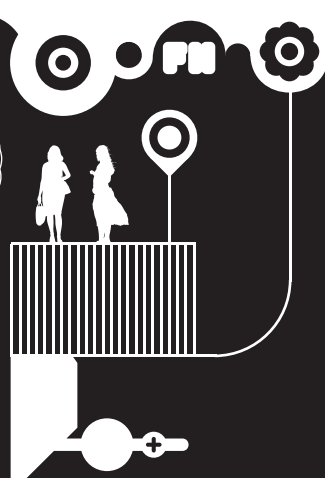


Amy's Diary

A fostered young person's journey
through secondary school

With notes for teachers and social workers



Foreword

The Welsh Assembly is delighted to be able to support the Fostering Network Wales in the production of this guide for teachers, designated staff in educational provisions, social workers and the wider circle within corporate parenthood.

The Assembly's vision of improving ACCESS to information and support, embedding a more collaborative CULTURE and providing TRAINING through information is realised all in this diary, which illustrates real situations that may occur and offers another point of view that may have otherwise not been considered.

Introduction

This is the fictional diary of Amy. Amy came into foster care when she was in Year 6, as a result of neglect and physical abuse. She spent a few weeks in an emergency foster placement, before being placed with Jennie. She was fortunate enough to be able to stay at her own primary school.

This is her story of secondary school.

Although this is the fictional diary of a fostered young person, most of the themes are just as relevant to any vulnerable young person you may meet.

There are around 3,500 children and young people in foster care across Wales. Each has their own story. Each has their own educational needs. Amy's diary introduces some of the common themes from across Wales.

Education is a major part of all young people's lives. It provides opportunities for personal development and success. It is a route out of poverty and disadvantage. Fostered young people need to get the most out of education, and yet as a group they are not achieving the same kind of outcomes as other young people.

Foster carers and care leavers both talk about the difficulty of moving from primary to secondary school. Many talk about how fostered children were "OK" at primary school, but increasingly fell behind and become disillusioned at secondary school. For this reason, this Guide concentrates on secondary school.

Meet the (corporate) parents

When a local authority fosters a child or young person, that local authority takes on some (or occasionally all) of the parenting role. The local authority then has to make sure that it provides parenting of a suitably high standard. This is called “Corporate Parenting”.

In theory, this means Amy has a whole team of adults working together to parent and support her. In practice, this can mean that Amy has a whole range of adults all looking at different parts of her life, with little sense of being a team. Important parts of Amy’s life may be overlooked because everyone thinks that someone else is dealing with it. Just as importantly, no one person has an overview of Amy’s life as a whole.

Amy needs her teachers to understand her situation and how it may affect her ability to learn and also her ability to handle the social side of school. Amy needs her social worker to understand how important school is, and to do everything possible to make school a happy and successful time. Both Amy’s teacher and social worker need to work closely with her foster carers, and provide them with the information and support they need to be able to help Amy succeed.

Note for teachers

As a teacher, you probably went into your profession with the aim of achieving the best for each young person who comes within your sphere of influence. Sometimes statistics, league tables, performance indicators and overwork can make it easy to lose sight of that bigger picture.

We acknowledge that no matter how sympathetic you may feel towards fostered young people, you are very unlikely to have the time or resources to deal positively with persistent disruptive behaviour which is affecting the learning and wellbeing of others in the class.

This Guide provides suggestions and information that may help you as you teach fostered young people.

The 30 second message for teachers is:

- Make use of your school’s designated teacher
- Don’t lower expectations, but do try to understand some of the problems faced by fostered pupils
- Fostered young people can succeed at school with the right support

Note for social workers

As a social worker, your professional training focused on social care. You may have received no training about schooling or education. And yet, as a social worker responsible for fostered young people, you need to be able to promote education and support foster carers to promote education.

This Guide provides suggestions and information about how you can help fostered young people succeed at school as part of your social work role.

The 30 second message for social workers is:

- Support foster carers to support young people's education
- Plan for and promote fostered young people's education with as much commitment as the best parent
- Fostered young people can succeed at school with the right support

Further resources and reading

Good books

Geddes, H (2006), Attachment in the classroom, Worth Publishing

Cairns, K and Stanway, C (2002) Learn the child: helping looked after children to learn, British Agency for Adoption and Fostering

Social Care Institute for Excellence (2004) Practice Guide 3, Fostering

Collis, A (2008) Education, The Fostering Network

Helpful organisations

Voices from Care, www.voicesfromcarecymru.org.uk

The Who Cares? Trust, www.thewhocarestrust.org.uk

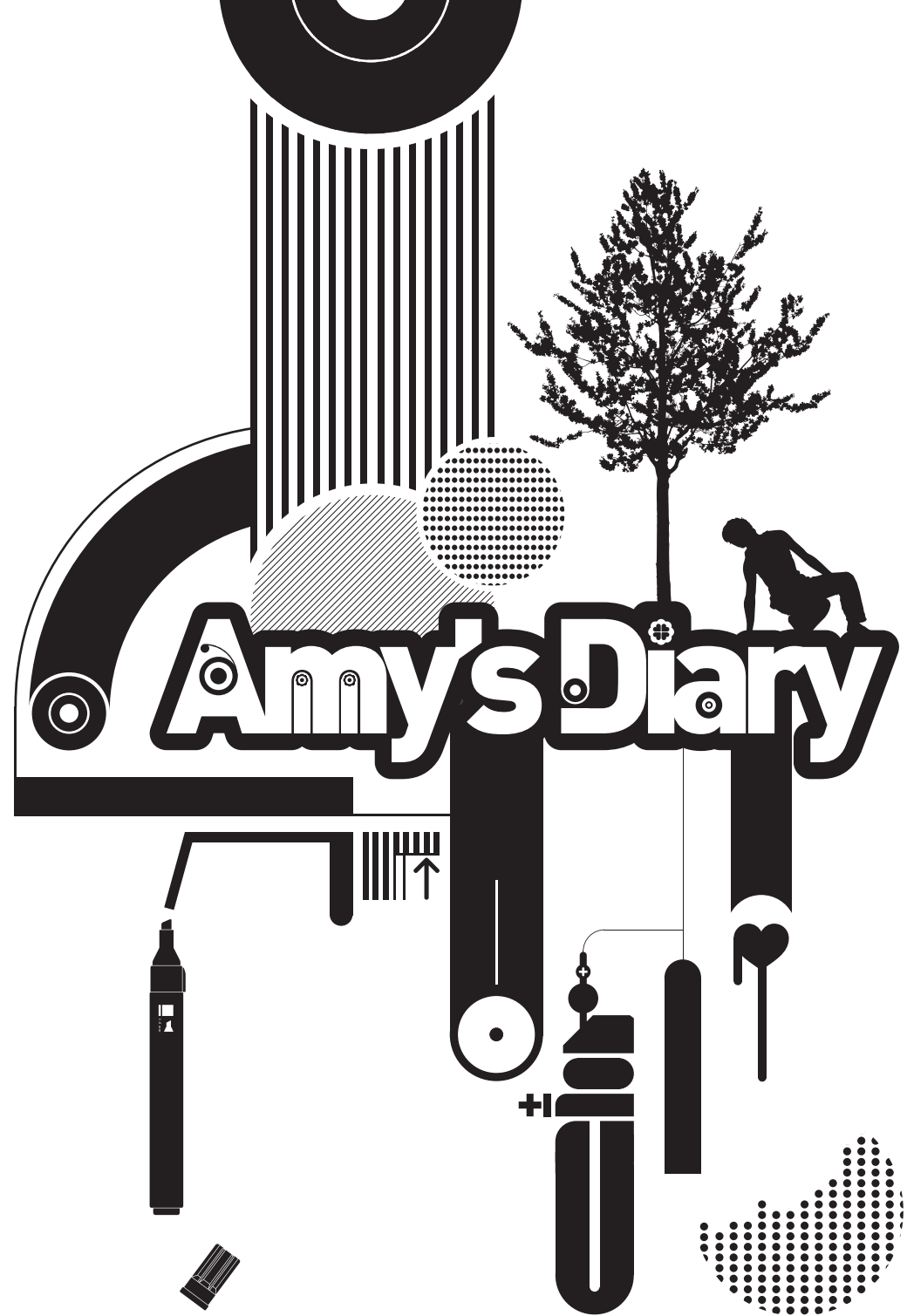
Advisory Centre for Education, www.ace-ed.org.uk

Other resources from the Fostering Network Wales

www.fostering.net/wales

Thrive is a bilingual young people's magazine. Special editions on school and higher education can be downloaded from www.fostering.net

The Fostering Network Wales offers tailor-made training for teachers, social workers and foster carers about education. For more information, contact sarah.mobedji@fostering.net



