

## Summary briefing 2010

Cambridge, March 2009    Newcastle, September 2009  
Leeds, March 2009        Liverpool, September 2009  
Brighton, June 2009      London, October 2009  
Bristol, June 2009        Cambridge, December 2009

Improving the outcomes for children in care is a goal shared by practitioners, managers, policy managers, children and young people, and their carers, and is central to legislation and government policy.

Fundamental to achieving this is a workforce that is skilled, knowledgeable and confident in meeting the needs of each individual looked after child. The task is not easy and the hectic daily schedule of front-line practitioners leaves little time to reflect on practice, consider new ideas and keep up to date.

As a contribution to the process of reflection and learning, NCB – supported by the Department for Education's (formerly Department for Children, Schools and Families) strategic grant, which continues its three-year term begun in 2008 – continues to run regionally based events for practitioners working with looked after children. These events provide participants with knowledge and information on policy issues and regionally based work, and the opportunity to hear from speakers on specific topics that relate to their work with looked after children.

The outline programme for each regional event consisted of:

- a presentation by the government regional office responsible for the event's location, outlining the latest national government policies and initiatives in relation to looked after children, followed by a summary of what is being done regionally to implement these policies
- presentations by specialist practitioners on key issues in relation to looked after children
- round-table discussion groups on the topic of the day.

This briefing contains a selective account from the range of presentations made, across eight regional events, during the second year of the Looked After Children Practice Exchange Network.

## The presentations from regional government offices

### National policy initiatives and developments

#### *Care Matters implementation*

The programme for implementing Care Matters continues. Many of the pilot projects are ongoing, so it is too early to evaluate their success and if there will be a national roll-out of any of the ideas currently being tested.

#### **Care Matters: Ministerial stocktake report 2009**

The first ministerial stocktake took place in the autumn of 2009 (*Care Matters: Ministerial stocktake report 2009*. DCSF). It looked at the progress made so far by each local authority's implementation of Care Matters, and the extent to which outcomes for children in care have improved. The next ministerial stocktake will take place in autumn 2010.

#### Key messages from the report

- There has been steady progress in improving outcomes for children in care. For example, we have seen more children in stable placements; more children achieving good GCSE results; and more care leavers living in good accommodation, and in employment or education.
- We need to go further and faster. Although educational attainment has been improving, figures for children in care are still well behind those of their peers. Some children are still being moved three or four times a year – some more. Too many care leavers are still living in unsuitable accommodation or are unemployed.
- We need to get all local authorities up to the standard of the best, which needs strong leadership from directors of children's services (DCS) and lead members for children's services (LMCS) as corporate parents. Local authorities need to get the basics right: good assessments; having a range of placements available via good commissioning; supporting the development

of staff and carers; having a strong focus on educational attainment; and supporting care leavers into employment and good accommodation. Where Ofsted inspections give an 'inadequate' marking, the government will intervene in the same way as they do for 'inadequate' safeguarding markings.

- There needs to be a change of culture in every local authority so that children are listened to more on key issues such as placement decisions; personal education plans; their health; and when and how they should leave care. The government is changing regulations to strengthen the role of independent reviewing officers (IROs) and asking all local authorities to set up Children in Care Councils (CiCCs).

DCSF (2009) *Care Matters: Ministerial stocktake report 2009*.

### Measuring success, and inspection

The government emphasises the importance of measuring success and the application of national indicators (NI). So a new indicator, NI 51, has been introduced to measure the emotional health and well-being of children in care, along with a set of strengths and difficulties questions (SDQ) to assess emotional well-being.

The new inspection regime for vulnerable children and safeguarding is now in place.

### Children Act regulations and guidance

The current suite of Children Act 1989 Regulations was developed in 1991. Nearly twenty years on, consultation has begun on a revised version of those regulations. It incorporates changes in legislation and increased understanding of the needs of looked after children and what is required to meet those needs. A single set of updated care planning, review and placement regulations were published in March 2010.

### Listening to the voices of children

Listening to the voice of the child is a central theme throughout *Care Matters: Time for change* and it finds practical expression through the introduction of Children in Care Councils. If they have not already done so, all local authorities are expected to have established a children in care council during 2010.

### Health

*Promoting the Health and Well-being of Looked After Children: Revised statutory guidance* was published by the DCSF in November 2009. This guidance extends the responsibilities and duties to include health bodies. DCSF also published *Promoting the Emotional Health of Children and Young People: Guidance for Children's Trust partnerships, including how to deliver NI 50* (DCSF 2010).

### Education

Following the Children and Young Person's Act 2008, all schools must have a designated teacher for looked after children with responsibility for their educational outcomes. As of September 2009, the role of designated teacher was placed on a statutory footing for maintained schools.

