanding) or young person should be spoken to about the people who are most important to them, and whether they would like to involve those important people in plans to create a lifetime of support for them.
3. The worker, working directly with the child or young person and the foster carer will identify members of the network that could be involved in planning and support.



4. The worker will contact those people identified to see if they would be interested in attending a meeting to help the child or young person. The meeting should happen at the earliest point possible, while respecting network members caring or work responsibilities.

5. At the first meeting ground rules suggested by the members will be established. The first meeting should be used to see if anyone from the network has been missed out and who could helpfully be included. There will be discussions why the network is there and the support they can offer.

6. The plan is written up and shared with all those attending and the IRO. The family network will then review progress at follow up meetings with the other professionals involved. There should be only one plan for each family network to be working to. Where the child/young person wants to involve network members in their LAC review, the review should be arranged around this.

7. All family network plans must be regularly reviewed to check on progress.

Frequently Asked Questions

What if the family is unsafe?

We will not know who is safe and able to offer a meaningful commitment to the child until we involve them. The likelihood is that families are far more aware of people who could present a risk than professionals and will not agree plans that could place the child in any danger.

Is the idea to place children with extended family members/friends rather than place them in foster care?

Yes, where possible we want children to remain with parents or in the extended network, as research shows that this creates a better sense of their belonging and supports their long-term wellbeing. However, where this is not possible, we want to make sure good links are maintained with the child's network that supports their development while in foster care.

What about children who are already in foster care or residential care?

We do not want to disrupt stable placements or plans where permanence has been agreed through foster care. However, we know that young people transitioning to young adults will often rely on or need a combination of family, friends and formal support networks to provide support.

Does that mean foster carers will be left out of decision making meetings?

Not necessarily. For many young people in foster care, the foster carers family and friend will make up the extended network. Others may want to involve people from their community of origin as well. We want to ensure that all those who could provide



the young person with support they need are offered opportunities to make plans and decisions with the young person and be part of their lifelong network.

Are we doing this already?

Yes, in some services this already happens. We need to make sure it is a consistent approach for all children and a shared vision across Norfolk.

What about contact arrangements?

Contact arrangements will be discussed as part of the Family Network meetings. It is likely that involving more people in the planning will support contact and make it safer and more beneficial to the child. The aim is for contact to become a part of their life in the same way that other children see members of their family for days out. This can be agreed through reviewing the child's normal routines and activities in the network meetings.

Can the meetings have an informal approach?

Yes, absolutely. Timings, venue, refreshments will be child and family friendly. If a child is attending the meeting, careful planning will be put in place, so the child is not overwhelmed.

What if a person is considered to be unsafe by the network but the child wants to see them?

The risks and safety will be explored with the network: what we are worried about, what existing safety there is or could be, and what needs to happen. The child's welfare must be paramount, and they will need to be helped to understand if there are things that can't happen and why, using words and pictures to explain the reasons people are worried. The situation will be regularly reviewed.

What will happen if the Family Network Meeting doesn't work out? E.g. the family/network member did not attend, or the venue isn't right?

The network members will agree how they will explore non-attendance to the best interest of the child. Opportunities to share feedback following the meetings also will be provided.

Sometimes children and young people do not always say who they are missing from the past, or this takes time. How will this be managed?

Children should always be given the space and time they need to think about the past. Often the network will know about people in the child's network that the child/yp may not immediately remember, and this will need to be discussed with the child/yp.

How can the carer feedback things that the child has said about who they would/would not like to see?

Normally, the carer will be involved in the network meeting, but should also have a separate conversation with the social worker where this would be helpful. A partnership approach is essential.