Transition to secondary school

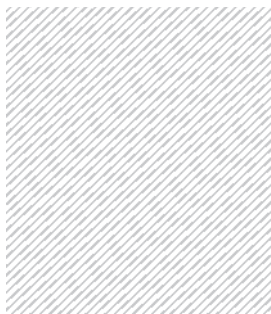
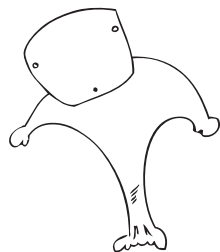
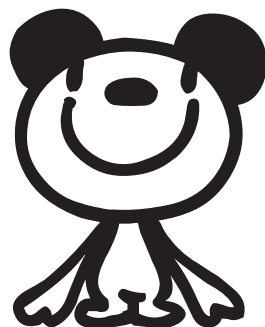
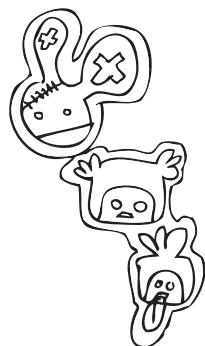
Year 7 Amy

autumn 1 September 4th

Little school seems so far away and I really, really miss Mrs Parkinson! She was my fave teacher in little school! The new school is ginormous and I'm so little. Everyone's jumpers were bright and mine was faded and shiny where Jennie ironed it after the boy she had before me.

My new class seems ok but they put me next to this girl called Kate. Then the teacher made us do this thing where we had to speak in groups and saying where we were from and all that. Kate's dad works in the council and her mam's a nurse. They live on that new estate opposite the school. I was a bit stuck really so I said my dad and mam weren't married (true!), dad was a bricky (not true) and that mam worked in Somerfield (true once). Felt a dork though.

Most of the kids had posh pencils cases and bendy rulers. Own-brand stuff just ain't cool.



Teacher

A secondary school teacher may teach over 120 pupils a day; a pupil may have to relate to more than six teachers in a school day. This is a far cry from one teacher who only had to get to know up to 30 pupils.

Transition is hard for most pupils, and has extra challenges for many fostered young people. Many have past experiences that have affected their self-confidence, social skills and ability to trust adults.

Extra support in the first few weeks can make a long term difference.

Social worker

Most children are scared about the move from primary to secondary school. Make use of taster days and preparation visits. If a young person is not going to the same secondary school as his/her classmates, try to introduce them to someone who is already at the secondary school.

Fostered children can feel particularly isolated when they start secondary school, so make sure they have met the designated person for looked after children before they move up.

Starting a new school means personal questions. Check they are prepared for this, so they don't feel pressured into lying.

Key Points

Fostered children may need extra support in adjusting to secondary school.

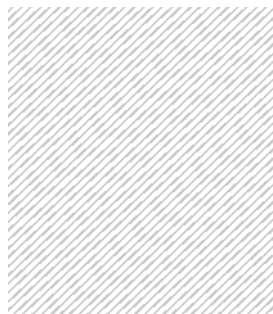
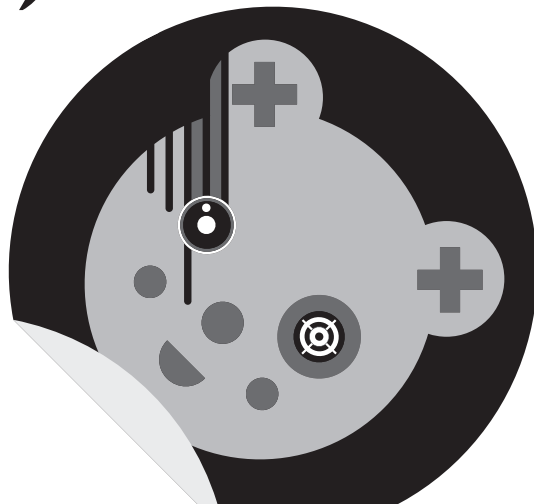
Try to prepare children for the move to secondary school and make sure they have met the designated person for LAC.

Additional Activities

Year 7 Amy

autumn 2 November 7th

WOW!!!!!!! saw Miss J the music teacher after break today seems she wants me to have keyboard lessons Can u believe it LA la la la Me having music lessons! Dunno what Jennie and the social worker would say, though. They costa bit. Perhaps they won't think I'm worth it! Anyway I'll need to practice. There's this group that comes into school once a week and they play with the kids and Miss J said I could practice with them. Katie said she's at grade 4 all ready So I'll never catch up with her. Mean that was. I wanted to smack her. Still I am having keyboards. GR8!



Teacher

Fostered young people need extra opportunities to build confidence and self-expression. Music lessons can be a fantastic opportunity for both. Fostered young people benefit from being encouraged to try out different instruments.

Many fostered young people will lack the confidence to ask for lessons or sign a sheet posted in the music department. They may need to be asked personally.

Music can help build self-discipline and concentration skills which in turn will help in the classroom.

Social worker

Music lessons are not a luxury. They can play a very positive role in helping young people build the skills and self-esteem they need for resilience. It gives them one to one time with an adult who is focusing on something that is nothing to do with their social care needs or personal history.

All fostered young people need the opportunity for additional activities like music. Your local authority needs an agreement with foster carers about whether these costs are included in the fostering allowance or are met directly by the local authority as corporate parent.

Key Points

Suggesting music lessons or another extra-curricular activity to fostered young people can make a big difference.

Music lessons and other extra-curricular activities are particularly important for fostered young people. Find out who should pay for them.

Homework and equipment

Year 7 Amy

spring 1

January 9th

That special needs woman the one in the office had been looking for me. She found me. Seems I missed 9 homework's last term so now I have to go to homework club. Jennie and me have been struggling with the maths. That woman even had a list of what I'd missed. Maths, maths (well!) English "write about your family" "All about me" DUH! I mean. Then she looked at me and said "Couldnt you have adapted it for you and Jennie?" How?? I mean it's just me and Jennie. Not like we go to Disneyland Paris on bus trips or bring back shells to show and tell in Geog! Or prayer shawls for R Ed! Honestly some people!

January 12th

The homework club is run by the helpers and we all know that some of them can't spell. Some of them can't add up either. So I got there and what did they do? They yelled at me for having no biro and ruler - I mean come on it is a school - haven't they got spares? Then I got told off for not underlining (how could I?). Still Miss Maths was dead chuffed when she saw I got all them sums right. Now she says I have to just work on being neater. She gave me a smiley face but honest some people are just hard to please!

Teacher

Teachers do not need to lower their expectations for fostered young people. However, the designated person for LAC should raise awareness among teachers of reasons why a young person may not be completing homework and, discretely, who may be affected by this. It is good practice to check with the designated teacher before making assumptions about the reason for lack of homework.

Some fostered young people have problems with executive functioning. Among other things, this means they can find it very hard to be in the right place with the right equipment. They may need support to do better rather than criticism or punishment when they get it wrong.

Fostered young people often have very poor self-esteem. Self-belief is important to educational success, so looking for positives and commenting on them is particularly important.

Key Points

Be aware that fostered young people may have reasons for not doing homework or having the right equipment. Don't lower your expectations, but give them support and find points to praise.

Social worker

Homework is just as important as school attendance. Foster carers may need training and/or support to know how to encourage and support young people with homework. You may want to think about an annual training session for foster carers on homework, and ongoing opportunities for foster carers to develop their own basic skills.

Sometimes a support worker can work with both the fostered young person and the foster carer.

Some local authorities have a homework club specifically for fostered young people.

Appropriate clothing and equipment

Year 7 Amy

spring 2

March 10th

It's the cross country season and it's been really wet and muddy! The first time I went I fell over and came back looking like an alien or something. Miss PE just laughed and said I'd better use the shower. The mud was in my hair and everything. She lent me some shampoo then packed my PE kit in a carrier bag. It was stinking. Trouble was Kate n Emma started looking at me n whispering. Then they laughed! Later they nabbed me in the girls' cloakroom. Wanted to know why I had manky trainers and manky kit in a manky bag. They said if my stuff was manky that I was manky too and that if I was manky I'd get nits. Then they got closer and started looking in my hair, because if I had nits they had to tell the rest of the class. I hated them because by the end I really did feel manky and I hated Jennie and her manky stinky carrier bags. Wish I had a proper sports bag or something.

Teacher

Fostered young people should have the kind of clothes and equipment that means they do not stand out from other pupils.

Occasionally, a fostered young person consistently has inappropriate clothing or equipment. If this happens, it is good to tell the designated person for LAC who can forward your concern to the young person's social worker.

Fostered young people are particularly vulnerable to bullying, and may find it difficult to verbalise their feelings. They may have a view of themselves that makes them think they deserve to be picked on.