The Virtual School Head Teacher (VSH) pilot project evaluation was completed in the summer of 2009. The initiative was judged to have demonstrated success in raising the profile and the educational attainment of looked after children. The use of private tutoring appeared to help many looked after children reach their full potential. With the national roll-out of the programme, all local authorities are expected to have put a Virtual School Head Teacher in place in 2010.

The Care Matters implementation programme introduced a system whereby a personal educational allowance of up to £500 a year should be made available to any looked after child at risk of not reaching expected national levels of attainment (DCSF (2008) *Personal Education Allowances for Looked After Children: Statutory guidance for local authorities*).

The DCSF produced guidance in 2009, *Improving the Educational Attainment of Children in Care (Looked after Children)*, which sets out the different elements that should be in place to improve educational outcomes for looked after children. These include appointing a Virtual School Head Teacher to keep track of every child; putting in place the appropriate provision to help each child attain their potential; and the aspects that social workers need to consider when making decisions about placement moves.

### Placements

Under the Children and Young Person's Act 2008, if there is a plan to move a child who is in Year 10/11, there has to be a statutory review of that decision. Children Act regulation and guidance to be published in 2010 will provide a further framework for local authorities, clarifying their duties and responsibilities with regards to placement stability.

The roll-out of the Fostering Changes programme is being marked by the introduction of training and support for foster carers to help prevent placement breakdown. Guidance on information-sharing with foster carers has also been published by the government, to ensure that foster carers are fully informed about a prospective placement. This aims to ensure that foster carers feel more confident that they will be able to meet the needs of a particular child being considered for placement with them.

Consultation on the revised national minimum standards (NMS) for adoption, fostering and children's homes ended in December 2009. The revised standards aim to better reflect the aims and priorities of *Care Matters*, by incorporating recent changes in legislation. The new

standards should be published in 2010.

### Care leavers

Eleven local authorities are piloting the Right2BCared4 programme, looking at giving young people greater choice over when and how they leave care. The pilot project, Staying Put: 18+ Family Care, is currently looking at providing young people with the choice of staying with their carers beyond the age of 18.

The revised *Children (Leaving Care): Regulations and guidance* publishes in 2010 for consultation. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the personal advisor support given to young people when they wish to resume education and training beyond the age of 21.

The government launched the Care2Work programme to improve employment opportunities for care leavers. It included funding for the National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) to work with local authorities to develop and test models of support offered to care leavers moving into employment. NCAS will also be developing a national register of employers. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learners Bill currently going through Parliament contains a clause to extend new apprenticeship entitlements to care leavers aged 19–25.

## Regional developments

### South East region

*Narinder Whitfield is the safeguarding policy team leader at the government office for the South East leading on policy developments for looked after children.*

The region has been involved in workforce developments. Buckinghamshire, Kent, and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, took part in the workload survey. A key task for the regional government office is to continue to lead on improvements and to help maintain morale locally while changes are underway.

In 2008, the region held a Care Matters conference to share learning and there is a recognition that there is still more work to do. The regional stocktake will establish the current picture across the region. The regional government office wants to improve its understanding of children in care and the issues facing them. Training on special guardianship was held in February 2009. Many Children in Care Councils (CiCC) are up and running across the country. Locally, 2009 was the year of delivery and they will be working on a more targeted approach to areas of work and practice identified as needing further improvement.

### South West region

*Sally Halls is the children services adviser, for the government office for the South West, with the lead role for looked after children and safeguarding.*

There are approximately 59,500 children in care in England, with the South West region looking after 4,500 of these children. Over the course of a year, the turnover in this population is approximately 50 per cent. Although the average turnover for authorities in the South West region was below the national average, there were three authorities that reported above-average figures. The reasons for this may be related to an area being urban; the rates of poverty within the population; or to practice. The main reason for children coming into care in the region was as a result of abuse or neglect; the next most frequent reason was that of parental illness or disability.

### Ofsted findings on provision

In the best provision, Ofsted found that:

- children feel safe and their privacy is respected
- children have their educational needs individually and thoroughly addressed
- staff and carers work in partnership with parents
- adults continue to support young people at the end of their placement.

Ofsted also found that in the best provision, local authorities take on fully the responsibility of corporate parenting and evidenced a high level of performance across all the standards for services. The main issues that Ofsted found in those not performing so well were those of poor matching with regards to looked after children and their placements; poor private fostering arrangements; and variations in the quality of provision available.

### Health and well-being

Improving the health and well-being of looked after children requires effective partnerships with health services (generic and specialist). With regards to dental and health checks, the South West region has been above the national average, apart from a dip in 2003–4. In Plymouth, 97 per cent of looked after children are up to date with their dental and health check-ups.

Ofsted found that in the best provision, children were involved in health matters; and those provisions also took account of children's identity in meeting health needs. In those performing less well, Ofsted noted that there was a failure to see the link between poor diet and health/well-being, and that the information on health plans could be improved.

