

# Lifelong Links

Building lasting relationships  
for children in our care



**A Guide for Professionals**

## What is Lifelong Links?

Lifelong Links aims to build lasting relationships for young people in our care in Durham.

The intention is to establish lost links, re-enforce existing relationships or form new connections for the young person, so that they develop a strong, stable, and consistent network of support as they leave care. These can be people that the young person knows well but have not seen in a while (like a previous foster carer, a teacher or neighbour), people that they identify as having been supportive in their lives and want to have a long-lasting support relationship with, family members that they have lost contact with or even a family member that have not met yet.

They may also benefit from making connections with local community groups that can offer them support.



“ Every child is one caring adult away from being a success (Nick Barwick) ”

## How can Lifelong Links help our Young People?

One of our independent Lifelong Links co-ordinators, working with the young person, can find safe family and friends that the young person wants to connect with and who they can turn to for support. They can learn more about their family history and find answers to the questions they may have.



Young people are eligible for Lifelong Links if they:

- ✓ Are aged 15¾ years and over.
- ✓ Are approaching leaving care prior to their 18th birthday.

The person or the local authority with parental responsibility for the young person must consent to the referral. The young person must also agree to have Lifelong Links.

## How it works

The Lifelong Links co-ordinator will meet with the young person and works with them to find all the people who may care about them.

With the agreement of the young person, the coordinator will contact all the people identified (where safe) and will arrange to visit them, where possible or at least speak to them about being part of the young person's Lifelong Links. They will discuss with family and friends as to how they may be able to support the young person.

In consultation with the young person, the coordinator will invite family and friends to the Lifelong Links Family Group Conference, should that be what the young person wants.



## The purpose of the Lifelong Links Family Group Conference

It's all about bringing together those people that care about the young person to decide on a plan of support for them so that:

- ✓ The young person have lasting relationships they can depend on.
- ✓ It is clear to everyone who is responsible for staying in touch with the young person and how this will happen, so there is no confusion.
- ✓ For the young person to learn more about their family history and develop a stronger sense of identity.
- ✓ Have people that the young person can turn to for practical and emotional support. This could be by being invited to family events, holidays, having telephone calls, sending emails, birthday/Christmas cards, going on outings or getting support with work experience.
- ✓ The young person's support network make a plan to share with the social worker and professionals. The plan then becomes part of the young person's care plan.

## Who attends the Lifelong Links Family Group Conference?

This will vary but usually includes the young person, family members (and others who care about the young person), the social worker (and other professionals who may be involved), the foster or residential carer, the Lifelong Links co-ordinator and possibly an advocate for the young person.

The Family Group Conference includes some private time which practitioners do not attend.

## What happens after the Family Group Conference?

The social worker should work with the young person and their support network to ensure that the plan they make is carried out and that it is safe. It will form part of the young person's care plan and eventually their pathway plan as they become more independent.

A Family Group Conference review will be offered to the young person and their support network, to check that the plan is working.

The plan should also be regularly reviewed at the CICR by the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) and social worker.

## How to enquire about Lifelong Links

Any Durham practitioner, working with a child or young person, who thinks that Lifelong Links could benefit them, can get in touch using the contact details below.

### Contacts

**Nigel Connah** (FGC and Lifelong Links acting Team Leader) or **Lucy Armstrong** (Supporting Solutions Team Manager) for an initial discussion.

**Email:** ~ [LifelongLinks@durham.gov.uk](mailto:LifelongLinks@durham.gov.uk)

or

**Telephone:** ~ **03000 262278**

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