Social worker

Young people with low self-esteem need every help they can get to feel good about themselves. A secure young person may not be worried about carrier bags or verbal bullying. An insecure young person will be.

Foster carers can help by providing clothes and equipment that have street credibility, either out of the fostering allowance or via a school uniform grant (depending on the local authority's arrangements for meeting the costs of adequate school clothing and equipment).

If foster carers are not supporting young people in this way, you may want to raise the matter with their supervising social worker.

Key Points

Try to spot if a fostered young person does not have appropriate clothing and equipment, as this can lead to bullying.

It is important that foster carers provide young people with appropriate clothing and equipment so that they do not stand out as different.

Outings and parental consent

Year 7 Amy

summer 1 Lunchtime, May 6th

I can't wait!! Sir Geog has arranged a trip to the coast. We're supposed to compare the rocky bits with the marshy bits where the dunes are. We'll be out all day tomorrow - at least that's what the letter says. It'll be cool because Emma n Kate said that I could sit with them in the back of the bus.

Evening, May 6th

God this is so unfair! Jennie's just told me that she can't sign the form and it's too late to get in touch with my social worker... DUH! But the trip is tomorrow and I can't go if the form isn't signed and I was supposed to sit with Emma Kate n the rest of the gang! I'll have to stay behind and go with another year group for the day. I'll be left out again! Flipping teachers! Why can't they be more organised! Why couldn't Jennie think a bit! Why do I need so many papers anyway????????

Teacher

Ask the designated person for LAC what your local authority's policy is about who signs which parent/guardian forms. Foster carers are in an unusual legal position. Although they can act as a parent under education law, they cannot under any other type of legislation. This means they often cannot sign letters from school asking for parental consent.

Depending on the young person's legal status, the foster carer may need time to get the form to the young person's social worker, for the social worker to get the form to the parent, and then for the form to get back to the foster carer. This means it is important for letters needing parental consent for an activity to be sent home well in advance of the activity.

Social worker

It is possible for those with parental responsibility to delegate to the foster carer the permission to sign certain forms. This can be done as part of the care planning process. It is possible, for example, for someone with parental responsibility to say that the foster carer can sign for day trips but not residential trips.

If forms need to be signed by a social worker or parent, make sure your authority has a smooth, swift process so that fostered young people do not miss out on important educational activities.

Key Points

Arrangement for letters can often be sorted out at the start of the school year. Make sure letters needing parental consent are sent home well in advance so that they can be signed by the parent or social worker if necessary.

Make sure that whoever signs parental consent forms, the process is swift so that young people do not miss out on educational activities.

School shows

Year 7 Amy

summer 2 July 16th

School Show.

I am SUCH a star! Keira K eat your heart out!!

"The Little Shop of Horrors" was ace and I got to TIMEWARP with Josh Edwards. I mean JOSH EDWARDS!!! YEAR 10! He is 100% gorgeous. He even bought me a coke in the interval. Emma and Kate were pure green but not as jealous as I was later. It feels like everyone had their Mums and dads and aunties and grannies and they were going for pub meals after. It was just me n Jennie! She gave me a hug and said she was proud! Miss W the music teacher said I was cool in my costume and the drama teacher said I was good. Strange though, Sir Geography nabbed me in the school hall and said he really enjoyed my performance and that I had a gift. Meant a lot that! Sir's Cool! And I AM A STAR!



Teacher

School shows are an opportunity for self-expression, success and social acceptance and can be particularly important for fostered young people. They may need encouragement to get involved, and plenty of positive reinforcements.

The benefits of being in a school play go beyond the social aspects and enjoyment of being involved. There can be lasting benefits for academic achievements, not least because it gives them a greater sense of belonging in the school.

Social worker

The biggest factor affecting educational outcomes is having at least one adult who consistently takes an interest in their schooling and education, and celebrates successes, however small, with them.

Your role is to make sure they have that adult at their school show. It may be you, their foster carer, their parents or someone else important to them.

If several people are going, check that the young person is not going to be embarrassed in front of their friends by having to explain who everyone is.

Key Points

Fostered children may need encouragement to get involved in school plays, but doing so will increase their confidence and help them to feel they belong in the school.

Make sure that at least one adult is consistently there to take an interest in the child's education, to celebrate successes and to attend the school show.

Parental contact

Year 8

Amy

autumn 1

September 28th

Not sure if these visits home are going to work out! I was in BIG trouble today like it went wrong from the start. Mum overslept so I missed the bus and i got no breakfast. Worse I was late for reg and the office were really snooty. Then I realised I'd brought yesterday's books because I went straight over to Mam's. Worse, I'd no PE kit and as it was the third time, I got detention at break. I tried explaining but Miss wasn't having' any. Rules are Rules. She said! I missed the snack bar and by lesson 3 I was starving and the fill in teacher told me off for not concentrating. Then by lesson 4 the English teacher who's a right moody git yelled at me for not bringing any writing books and for forgetting my reading book on a library lesson so I got a double warning for that! Seeing Mum and sleeping over is just hassle.

Teacher

It is easy to assume that young people are at fault when they turn up for school ill-equipped. Do not lower expectations for fostered young people, but do check the circumstances either with the young person or the designated teacher. If it happens often, suggest they may want to keep some spare kit at school.

Overnight contact can be emotionally or practically difficult. The young person may need emotional or physical space to settle at the start of the school day.

Social worker

Contact and education are extremely important in young people's lives. One should not happen at the expense of the other. Balancing contact and education can be challenging. Always remember one when you are planning the other.

Remember to think about practicalities, and make sure there is a workable system in place.

Key Points

There may be valid reasons why a fostered young person is late or not equipped. Be particularly aware that parental contact can cause practical and emotional problems.

Contact and education affect each other and need to be balanced. Planning in advance can avoid practical difficulties.

Personal Education Plans

Year 8 Amy

autumn 2 November 10th

I had a PEP review which is a personal education plan or something. All kids in care have them. More like a pep talk with ticks for everything!

Amy completes all homework on time.
Always Mostly Sometimes Never

Amy usually brings the correct equipment
Always Mostly Sometimes Never

Amy cooperates and is on task within 5 minutes
Amy responds appropriately.

All I learned was that I exist between sometimes and never - all my ticks are on the wrong side of the page. That's what the special needs say anyway. At least I always say please and thank you to the teachers I like - I even held the door open for sir Geog when he was carrying them books! They didn't mention that!! Is Amy going to pass exams always sometimes NEVER! Is Amy going to be happy?? Never! Is Amy clever? Clever? Me? Neva!



Teacher

Fostered young people do not usually achieve their educational potential. This is not normally because they have chosen to fail.

A PEP (personal education plan) is a tool for planning to make sure fostered young people have every opportunity to succeed. Welsh Assembly guidance says that a PEP must be completed within 20 school days of starting a new school to make sure that their educational needs are being met. If someone has an emergency placement, the PEP must be started within 14 days and completed in time for the first review.

The best PEPs look at the young person's hopes and dreams, and look at how the adults and systems in their lives can support them to succeed. The worst PEPs just measure what the young person has done against a list of behavioural and academic standards.

Social worker

In 2007, only 41.6% of fostered young people had a PEP within 20 school days of becoming looked after or starting a new school. Guidance states all fostered young people should have a PEP by that stage. For an emergency placement, the PEP must be started within 14 days and completed in time for the first review.

Education is important. You can give the right message by booking meetings that involve fostered young people, including PEP review meetings, outside school time.

Check the list of who should be at the meeting, and who is responsible for what.

Be sensitive to where the young person is most comfortable for the meeting to be held.

Focus on achievements and the future. Usually the young person already knows where they are failing, so does not need that to be reinforced. They are less likely to know where they are succeeding.

Key Points

PEPs should be a means of helping young people to achieve their dreams rather than a checklist of standards.

Check that PEPs are completed within 20 days of becoming looked after or starting a new school, and started within 14 days of an emergency placement. Make sure PEP meetings and review meetings are a positive experience for the young person.

Fair treatment

Year 8

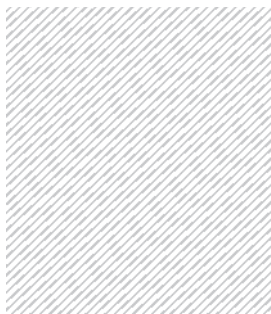
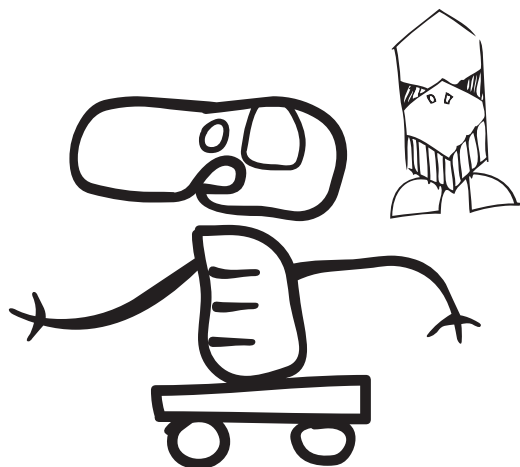
Amy

spring 1

January 11th

School phoned Jennie today. Said I bullied Kate into giving me her ipod and that Emma had seen the whole thing. Yeah! Right! So there I was in the office, like and the head of year wittering on to me, Jennie, Kate n Emma, about how he knew how difficult things were for me... I mean come on! What does he know about anything?