Given that the number of looked after children completing dental and health check-ups is rising, one of the challenges for the South West is ascertaining whether health check-ups actually make a difference to children's health and well-being. For example, are there plans being developed as a result of those checks? Is there consistency in meeting health needs when children move placements?

## Stay safe: Stability

Stability for looked after children not only means being in the right place to start with but also having continuity of relationships/friendships and support, including those relationships that are school-based. This is an area that needs to be monitored. Stable placements demonstrate excellent relationships with carers; good training available to foster carers and residential staff; and good commissioning arrangements in place, including wraparound services. Progress on this appears to be varied in the South West region.

With regards to NI 63, long-term placement stability, the South West region is making progress and is above average in the national statistics. Statistics about placements and stability can be difficult to interpret, given the changing sample size and the turnover of the looked after population.

The challenge for the South West is that although there have been recent improvements, instability is persistently higher across the region than the England average; and in some local authorities within the area, placement instability is significantly higher than the South West average.

### Education

- Nationally, only 1 in 8 children in care achieve five good GCSE passes – compared with well over half of their peers.
- The picture in the South West is even worse, with significant under-achievement across Key Stages 2 and 4.
- Taking account of research on the link between educational attainment and success in later life, more looked after children in the South West are likely to be disadvantaged as adults.

In identifying the characteristics of the best provision, Ofsted recognised the importance of what happens outside school and that this has an impact on what happens inside school, for example having structured learning beyond the school day.

Although the South West region is doing better than the national average with regards to children's attendance at school, more than 10 per cent of looked after children missed significant amounts of schooling in 2007/08. The reasons for this are not clearly understood at present. Rates of absence in England have dropped sharply, but in the South West absence numbers are still rising.

Young people in the South West are also more likely than anywhere else in England to be caught up in the youth justice system. The regional government office is trying to find out why this is so.

## NI 148: Percentage of care leavers at 19 in education, employment and training

Although the South West region has been in an increasingly good position with regards to this national indicator, last year 30 per cent of care leavers were not in education, employment or training (otherwise known as NEET). Performance in some local authorities was significantly worse than in others.

Torbay should get a particular mention. Of their care leavers, 83 per cent were in education, employment or training; and that figure will probably be even higher this year. The challenge for the South West will be to continue to help young people to get into employment during an economic downturn.

## NI 147: Percentage of 19-year-old care leavers in suitable accommodation

In the South West, some local authorities have been achieving extremely well against this indicator, however the 2008 figures indicate that improvement has been tailing off. To do well, local authorities have to be working closely with housing providers. There is still room for improvement; all local authorities within the South West region should be reaching the levels achieved by the best authorities.

### What the government office for the South West is doing

The government office for the South West hosts a regional children in care board, to help support the work in the region. This board brings all the relevant agencies and partners together and is chaired by the director of Bath and North East Somerset.

The board keeps an eye on progress on the performance indicators in the South West; and is where improvements and barriers are identified and discussed.

The government office for the South West also runs a number of regional networks, namely the:

- Virtual Head Teachers Network
- Education Protects
- Leaving Care Network.

**Care Matters workshops** The government office for the South West ran Care Matters workshops this spring, attempting to pull together information on policy, research evidence on 'what works' and to showcase best practice for delivering Care Matters within the region.

**Placement stability research** The government office for the South West is supporting research into why some placements do better in terms of stability and why others do less well.

**Commissioning through RIEP** (Regional Improvement Efficiency Partnership) is helping to develop better relationships with the private and voluntary sectors.

**Local authority support and challenge** Separate to inspections, the government office for the South West provides support and challenge to local authorities to help improve practice and outcomes for looked after children.

### *North East region*

*Pixley Clark is the children's services adviser for the government office for the North East. Her work mostly concerns child protection and safeguarding but she also has responsibility for looked after children.*

The North East has a history of high numbers of children coming into care. However it was noted that all the government regions have recently seen an increase in the numbers of children coming in care. Young people tend to have fewer placement moves in the North East. Compared to the rest of the country, the North East does pretty well in ensuring young people are in the appropriate accommodation.

More inspections have been announced and there is to be a focus on carrying out joint inspections, including looked after children services. All local authorities will have unannounced inspections, followed by a three-year in-depth review of children's local authority services. This is in tandem with the national minimum standards for care.

The North East is involved in the Right2BCared4 and Staying Put 18+ pilots introduced through Care Matters. A regional stocktake will take place, along with a regional seminar, assessing whether they have achieved improved outcomes. The seminar will also share good practice. Regional development work has also been looking at how to improve the health of looked after children.

### *North West region*

*Jane Power is the lead for looked after children and Care Matters for the government office for the North West of England. Her post involves monitoring, challenging and supporting local authorities with the ECM agenda.*

The North West is a region of contrasts, with areas of extreme deprivation alongside areas of wealth and prosperity. Over a third of North West authorities feature in the worst performing 50 authorities nationally.