Then he said it was wrong to threaten to punch people and hide their coats to get things Jennie can't afford! And did I have anything to say to Kate? It was 4 of them against 1 of me. What COULD I say? No way would they believe what really happened. That Kate said I could borrow the ipod for a night then got scared she'd get a row from her mam for bringing the ipod to school. So much for truth! Have to hand it to Emma though, her drama lessons really paid off. Even I believed her at one point but then so did the rest of the class!



Teacher

Even teachers can make discriminatory assumptions when faced with two young people making an accusation against a fostered young person.

If a fostered young person believes the world is against them, then they may not try to defend themselves in this kind of situation.

Social worker

Even social workers and foster carers can make discriminatory assumptions.

It is important to work with young people on self-esteem and the ability to verbalise feelings. A young person is not going to feel able to report bullying or challenge injustice if deep down they believe they deserve to be treated badly.

Key Points

It is particularly important for fostered young people to feel they are being treated fairly as they may be less able to defend themselves than other young people.

Help fostered young people to gain self-esteem and verbalise their feelings so they are better able to stand up for themselves.

Asylum seeking children in foster care

Year 8 Amy

spring 2

March 14th

This new kid started today. He was really odd, called Mahad. Our reg tutor kept us back from assembly and said we had to make a special effort to be kind because he can't speak much English and he's come here without his parents. She whispered to me that he was being fostered too. She asked me, Michael and Jamie to keep an eye on him and show him round. It was fine until break time then some of year 8 and year 9 kept asking questions that he didn't understand. He started shaking, then shouting. Some of the duty teachers ran to see what was going on. Mahad started crying then he skittered across the canteen curled under a table and started sucking his thumb. It took ages to get him out and I was late for science.



Teacher

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are usually fostered. They face multiple difficulties at school, including a language barrier, racism, trauma and isolation. Their personal education plan needs to address these difficulties.

Welsh Assembly Circular 47/06 stresses the important role played by education in the social integration of these young people.

Assigning "buddies" has been shown to help. It also helps to have materials in their first language around the school.

Social worker

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and their foster carers need substantial support. They will need support to learn English and understand the Welsh education system. They will also need access to materials in their first language.

Foster carers will need extra training and support to help them foster someone who almost certainly has a traumatic past and an uncertain future.

Key Points

Assigning buddies and providing materials in the child's first language can help them settle.

Unaccompanied asylum seeking children and their foster carers will need extra support.

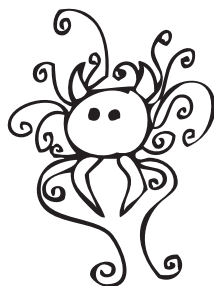
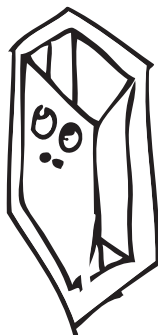
Targets

Year 8 Amy

summer 1 April 29th

Everyone's talking about their targets for next year. Emma n Kate supposed to get level 6 and their mums bought them those posh revision guides. Me? I'm down for level 4 and miss maths says that'll be a challenge. I work fine in class but when it's just me at home with Jennie it's difficult to remember things. Homework club is ages from the lesson and it's getting busier and I never get any help there.

Thing is people think my targets are fine and that my effort is better - they haven't really noticed that I don't understand. Sometimes I get help from the assistant in science but when I really need it she's usually with another kid and sir's busy with the level 6's so there's never any time to ask.



Teacher

Fostered young people may be anxious or defensive about their ability. They may need extra support because they find it hard to ask for help.

Some foster carers struggle with basic skills, and may struggle to provide support at home.

Sometimes assumptions are made that fostered young people will not do well at school. Fostered young people need teachers who have higher expectations and will work with them to overcome barriers or fill in gaps in understanding.

The designated person for LAC should contact the LACE coordinator in the Local Authority to see if additional help can be arranged.

Social worker

An average pupil at the end of Key Stage 3 is expected to get a level 5.

Young people do better at school if adults show an interest in them and believe they can do well. Both you and the foster carer have an important role in this.

Fostered young people deserve better than to be allowed to drift along; they need to be offered additional help (including extra tuition and study materials) to do the best they can.

Key Points

If you believe that fostered children can achieve and give them extra support, let the designated person for LAC know.

Make sure fostered children have all the support they need to do well.

Exclusion

Year 8

Amy

summer 2

June 16th

I got excluded today. Okay I lost it but Kate n Emma have had it coming since that business with the ipod. And all they can think about is how clever they are and how thick I am! They say I'm ugly too.

Emma saw me chatting to Josh Edwards - he's always been nice to me ever since the school show last year. Anyway, Josh n I were talking bout music n guitar practise n stuff. Emma says to Kate that I want to dump them to snog Josh. Kate got really mad. Then she tells me I'm easy because I hang out with 16 year olds. She said no spotty boy would want me if my own mother didn't.

Next thing the chairs were everywhere and Kate needed an ice pack for her lip and the three of us had to write an incident form. And I got all the blame - AGAIN! Still, no school for a week so I won't have to put up with Kate. I hate her.

Teacher

Welsh Assembly Circular 47/06 says that schools must have arrangements in place to support fostered young people at risk of exclusion and exclusion should only be used as a last resort.

If a fixed-term exclusion is deemed appropriate then the young person may need the school to look again at how the young person is supported by the school. Counselling may help prepare them for returning to school.

There are often complex reasons, which regularly include intentional or unintentional verbal bullying or intimidation from others.

Young people are most likely to talk about underlying problems to someone they trust. This may be the designated person for LAC, but is often a subject teacher or member of non-teaching staff.

The designated person for LAC needs to be sure that each fostered young person has at least one adult at the school whom they trust.

Social worker

16% of fostered young people got a fixed term exclusion in 2006-2007, compared to 8% of all young people.

During a fixed-term exclusion, the school is responsible for providing work for the young person to do at home, and for marking any work sent back to school.

Schools may use "informal exclusions" (ie sending a pupil home to cool off) instead of a fixed-term exclusion. This is illegal and not in the young person's interests.

Key Points

Be aware that fostered young people may have reasons for not doing homework or having the right equipment. Don't lower your expectations, but give them support and find points to praise.

Fostered young people are twice as likely to be excluded than the general population. "Informal exclusions" are illegal. Make sure work is set by the school when any fixed term exclusion is imposed.

Smoking and other addictions

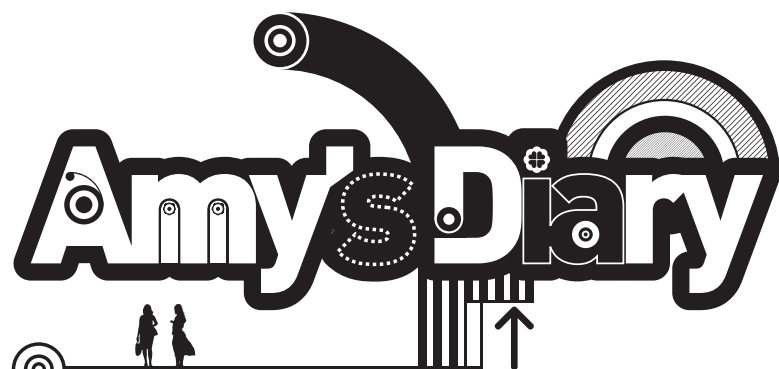
Year 9 Amy

autumn 1 September 13th

Jennie's bin on at me because my uniform smells of smoke... She's not going to believe it's the school bus for much longer! The physics lesson dragged. I couldn't keep still - I was desperate for a smoke. I couldn't wait to nip out at break.

Josh's mate George - he smokes dope as well but not in school - found a neat spot away from the spy cameras. Anyway we got caught coz the site manager saw the smoke above the bushes. We were dragged in and asked to empty our bags and pockets.

Josh and I had to copy an anti smoking leaflet by hand 5 times. By three o'clock I was desperate again! Lucky Josh had kept some back in his locker. He's a good MB!



Teacher

Young people who are addicted to anything may be nervy and find it hard to concentrate at school. They are likely to break school rules either because they are struggling emotionally without their "fix" or in order to get their "fix".

You need to work with the foster carer and social worker to address issues like this. Their foster carer has day to day care, so needs to know what is happening at school. The social worker has overall responsibility, so also needs to know.

Social worker

Fostered young people have higher levels of risky health behaviours. These will impact on education. Addictions can make it difficult to concentrate at school, and are likely to result in breaking school rules.

Smoking can be a way of managing stress and anxiety, a result of peer pressure or a way to rebel. Some young people cannot put their feelings into words, and smoking is their way of acting out self-hatred.

By helping them to put into words why they smoke, you are helping them learn skills they need to get the most out of their education.

Key Points

If you think a fostered young person has an addiction, it is important to work with the foster carer and social worker.

Addictions will have a negative affect on school work. Help the young person to put into words why they smoke or take drugs.

Managing behaviour

Year 9

Amy

spring 1

January 2nd

Help! It's all gone wrong! Christmas was a disaster. I don't even want to think about it. I just know Jennie's going to kick me out. And when the school find out, I'm in dead trouble there too. It just got too much and I couldn't help myself. I didn't mean us to spend Christmas Day in casualty with the police all over the place. It's just all been building up inside me and something had to blow.

I can't face starting over again. I'll kill myself if it happens. Shit. I wish I was dead. I never asked to be born. It's not fair.

January 13th

Thank God. I can't believe it. Jennie isn't going to kick me out. Her social worker's talked to her about extra help she needs. And my social worker's found me a really cool counsellor. And he's talked to school and sorted it with them. My Head of Year had a long chat and has said she's always there if I need her. And they've put me on this card system, so if it gets too much at school, I just show the teacher this card and can go and sit in the library or see the school counsellor and no-one will have a go at me. Phew.

Teacher

Moving a child to another school is rarely the answer to problems. It simply moves the problem on to a new set of people who know even less about the young person's background and needs.

Your behavioural support system needs to be flexible enough to meet the needs of individual pupils.

Many fostered young people have difficulty managing their emotions, and may go swiftly from apparent calm to an explosion of anger or overwhelming anxiety or grief. Methods like the card system can help them learn to manage their emotions and often helps their self esteem when they achieve well on the card system.

Social worker

Sometimes placements get close to breakdown. A swift, sensitive response can make all the difference. Often it needs the supervising social worker and young person's social worker to listen and then put in place the support that the foster carer and young person say they need.

Placement breakdowns and missing school (through truancy, exclusion or the inability to get to school) often go hand-in-hand. Either can trigger the other.

Schools have behavioural support systems. These are intended to support young people and meet their needs, not as a punishment or first step to exclusion.

Key Points

Fostered young people often need extra support in managing their emotions. Behavioural support systems need to be positive and flexible.

Providing extra support to the young person and foster carer can prevent a placement from breaking down.

Thinking about careers

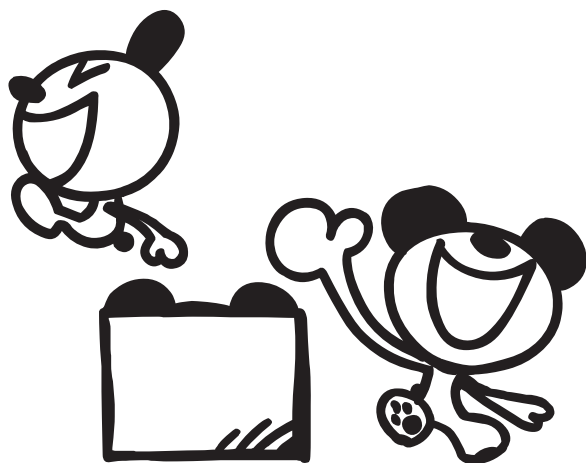
Year 9 Amy

spring 2

March 11th

We've been doing career searches in our PSE lesson - waste of time - it's going to be years before I'm an adult. What hopes are there for me, anyway? I'd make a crappy cleaner, I don't want to work in an OAP home, and I don't want to work with little kids. Working in a supermarket for me! Anyway there aren't any jobs around here.

You need GCSE's to get on health and beauty and GNVQ courses. Jennie says to do what subjects I like but some say to do a variety to cover my options because I'm unclear what to do. Thing is it all feels so hopeless I wonder what the point of it is and I'm so thick I feel as if I'll never get the hang of it.



Teacher

Many fostered young people have negative underlying beliefs about themselves. This means they may dismiss any jobs that sound as if they require skills or higher education. Helping them think about what kind of skills, personality and dreams they have rather than focusing on specific jobs can help them to aim higher.

It is important that you know your local authority's general provision for care leavers, support for care leavers to go on to higher education and policy about staying with foster carers post-16.

Social worker

Fostered young people often have low expectations of themselves. Many do not have dreams for their future.

It is important to clarify with the foster carer whether they are willing and able to continue to care for a young person up to and beyond their 18th birthday. If they can, this opens more possibilities for the young person. Those who do best in the long term generally have foster carers who continue to treat them as part of their family post-18.

Key Points

Help fostered young people to focus on their skills, personality and dreams. Find out what support fostered children in your LA get post-16.

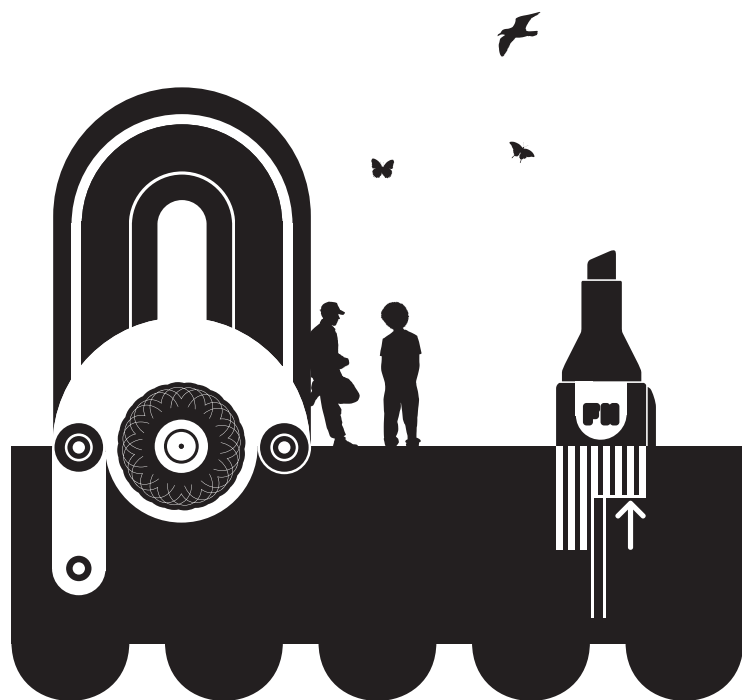
Fostered young people are far more likely to do well if they remain with the same foster carer into adulthood.

GCSE choices

Year 9 Amy

summer 1 May 8th

It's really depressing now I have to make my choices. The forms came. Art, Geography and French are in the same column. Emma, Kate Lisa and me tried to get it that we were in the same columns for French so at least we'll get that together. But we simply couldn't get it to work out. I showed my choices to Mum but she was too wasted to care. She said it looked great but... well I don't think much sank in. Mum barely made it to form 5 so perhaps she doesn't expect as much from me. Jennie seemed pleased but I'm a bit worried she's been ever so distracted lately.



Teacher

Making GCSE choices is the first stage of deciding on a future career.

Fostered young people may lack confidence in their abilities. Sometimes their choices may be limited by other people's low expectations.

Young people may already be thinking about leaving care and worrying what will happen in the future.

You can help by encouraging them to think beyond GCSEs and making sure you know what your local authority's policy and practice are for post-16.

The new 14 - 19 Pathways gives positive options for young people. It is particularly important for the designated person for LAC to look at all the options if there is a risk that the young person will lose any interest in school. LACE coordinators should be able to help with funding/travel arrangements.

Social worker

You can support your young people as they make their choices by:

- Taking an active interest in their schooling and dreams for the future
- Getting extra careers advice for them, for example through mentoring or informally meeting people who do a range of jobs
- Addressing any underlying beliefs that may limit their choices
- Investigating alternatives to GCSEs at school if it is clear that other options may bring out the best in them

Key Points

Fostered young people may be hampered in their choices by their own or others' low expectations or by worries about the future. Help them to think beyond GCSEs and to see whatever choices they make in a positive light.

Taking an interest in young people's dreams, being positive and listening can all help fostered young people as they make their choices.

Higher education

Year 9 Amy

summer 2 July 12th

Jennie and I sat down to talk yesterday. She's been preoccupied lately and I know her Dad's not well and Jennie hates the fact that he lives so far away.