Looking at the key facts for looked after children (LAC) in the North West (based on published data as of 2007), there were 69 LAC per 10,000 population aged under 18; compared with the national average of 54. There were 84,038 referrals for advice or support in a year, and 17,900 repeat referrals. A total of 38,900 initial assessments were completed, with 29,290 of these carried out within the

agreed timescales. There were 10,825 core assessments completed. A total of 9,285 joint child protection investigations were carried out, which led to 4,480 children and young people being made subject to a child protection plan.

### **Key priorities for the North West**

- reducing numbers in care through better early identification and support
- increasing the use of residence and guardianship
- improving access to emotional health/well-being services
- improving stability and permanence
- improving attainment at Key Stages 2 and 4, and GCSE
- addressing leaving care outcomes, especially for those who are not in education, employment or training and increasing the proportion in full-time education post-16.

### **What's happening**

Care Matters pilot projects are underway, namely:

- Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care – Cheshire & Manchester
- Virtual School Head Teacher – Stockport & Salford
- Right2BCared4 – Cheshire
- Staying Put – Cheshire
- Social Work Practice (outsourcing to independent social work organisations) – Blackburn with Darwen and Liverpool.

Other activities that are underway, are:

- developing sustainable employment opportunities (REIP and NCAS projects)
- Remodelling the Workforce – Wirral (CWDC Pilot)
- Cost Calculator – Cheshire (DCSF/Loughborough University).

The Cheshire social pedagogy pilot is already underway. It has been accepted on to the Thomas Coram programme; and two pedagogues from Germany have been recruited.

### *London region*

*Harvinder Mankoo is the Narrowing the Gap policy lead for the government office for London, where the focus is now very much on looked after children.*

There are approximately 11,000 children and young people in care in London, which has the highest number of looked after children in England, although there has been a steady decline over the past few years. The reason for this has yet to be fully analysed.

## London local authority survey on Care Matters, September 2009

In preparation for the Care Matters ministerial stocktake in 2009, the government office for the London region conducted a short survey focusing on the five enablers of Care Matters. These are:

- Personal educational allowances (PEAs)
- Children in Care Councils (CiCCs)
- Children in care (CiC) local authority 'bespoke' pledges
- Personal education plans (PEPs) including extended access to Personal Advisors
- Virtual School Head Teachers (VSH).

The survey was sent to all 32 London boroughs except for the City. Eighteen responded in time for the DCSF deadline. The summary of the findings are as follows.

The government office for London is considering repeating the exercise at a later date to see if any further progress has been made.

### Local authority survey findings on challenges

There is a need to:

- develop evidenced and personalised approaches to learning
- increase the numbers and skills of educationally focused foster carers – this includes improving the attractiveness of the foster carer role
- strengthen the out-of-borough notification process
- bring about closer supportive working arrangements between social workers and carers
- improve placement choice.

### Pan-London Virtual School Head Teachers Network

The pan-London Virtual School Head Teachers Network is supported by working groups whose projects include: data development; training materials; and producing pan-London documents and protocols. The new terms of reference focus on being strategic, operational and facilitating best practice. The government office for London facilitates network meetings and oversees the groups' projects.

To make sure looked after children are able to access support equally across boroughs, potential work strands for the VSH network include:

- tightening up and modifying notification procedures
- pan-London documents and protocols, such as PEPs
- equal access to resources and support
- accessing additional support
- behaviour support
- criteria for measuring success.

**Table 1: Responses of 18 boroughs to the London local authority survey on Care Matters (numbers and per cent response rate)**

	Fully effective or fully established	Partially effective or partially established	Ineffective or not established
PEA systems	9 (50%)	9 (50%)	0 (0%)
CiCC	6 (35%)	10 (59%)	1 (6%)
LA 'bespoke' CiC pledge	7 (41%)	8 (47%)	2 (12%)
Personal advisor (up to age 25 yrs)	13 (81%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)
Virtual School Head Teacher arrangements	10 (59%)	6 (35%)	1 (6%)

### Pan-London pledge

This was launched in November 2008 by the Minister for London. It contains 47 promises across all five ECM outcomes and has been signed up to by all London authorities and the Mayor of London. There was a Young London Matters strand group, which put forward proposals on the monitoring and evaluation of the pledge.

### Designated teachers' conference

A conference took place on 20 November 2009, aimed at London's designated teachers, to raise awareness of guidance and implications. It also launched the national statutory guidance.

### LAC developments in London

A new VSH Network terms of reference will be produced and the VSH Network's work strands developed. Practice sharing events will also take place. It is also the aim to embed the Children in Care pledge, and promote regional stakeholder joining-up in order to complement existing programmes, rather than have duplication of effort.