My head of year has been in touch and said that because my core subjects had improved, had I considered staying on to 6th form? I was so surprised when Jennie started talking to me about University. Well, me, Amy at Uni. I can't see that coming off. I mean I'll be a care leaver when I'm 16! Where would I live? Who'd be responsible for me? Where is the money going to come from?

She picked up some brochures for me to look at. One on the Welsh coast looked fab! All these people sitting around tables and talking and then there were pictures of students rafting, canoeing and partying. It'll cost loads of money and it'll be scary I'll be even more on my own and that's if I'm clever enough. To be honest I don't think I am.

Teacher

Care leavers **can** go to university, but rarely do. 2008 is the first year that the UCAS form asks if an applicant is a care leaver, so there are no firm statistics, but the most quoted figure is 1% of care leavers going to university. For Wales as a whole, this means about 4 care leavers a year.

Poor educational outcomes for fostered young people as a whole make it even more important for you to spot potential and encourage young people to aim high.

You can help by making sure fostered young people are given priority for any university outreach activities. If there are no suitable outreach activities, check which universities have the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark and approach them directly to ask what they can offer. This quality mark is only awarded to universities and colleges that meet minimum standards for supporting care leavers.

Social worker

Amy's questions are common. If she is to stand a chance of university, she needs initial answers to those questions now, before even starting her GCSEs.

Most young people who go to university have active parental support and encouragement. Foster carers do not always have the life experience or skills to provide this. You, however, do. You may be able to find a mentor to help young people raise their expectations.

Preparing for university can take money, for example to travel to open days or attend summer schools. Fostered young people need to know that their corporate parent will support them in the same way as other supportive parents.

Key Points

Prioritise young people in public care for university outreach activities. Know which universities have the Frank Buttle Trust Quality Mark.

Many fostered young people are clever enough to go to university. Think about mentors or role models for them. Make sure they know what support they would get at university.

Problems with GCSE choices

Year 10 Amy

autumn 1

October 6th

Oh my God!! I've had so much work it's unbelievable. Coursework this and coursework that. Seems like all they care about is coursework. French is SO difficult. I thought that it would be posters and cards and things but we've got to do translation and learn huge lists of words. I hate it. I want to drop it but everyone says I have to persevere. Why should I?

Jennie's still worried about her dad - he was poorly over the summer - I can't talk to her and I feel as if I've got homework every night - hours of it.

I'm unsure about this child development course. It sounded easy but it's actually more work than a GCSE. I've got to design a nursery theme suitable for twins but a boy and a girl. I wish I'd chosen art now. I hate school at the minute. Jennie suggested that I just ask the teachers for help.



Teacher

Fostered young people are unlikely to make the first move by telling you they are struggling or unhappy with their choices. It is a good idea to check after a few weeks of term how they are settling.

The advice to persevere is usually good, and needs to be backed up by asking what might help them, or what particular difficulties they are having. The designated person for LAC will know if extra help can be made available.

Sometimes specific learning difficulties have gone undetected because so much else has been going on in a young person's life. The additional work of GCSEs may bring these issues to the surface.

Social worker

In 2006-2007, 54% of young people got 5 A* to C GCSEs, but only 8% of fostered young people.

In 2006-2007, 97% of young people were entered for at least one public examination, but only 68% of fostered young people.

The start of the GCSE course is a critical time to arrange extra support for fostered young people. Any difficulties with the subject or school in general need to be addressed quickly.

Foster carers need your support. The Social Care Institute for Excellence noted that half of foster carers waited for the school to contact them about problems, and did not make contact with the school themselves to check progress or address minor concerns.

Key Points

A few weeks into Year 10, check with fostered young people whether they are happy with their GCSE choices and offer them extra support if necessary.

Check at the start of Year 10 whether the young person needs extra support. Remind foster carers to be pro-active in contacting the school to check progress.

Moving to another school

Year 10 Amy

autumn 2 December 1st

No! No! No! Jennie's moving to be with her dad. He's got cancer and he's going to die soon. She can't take me with her. We sat and cried last night. I just can't believe it - she's going to leave me for an old man who's going to die anyway. Worse my social worker can't find a local placement for me, so I have to leave school and Kate, Emma and Josh and all my teachers and move to a new area. My reg teacher said that it was a shame because I'd made such progress and come through so much. The classroom assistants were bitching to the school secretary about it in the office. God I'm so powerless at times. I can't believe that Jennie has let me down. The new authorities say I have to transfer schools because no-one will pay my transport costs to here because there is a school three miles down the road. I asked if my mum could have me but they just sighed and shook their heads.



Teacher

Fostered young people may need to leave your school against their will. You can help by passing clear information to the new school before he or she starts there, along with copies of any coursework.

The school can make the difference between a young person like Amy feeling her world has ended and feeling life is tough but manageable. Make sure the young person has a positive ending rather than letting them drift away as if no-one cares. Sometimes it helps if the designated teacher, or another member of staff they trusted, keeps in touch with the young person until they have settled.

When a young person is placed in care in an emergency the school should always provide some basic literacy and numeracy work for the new foster carer to use with the young person.

Social worker

Every effort should be made not to change schools during GCSEs. If the young person can manage the travel time involved, then budgets should not prevent them from staying at their old school.

Jenny had given notice that she would have to stop fostering to look after her father. This means it was not an emergency placement move. In turn, this means education must be in place before the new care placement is made.

Amy's placing authority keeps corporate parent responsibility, but the LEA where she will be living is responsible for her education.

Key Points

If a fostered young person has to leave your school, pass on information and copies of coursework to the new school. Make sure the young person is given a good send-off and consider keeping in touch for a while.

Fostered young people should not change schools during GCSEs unless absolutely necessary.

New placement, new school

Year 10 Amy

spring 1 January 5th

I hate this place I simply hate it. I msn'd Josh last night to see how everyone was. My last day at school was awful. I was crying so hard they had to peel me off Josh... Jennie went off to her dad's just after Christmas and Adrian my social worker was telling me "it will be ok". What does he know? It'll never be ok again. I've got to go to this school and they do a different syllabus for Maths and science so I've got to catch up with coursework. On top of that they've done different coursework in English too. I've had to drop French because it doesn't fit in with my other options here - and after all the effort I put in to keep at it and I'd just started to enjoy it, too. My life is such a mess. And it's further to go to Mum's now.

The new foster people seem ok. Well, Elaine, the woman is ok; but I'm not so sure about her husband Andrew. He's got shifty eyes. He must be ok though - he's had all the checks. None of us are talking much and mealtimes are grim. I just don't want to be there. It's not my fault I was moved.

Teacher

Fostered young people may have to change placement suddenly through no fault of their own.

Resilience is the ability to survive traumatic events without long term harm. Changing placement and changing school are both traumatic events. Fostered young people often lack resilience, so are more likely to be affected than other young people.

The designated person for LAC has an important role in collecting as much information as possible from the old school, and briefing subject teachers on how to support a fostered young person who is joining part way through the GCSE course. The social worker and school need to agree who will give the information to the new school.

Social worker

A combined change of placement, particularly if it is to an out of county placement and change of school mean that almost everything in a young person's life has changed. Either change on its own could be enough to start a downward spiral. In 2006, the Audit Commission has found that 1 in 4 young people in public care over the age of 14 were not attending school. Changing placement and school increases the risk that Amy will become another statistic.

Amy was lucky to have a social worker and LEA who followed guidance and found her a new school swiftly. However, the warning signs were there in the summer that Jennie might stop fostering; a move before starting GCSEs would have been better for everyone. By the time of this diary entry, Amy should have a new PEP which includes additional help to catch up with different coursework and looks at possibilities for her to continue with French.

Key Points

Young people who change school need information from the old school to be handed quickly to their new school. Teachers need to think about how to support someone joining in the middle of their GCSE course.

Fostered young people will be particularly vulnerable if they have to change placement and school. New PEPs should plan the extra support they need if they move during their GCSE course. The social worker needs to make sure information is transferred from the old school.

Discrimination and the young person's perspective

Year 10 Amy

spring 2

April 2nd

Now I KNOW I'm in the wrong school!! Flipping PSE lessons. It's entirely the teacher's fault. But Andrew said I had to apologise. Apologise? Yeah like NEVER! If the teacher just hadn't gone on about normal families. He even said something that single women shouldn't bring up children.

Jennie didn't do so badly with me, and then that idiot started saying how single women with children are unacceptable because they sponge off the social. So I stood up and said I'd been brought up by a single woman so would he want to call me a sponger to my face. The teacher got really red and started stammering and said that of course I was normal, that I couldn't help my circumstances. That got me crosser and that's when I told him to "Shove his ***** sympathy." So detention again.