### West Midlands region

*Mandy Smith is the policy officer for vulnerable children, government office for the West Midlands.*

### Progress of Care Matters

The West Midlands has been involved in every single one of the Care Matters pilot projects, for example, social pedagogy is being piloted in Dudley and Solihull.

Children in Care Councils have been set up and local pledges are being implemented, listening to the voice of looked after children and young people.

The Virtual School Head Teacher role has been supporting the education of looked after children and there are opportunities for private tuition across the West Midlands.

There are developments and learning about supported lodgings emerging from the Right2BCared4: 16–18 and Staying Put pilot projects. Progress so far includes some local authorities in the West Midlands having achieved 100

per cent suitable accommodation for young people. There is now a framework for providing additional support. From Care2Work, funded by DCSF and rolled out by NCAS, there is a programme manager to work with each local authority to look at employment opportunities. Work placements for care leavers are providing the opportunity to work in the 'family firm' (that is, a local authority placement), enabling care leavers to get a foot in the door and experience employment. As of 1 November 2009, all West Midlands authorities had shown an interest in the scheme, with nine local authorities already signed up.

### **Governance arrangements**

The West Midlands has children in care and Care Matters as part of their governance arrangements and networks.

### **Regional stocktake**

There was a care leavers event on 19 September 2009 in Dudley, and just under 30 young people attended. The regional stocktake on the progress achieved on implementing Care Matters was held on 20 October and fed into the *Care Matters: Ministerial stocktake report 2009*.

### ***Eastern region (Go-East)***

*Ganga Westwood is the Stay Safe and Care Matters policy lead for the government office for the East of England (Go-East).*

### **Regional children in care networks**

We support a number of regional children in care networks, which receive key messages and inputs from policy leads, the safeguarding advisor, and health colleagues. These networks promote the Care Matters agenda through improved joint working and dissemination of good practice. They are the:

- IRO network
- Healthy care network
- Virtual School Head Teacher network
- Leaving care network
- Fostering network
- Participation leads network.

The current focus of the IRO network is: the challenge role; decisions made for children in care; and listening to the views of children. The government issued a 'sunset clause', which says that if the role of the IRO does not present sufficient scrutiny of care planning then plans may be made to remove that service from local authorities.

The Healthy care network is made up of service managers with a health remit in social care and designated nurses for children in care. Within the region there has been a stronger relationship with health than was previously

the case. Go-East is working with the strategic health authorities' leads and a designated doctor for looked after children to develop an audit tool for initial assessments to be shared with all local authorities.

Previously, the region supported a Quality protects network which looked at the education of children in care. In keeping with current developments, this network was realigned to form the Virtual School Head Teacher network, given that all the local authorities in the region have or will have a Virtual School Head Teacher. The national pilot project of the Virtual School Head Teacher initiative has recently been evaluated and been seen as incredibly successful in raising the profile of looked after children, in raising their educational attainment and in providing strong challenge and support in this area. The pilot project highlighted that the use of one-to-one tuition has resulted in significant improvement in English and Maths. The Virtual School Head Teacher network will be taking forward key successes from the national pilot project. The network will have a stronger challenge and support function in driving up educational outcomes for looked after children and delivering the education PSAs.

The Leaving care network is focusing on the Care to Work, National Employability Scheme. This DCSF/Cabinet Office initiative is aimed at creating opportunities for young people in and from care. A number of leading private and public sector companies (including Tesco, Aviva and Sainsbury's) and several government departments (DCSF, Home Office, etc.) are committed to working with local authorities to provide skills and work experience for care leavers.

Go-East and the Fostering network are working with NCB to devise and disseminate a 'Creativity for Well-being' regional strategy for looked after children, to support emotional well-being and placement stability. The work will build on NCB's national programme to embed opportunities for creativity in the lives of looked after children.

The main focus of the Participation leads network has been on the development of pledges and Children in Care Councils. This network worked on a regional pledge, helping local authorities to develop their thinking about their own pledges.

In March 2009, Go-East and the Participation lead network held an event bringing together 90 children from all the local authorities across the region as a direct response to the Care Matters emphasis on the need to promote the voices of children themselves. All the participants were shown the film *Walking Away*, produced by the Red Rose Chain Theatre Company. The storyline was created through workshops with children in care and looks at the difficulties young people face in overcoming barriers, the importance

of relationships, and the impact and influences that everyday interactions can have on young people.

The objective was to use this film as a starting point for them to consider how lives are shaped by the influences of significant people in their lives and the effect of our own choices. Following this, the children and young people were supported by actors in devising and playing out two scenarios (what happens when things do not work out as they would like and what makes the difference when they do). A film of the event was produced, to be used as a learning tool for professionals to remind them that in their work the voice of the child can sometimes be drowned out by day-to-day procedural work and policy-driven practice.