But this one was awful it was in the school hall and it was stinking of cold food and it was really draughty. Elaine and Andrew have grounded me for 2 weeks and banned me from using MSN.

Teacher

Looked at one way, Amy over-reacted and behaved aggressively and inappropriately towards her teacher. She deserves detention. Looked at another way, Amy has every right to be angry and upset at the teacher's discriminatory views. She has grounds to make a complaint.

Most young people have a strong sense of justice. It is important to listen to their perspective rather than simply reacting to their behaviour.

Fostered young people have all gone through separation and loss. Many have trauma in their past. Listening to their perspective helps you to work with them, rather than reinforcing their belief that school is unfair.

Social worker

Fostered young people can face discrimination from teachers as well as pupils. They may lack the skills to deal with it in a socially acceptable way, and feel they are being treated unfairly when they are punished for their response to discrimination.

You will need to acknowledge their feelings and perspective before you can support them to learn better ways to respond to discrimination.

Young people who feel they have been punished unfairly are at high risk of disengaging from the relationships and systems that they feel treated them unfairly.

Key Points

It is important to ensure that the young person knows they have been fairly treated.

Listen to the child's perspective and then help them to learn better ways to respond to discrimination and injustice.

Permanent exclusion and support plans

Year 10 Amy

summer 1 May 2nd

My social worker picked me up from school today. It's not fair, she can't take my new mate Jade as well "because of insurance". So Jade dodged last lesson so that we would arrive home the same time. Because she dodged and left the premises the head decided she would have a one day internal exclusion. Jade then lost it with the head, swiped everything off his desk and told him that the rules were ***** stupid and designed for ***** idiots who had nothing better to do with their ***** time than discriminate against ***** kids and interfere in friendships. She also, apparently, "pointed a finger in an inappropriate manner". Least that's what it says on the letter LOL. So Jade won't be back. She'd already had loads of suspensions, so she'd run out of chances.

Teacher

The whole of life impacts on a young person's ability to learn and to behave appropriately in school. Some young people have high levels of additional learning needs to do with their social skills and their insecurity.

By this stage, Jade would have been getting help via a behavioural support and/or pastoral support plan. If fostered, her educational needs would also have been addressed in her PEP. The aim of these is to meet a young person's needs so that they do not need to be excluded from the school.

The effectiveness of these systems varies considerably around Wales and even among schools within the same LEA. The systems work best when the intention is to help young people learn, not to punish or label them.

Social worker

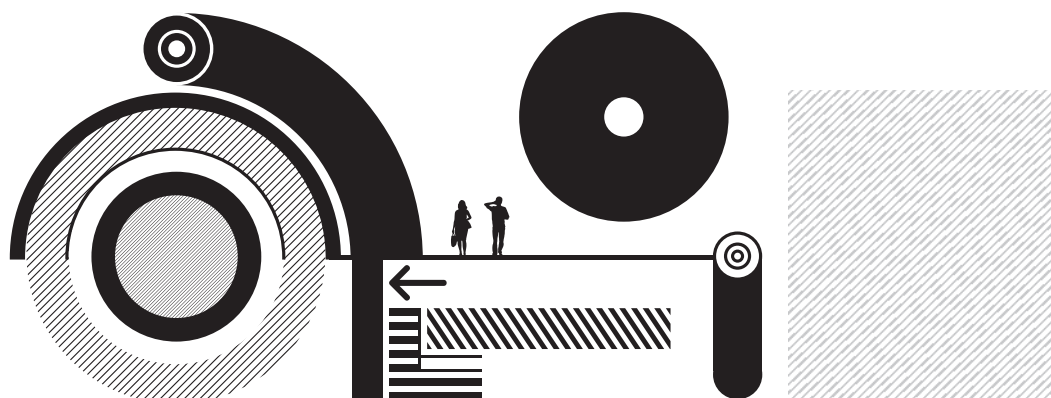
In 2005-2006, the permanent exclusion rate was 1.9 pupils per thousand. For young people in public care, the rate was almost 8 per thousand. A permanent exclusion is very unlikely to come out of the blue. Once it is clear a school is struggling to meet a young person's needs, it is important to make arrangements so the young person's educational needs are met. This is much better than letting things drift until the young person is permanently excluded.

You or the foster carer can, and usually should, act as an advocate and support a managed move to another school if it is in the best interests of the child. It is a good idea to think about going to the independent appeal panel, so that the young person knows they have had the chance to give their side of the story.

Key Points

Behavioural and pastoral support plans work best when their intention is to support rather than punish.

Permanent exclusions are unlikely to happen "out of the blue"; use the systems to support a young person before things escalate. It may be in the young person's best interests to appeal.



Work experience

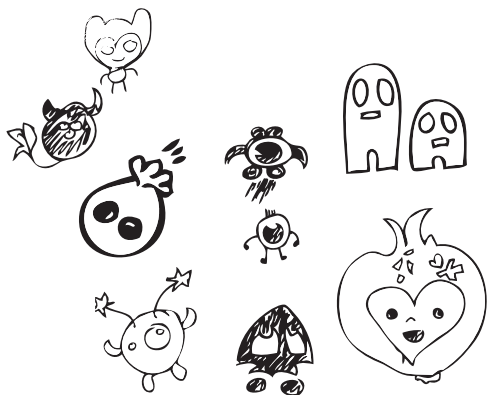
Year 10 Amy

summer 2 July 13th

Andrew arranged work experience at a bank. He and Elaine got me another pair of black trousers. I'm to wear those with my white school shirt. The taxi even took me there.

The girls in the office were really pretty they've got a pale lilac uniform and it's really well cut. I had to sign a form to say that I wouldn't divulge any secrets. I got to load bundles of notes in the money machine and help balance the till at the end of the week. I also listened to mortgage interviews.

I pretended that Andrew and Elaine were my real parents. I got to answer the phone and the regional manager thanked me at the end of the week for my "contribution". Some contribution! Mostly I just felt in everyone's way though they were really kind and patient with me. When I left they gave me a present of makeup. Elaine says that I mustn't wear it to school though.



Teacher

Young people in care and care leavers face prejudice from many employers. Work experience is a way to overcome some of the barriers. Fostered young people should not have to disclose that they are in foster care, nor should the school pass on that information.

It is important to "think high" when planning work experience. Even if the young person opts for a less demanding career, work experience is a good opportunity for them to get a taste of something challenging which may encourage them to be more ambitious in their career choices.

Social worker

Often, it is parents who do the initial legwork to find a work experience placement for their child. Fostered young people should be able to look to their foster carers and their corporate parent to help them find a work experience placement.

A positive work experience placement can help young people refocus and get motivated ready for the final year of compulsory schooling.

Key Points

A challenging work experience can help fostered young people to aim high. The school should not pass on the information that the young person is in foster care.

You and the foster carer can help organise a suitable work experience to help motivate the young person for Year 11.

Parties and their effects on school

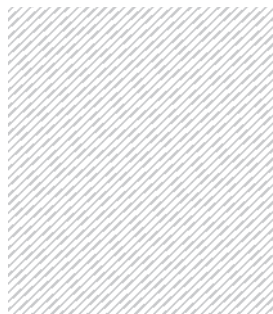
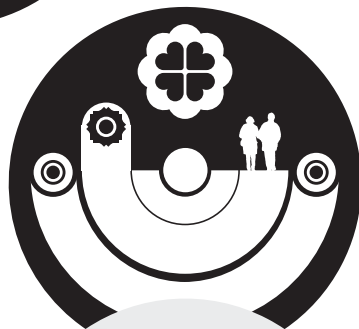
Year 11 Amy

spring 1

September 17th

My tutor was sniffing about literally. In the end I was sent to the deputy who asked if I'd been drinking. Just standing there made me feel sick and the heater was turned up. Next thing I belted out of the office and threw up in the toilets. I was sent home. They were "disappointed at my conduct". Whatever.

Elaine was really ticked off at me. But she can't stop me from visiting Josh - I'm old enough. Anyway it was a great party. Kate and Emma were there and we'd persuaded Josh and some college lads to get us cider.



Teacher

Young people can be sent home because they are too ill to be at school. However, they cannot be sent home because of their conduct unless the school uses the fixed-term exclusion process –even for ½ day. Without the fixed-term exclusion process, sending a young person home because of their conduct is an illegal "informal exclusion". If a young person's behaviour is such that they need to be sent home, then the young person also needs the rights and support that come with the fixed-term exclusion process.

If a young person has to go home for ill-health, the school needs to know whom to contact if they are unable to get hold of the foster carer. The designated person for LAC should have a list of alternative contact numbers.

Social worker

The issue of who can give or withhold permission to see people, go to parties and have sleepovers is not strictly an education issue. However, it can have consequences for education.