### Other news from Go-East

**The first national ministerial stocktake:** Go-East submitted a regional return to DCSF on the progress made against the Care Matters outcomes in this region, based on local authorities' self-evaluations.

Go-East has set up a Regional Corporate Parenting Governance structure for all our regional Children in Care networks to offer a clear cross-sector strategic framework. It will be chaired by an ADSC and will be accountable to the 11 East Region local authorities and Go-East.

### References

For further details about the Red Rose Chain Theatre Company, their work and where to order the DVD, *Walking Away*, go to [www.redrosechain.com/page/home](http://www.redrosechain.com/page/home)

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## Practice and development presentations

### Child-centred care participation

*John Kemmis, the chief executive of VOICE, introduced the Blueprint project.*

Blueprint is a child-centred approach to children and young people in public care.

(Blueprint Project (2004) *Start with the Child, Stay with the Child: A blueprint for a child-centred approach to children and young people in public care*. NCB. London: Voice for the Child in Care.)

It is an attempt to re-think the care system from the bottom up. The project involved children, young people and adults working together. Over 400 children and young people were consulted. Twenty young people were trained as reporters to research and produce the final report. The young people looked at what child-centred care should mean in practice. The report, *Start with the Child, Stay with the Child: A blueprint for a child-centred approach to children and young people in public care*, highlights the key

ingredients and messages that emerged from the project.

### *Elements of child-centred care: The young people's list*

- The child should be at the centre of all decisions.
- Decisions should be kept focused on the child.
- The child should have some control and choice about their life.
- The child should have more choice than now.
- The system should move at the child's pace.
- The child should always be seen and treated as an individual.
- The system should protect the child.
- Young people should be seen as important and listened to.
- Care should be about the child and their wishes, not the system and its priorities.
- A child-centred system involves seeing the world as the child sees it.
- Such a system prioritises treating the child with respect and valuing them.

### *Four key blueprint messages*

1. We have to focus on the child in everything we do.
2. The relationships children have are central to their well-being.
3. Children and young people are competent.
4. We need to create a better balance between working directly with children and all other tasks which support this central activity.

There was also discussion around equipping young people with independence skills and looking to the future. However, whatever was discussed with young people, the discussions always came back to key relationships. We must value these relationships in our practice. If we got our practice right, it would not be possible to separate siblings. There has to be a culture shift, so that more time is spent with the child and less on bureaucracy.

Following on from the first Blueprint project, lottery money was secured to work with six local authorities to develop more child-centred approaches in practice. One of these projects involved helping Kirklees Council to improve their child care reviews. This was a very successful project, which demonstrated that children, young people and adults working together can change the system for the better and make it more accessible to, and reflective of, the wishes of children and young people.

For further information on the Blueprint project, download the report and materials from [www.voiceyp.org](http://www.voiceyp.org)



## Improving outcomes for care leavers

Linda Briheim Crookall, policy manager, NCAS

The National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) is a new amalgamated service of NLCAS (the National Leaving Care Advisory Service) and the What Makes the Difference project. NCAS is a national advice support and development organisation focusing on young people's transition from care (aged 13–25 years).

### What NCAS does

- provides an enquiry service
- provides advice and information
- offers service development support
- leads the benchmarking forum
- provides support to regional leaving care forums influences policy.

### Policy context – improving outcomes for care leavers

The key legislation and policy developments for care leavers are:

- Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
- Children and Young Persons Act 2008
- Public Service Agreement 16 (PSA 16)
  - NI 147 Care leavers in suitable accommodation
  - NI 148 Care leavers in education, training and employment
- Care Matters (2006).

As part of Care Matters, and specific to care leavers, the Right2BCared4 pilot projects are looking at how young people can be helped to stay in care longer, after they reach 16, if they so wish. The pilots are looking at how to make this right a reality in practice. There are pilots that are looking at encouraging young people to stay in care until they are 18 or 21 (Staying Put); offering personal advisors for young people until they reach 25 years of age; and offering Higher Education bursaries.

NCAS continues to work at influencing government at a policy level. The Department for Work and Pensions and DCSF are also looking at benefits for care leavers.

### What did the What Makes the Difference project (WMTD) achieve?

The outcomes and lessons from this project are still being disseminated. The project developed and tested models within pilot authorities that could be applied elsewhere. The models were based around the following priorities:

- education and training

- employment opportunities
- preparation and planning
- empowerment.

On the NCAS website there are resources available to download and a practice database produced as a result of the project.

### Education and training – what we did

The WMTD project worked with 12 local authorities testing out different models of education support such as:

- Offering individual tuition for year 11 pupils
- Setting up a group for young people not in education, training and employment, providing basic education and a comedy course.

The outputs of this piece of work include a set of resources available on the NCAS website, including education and support charts, full of information and advice.