You and the foster carer need to work together on these decisions. Otherwise, there is a risk that you will undermine each other by having different criteria for decisions. The foster carer has day to day care of the young person and it is impossible for them to provide this if the social worker over-rules decisions. Just as with parents, it is important to have discussions about criteria in private and present a united front in public.

Key Points

Young people can only be sent home for bad behaviour if the school has gone through the fixed-term exclusion process. If the young person is sent home because of ill health, the designated person for LAC should have a list of contact numbers.

The foster carer and social worker need to work together to choose how decisions about a young person's social life are made.

Teenage pregnancy

Year 11 Amy

autumn 2 November 6th

Emma MSN'd me last night. She wanted to talk to me. She's pregnant. Or at least she thinks she is. It must have been the party because she and Jordan disappeared for ages at one point. Anyway they've been an item since... or had been anyway. He dumped her when she told him. Anyway I bunked off school. I faked Elaine's signature on a note that said I'd got the bug, then told Elaine that I was going to Emma's after school. She told her mum she was going to Kate's. It took ages to get to the city on the train - 2 hours. We stopped in MacDonald's and then went to the clinic. They were really good with Em. She was crying. Turns out she hadn't done a pregnancy test she was too scared to get one from the chemist and she was afraid to tell the GP because she didn't trust her because it's a small village. No way could she tell her Mum and dad. Anyway they did a pregnancy test and it was negative. Poor Em! She was dead lucky.

Teacher

Wales has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in the UK, and young women in care have the highest pregnancy rate in Wales.

There are many reasons for this, including fear that their foster carer and social worker will be told and it will be written in their case file if they go to a family planning clinic or school nurse for contraceptive advice. They may also miss out on sex education within school if they change schools or miss school for other reasons.

The Local Authority will have protocols in place to make sure pupils who are pregnant or who are mothers still get a full time education.

Pregnant young women need time for antenatal appointments; if the father is a pupil, it is helpful if he can attend these appointments as well.

Social worker

Fostered young people may get pregnant or may discover that their girlfriend is pregnant. In either case, the young person needs emotional and practical support and information.

Many fostered young women decide to continue with their pregnancy.

If a fostered young person is pregnant under 16, she is still required to receive an appropriate full time education unless she has medical needs that prevent this from happening (eg just before and after giving birth). She cannot be excluded from school. However, there may be more appropriate ways to provide full time education, particularly when she has her baby to care for. These will be known to the LACE coordinator in the Authority.

Key Points

The designated person for LAC will work closely with the LACE coordinator and the social worker to ensure appropriate support is given to any young mum who is in care.

Fostered young people who become pregnant or whose girlfriends become pregnant will need extra support.

Coursework

Year 11 Amy

spring 1 February 28th

I can't believe how I let myself get into this mess. I've got two redrafts for English - miss says that they count for Language and Literature. I've got a project to finish for R.E worth 50% of the overall mark, so sir says, and I've got revision for science mocks.

I just don't know where to start. The teachers sigh and moan saying that I should be more organised! But how? The work is due in on Thurs I've got a visit to my Mum's and I really need to see Kate Emma and Josh. Two nights for this workload is plain unfair. They have such high expectations.



Teacher

Fostered young people may need extra help with planning their coursework.

Foster carers may not understand the difference between coursework and homework. It helps if they are given a clear explanation of what is expected; the PEP review is a good time to do that.

Most schools already break coursework down into a series of smaller targets and deadlines. It will help the foster carer and social worker to work with the young person if they are given a list of what is expected and when.

Social worker

Make sure the foster carer knows both the school's deadline for coursework and the examination board's deadline. Sometimes young people give up because they believe the deadline is impossible - whereas there is actually some flexibility because it is an internal deadline.

Think about having a coursework group or catch-up group for fostered young people.

Young people need help with planning their time, especially when revising for exams.

Key Points

Fostered young people may need extra support in planning their coursework.

Foster carers may need to negotiate deadlines for coursework. A coursework or catch-up group can help fostered young people to keep up.

Revision

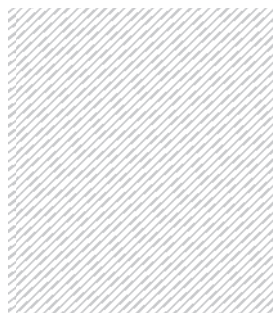
Year 11 Amy

spring 2

March 20th

It is worse then normal school, now we've started revision. Andrew and Elaine are getting at me to study more, all I do is study. It is really hard nothing is sinking in; Andrew and Elaine aren't much help. Jade is coming over tomorrow we are going to study.
Study! Study! Study!

I deserve a break. I need to see Josh, Kate and Emma. Surely one night off won't harm my marks, I mean come on!



Teacher

Poor organisational skills can make revision difficult. All young people need teachers to show them different ways to revise, and help them plan their revision at school. Those in care may have different calls on their time and may need extra understanding and different boundaries during this stressful period.

Foster carers will probably appreciate support in helping them to know about different learning preferences/styles and the wide range of revision methods available depending on learning preference.

Social worker

Remind foster carers that young people need time for fun and to socialise, and that this will help with their revision and exam preparation. They should plan regular "rewards" if the young person spends time revising.

This is often the last opportunity to complete missing coursework. Someone needs to contact the school to check all coursework has been handed in – agree with the foster carer which of you will do that.

Arrange training or information for foster carers about how different people learn.

Consider setting up a local authority study club or revision support scheme.

Key Points

Young people in foster care may need extra help in finding their preferred learning style and in planning their revision.

Make sure foster carers understand how to support their young people in revision and consider setting up a study club.

Information about exams

Year 11 Amy

summer 1 April 21st

Five weeks to go till exams and when they're over I'll be a school leaver. Though I'm keeping my options open about 6th form and college. My worries are more practical than that - like where to live.

We had a huge green piece of paper with a timetable on it: dates, start times, subjects and reminders about correct equipment. Andrew and Elaine were really cross that I'd stuffed it into the bag. They said I had to learn to share important info promptly. Mm well!

There were also loads of tips on a separate sheet about keeping healthy, avoiding stress. That was good because not every school does that - at least that's what the deputy head said.

I've got one awful day in the middle: physics and maths in the morning, Welsh in the afternoon. Three subjects in one day. How am I meant to revise 3 subjects in one night?

Honestly you think they'd plan these exams better!

Teacher

Many fostered young people have problems with organisation. It is a good idea to post important information directly to the foster carer as well as giving it to the young person. Foster carers may be less aware than parents of what information they can expect the school to provide and when, so may not realise their fostered young person has not handed over important information.

It is excellent practice to give tips on how to do your best in the run up to exams and during exams.

Social worker

Some young people find it a relief to be sitting exams and away from ordinary lessons. Others find exams an immense strain.

The Fostering Network's publication Education is targeted at foster carers. It has a useful chapter on supporting young people with revision and examinations.

Make sure your foster carers know what information they can expect from the school. Encourage them to keep home-life as calm and predictable as possible in the run up to exams.

Key Points

Post important information directly to the foster carer to make sure it is received. Give tips on how to cope before and during exams.

Make sure foster carers know what information to expect from the school and how to support their young people before and during exams.

Worrying about the future

Year 11 Amy

summer 2 May 30th

Revision has been hell this week. I can't concentrate. How am I meant to succeed and do well when I don't know where I'll be living in a month? With that hanging over me how can I make plans for the future? Andrew, Elaine, my key worker all say not to worry; that I must focus on the exams. But how can I focus when by June 29th I'll be 16, a school leaver, and a care leaver.

I heard about one girl and her brother who were fostered. She really has gone to Uni - studying linguistics. He's doing his GCSE's now. Going to fail all of them and he says school can't see how pointless it is to worry about marks when he doesn't know where he'll live. His sister has left him behind: she was fostered by a teacher. He's been moved several times too violent apparently.

I have no idea what's going to happen next.



Teacher

Amy has gone from thinking about university to leaving school at 16 with no clear plans. It is sadly common for education to go downhill during Years 10 and 11 for fostered young people. Even at this stage, positive support from school can help young people through their exams. For example, schools can actively invite young people like Amy to drop into school between exams to see their teachers for extra help with revision or just to talk.

Social worker

Arrangements for post 16 support should be in place a long time before examinations so fostered young people are not trying to juggle all the worries and fears Amy has.

Most successful graduate care leavers had foster carers who offered a stable placement through A-levels and beyond. More than 1 in 3 of these foster carers are themselves graduates (1 in 100 of all foster carers are graduates). This does not mean only graduate foster carers can help someone go to university. It does mean those fostered by non-graduates may need even more encouragement and support from you.

Key Points

Make sure fostered young people know they can drop into school between exams to get extra help or just talk.

Make sure fostered young people know where they will be living post-16 so they can concentrate on their exams without worrying about practical issues.