**The outcomes** for, and feedback from, the young people as a result of the work on education and training were:

- improved skills, confidence, self-esteem, motivation
- better attendance, fewer exclusions
- young people feeling more positive about education
- improved awareness of employment options
- improved test and examination results.

### Employment – What we did

The What Makes the Difference project worked with local authorities in developing models that increase work experience and employment opportunities for care leavers. The project also improved work with other local services, promoting and encouraging agreement to work together to improve opportunities for care leavers. Young people also had individual employment support plans and there was an increased awareness and promotion of volunteering.

The project produced a *World of Work* CD-ROM with top tips from young people, interactive employment games, work experience and job option information and work on CV writing and interview techniques.

**The outcomes** of the project were that young people were:

- given greater awareness of the options available to them, helping them find direction and raising aspirations
- helped to set achievable goals
- helped to feel more positive and confident about work
- given practical experience of job searching, interviews and working
- given opportunities to relate to people in a professional, work setting.

ETE (Education/Training and Employment) Young people informed us that they need:

- encouragement, support and motivation from carers and workers to stay in education

- advice and information
- help in choosing or accessing courses or training
- help to focus on what to do in life
- help with their homework
- practical help such as being provided with a computer, money, travel costs or books, etc
- access to and opportunities for work or volunteer experience
- the support of carers and workers with a positive attitude to the young person's future.

### **Empowerment – what we did**

The project worked on involving service users in local authority work plans, including staff recruitment. The project also helped to get young people working in leaving care teams as employees and trainees. In addition, it developed a peer support model. The project trained young people to do peer research and it produced a peer support model booklet, a peer research report and a corporate parenting pack.

For further details go to the NCAS website.

**The outcomes** were that staff said having a service user involvement (SUI) plan led to:

- better team planning
- clearer questions when interviewing staff
- a more responsive service, in line with what young people want
- greater staff awareness and more inclusive services.

Young people said that:

- they want to do similar jobs
- they would like more support with job applications and access to workers
- their self-confidence had improved
- that participation has helped one person to consume less alcohol.

The peer research found that young people said that:

- experiencing positive/caring relationships was the most important factor in improving the lives of young people
- help with psychological issues was important
- being able to feel emotionally secure, supported and safe were critical
- choice, control, quality of accommodation and help in becoming independent were essential
- encouragement and support with education and self-development were needed
- the chance to experience family life and opportunities was valued.

**Well planned transitions** A well planned transition has to start early, not at the point when a young person is about to leave the care system. Transition planning should build on existing assessments and care plans. Young people

should be given the option to remain in care until they are prepared and ready to leave.

A well planned transition involves the young person and should be empowering to them, incorporating opportunities for them to learn and develop their skills and knowledge. It should involve all the professionals who are working with that young person and include support that encourages and enables young people to achieve. For example, it should provide work experience, individual education plans and use innovative approaches to address problems. Importantly, as highlighted in the peer research, young people should have good, consistent and stable relationships with those who support them. Young people need and have the right to feel cared for.

**Good corporate parenting** Linda suggested that professionals need to ask themselves the question: 'If this was my child – what would I do?'

### **Current NCAS work on outcomes**

The Right2BCared4 evaluation is being carried out with Loughborough University.

Work with the benchmarking forum and Cabinet Office on PSA 16 is looking at how the benefits system can be improved for young carer leavers.

An accommodation guide will be published shortly.

A tool/DVD for young people has been developed that contains questions to ask yourself as a young person leaving care. NCAS continues to lobby for supported housing standards – we want national standards.

An employability project, including working on a national employers' database, involves employers who are willing to give care leavers jobs, training, etc. working on developing a Quality Mark for those employing care leavers.

*Preparation for Adult Life* is a training pack and CD-ROM, which was specifically created by young people along with a website, details of which can be found at [www.getreadyforadulthood.org](http://www.getreadyforadulthood.org)

NCAS also produced an email-bulletin/newsletter called *Keynotes* with updates on the latest developments in leaving care, practice articles, regional updates and information. For further details on this and all NCAS work, resources and information go to [www.leavingcare.org](http://www.leavingcare.org)

### **Drug misusing parents and looked after children**

*Emma Sawyer is an independent social worker, consultant and trainer. In her work with NCB she wrote Building Resilience in Families under Stress: Supporting families affected by parental substance misuse and/or mental health problems, which looked at how these issues affect looked after children and the implication for support and services.*

## *Context and prevalence*

- There is an emphasis in research and literature on assessment and family support.
- 35.6 per cent of drug-misusing mothers and 62.8 per cent of fathers no longer have their children with them (ACMD 2003).
- Children and young people in this context may become looked after for varying reasons: planned assessment, testing period, crisis protection, permanent removal or pending rehabilitation.

Despite the emphasis in research and literature on assessment and family support, the critical issue is what happens after the assessment? Very little is written about looked after children in these circumstances, the issues they face and the support they might need as a consequence. Many children do not stay living with their parents. In terms of young people on social work caseloads, there are no national figures specifically relating to children with drug-misusing parents. Whether or not notes are made on the files about the parents' substance misuse varies. Some 41 per cent of looked after cases that reach court proceedings had parental substance misuse as an acknowledged issue (Forrester and Harwin 2004).

## *Challenges in decision-making and planning*

These children may have a wide spectrum of needs. There are some recurring patterns – although each child is unique. There are specific challenges that come with parental substance misuse that do, or should, affect decision-making. Children's social workers do not receive a great deal of training on parental substance misuse; what they do get is often inadequate. But how do we turn things around with a lack of practice models? Important to the task are an awareness of how parental substance misuse affects children; an awareness of how to work with families; and some reflection on how one's attitude or stance on substance misuse might impact on the decision-making and planning. This area of work is often value laden with a worker's own professional and personal opinions potentially impacting upon assessment, planning and intervention.

There is a question as to whether specific guidance is needed for working in this area. However the principles of holistic care planning apply to all looked after children, regardless of whether drug misuse issues are involved.

Over 70 per cent of children's social workers will not have had an adult substance misuse worker involved on the case, even though it is a specialist area. This can lead to workers feeling overwhelmed. There tends to be an overemphasis on detecting misuse rather than on understanding how it affects the child and under-intervention compared to cases dealing with alcohol

misuse. With heroin or crack cocaine, intervention rates are much higher but often mechanistic. Remaining child focused is difficult when we look at the issue of parental substance misuse.

If the parent is trying to engage, it takes time and usually a few attempts, making it difficult to know when to draw a line. This can lead to uncertainty and difficulties in making predictions about likely outcomes. One has to weigh up the child's needs and timescales against the parent's timescales for action and possible recovery. This can create a difficult balancing act. Often there are repeat assessments including residential assessments being undertaken. In Dr Di Hart's work, she identified that residential assessments were often used to make the final decision about the care plan for the child, using the term 'safe place to fail'. It was found that this type of placement was being used to provide the hard evidence required for the courts, however, it is arguable that a residential assessment setting should only be used if there is a prospect of a positive outcome (Hart 2004).

Having a twin-track or concurrent approach to planning is important, along with contingency plans, but the focus on the child's needs must remain central.

It is also important to note that, for some of the children involved, there are mixed experiences of this situation, not all of which are bad.

## *A multi-agency approach*

Working with children affected by parental substance misuse requires a multi-agency approach. This is an area that most professionals struggle with. To make the best decisions, the more perspectives we can take on board the better. However, differences between the range of professionals involved – their role, relative status, remit and ways of working – can result in a lack of interaction. Children and adult workers can be aiming for different things. Adult workers can be fearful of losing contact with a parent or of losing the trust in a relationship, or they can be afraid of reprisals from parents and families.

A multi-agency approach (which should also include the family) should not stop once a decision has been made. Even when a child might not be returning home, a multi-faceted approach, such as the use of family group conferences, might achieve stability or improve the quality of family contact. The more we can engage with the positive aspects of a family network the better.

## *The impact on a child or young person's needs*

Once a child is looked after, they have very individual needs. How is the placement affected by substance misuse? We have to consider the complex interplay between organic, environmental and genetic factors and their relevance to a particular child.

Although there has been much work on the effect of drugs on babies, there is a lack of knowledge on the long-term effects of substance misuse during pregnancy. We do know that these young people can present bewildering, hard-to-understand behaviour that is not easily managed.

The impact of parental substance misuse on children will vary, but they may need help with:

- relinquishing responsibility
- the experience of reduced autonomy
- making sense of their history
- fears regarding their future
- reactions to their carer's behaviour, e.g. drinking
- learned patterns of secrecy and mistrust
- control and anxiety or 'learned hyper vigilance'
- talking about their experiences
- forming new attachments (and building on the positives).

Children frequently take on a carer role within their family. They often have a heightened sense of their own impact on parents and hold a great deal of responsibility. Many children will have had a high level of autonomy or inconsistent supervision, which might make it difficult for them to adjust to a placement where there are boundaries. They find it difficult to let go of that autonomy and may not be used to the level of supervision and care that a placement provides. There may have been little in the way of boundaries and rules within the home.

Given the stigma and often illegitimate nature of parental substance abuse, a child may find it difficult to talk about their experiences, adding to the child's difficulties in making sense of their history.

The stigma associated with substance abuse often means that children anticipate people making negative comments about their parents. There is also sometimes a sense of inevitability, a fear that they will end up with the same problems. Carers' behaviour can sometimes replicate parents' behaviour, unknowingly. Patterns of mistrust and secrecy are common in families where there is any illegal behaviour. Younger children, in particular, can have a strong need to control their environment as a result of this control/anxiety or 'learned hyper vigilance'. Many foster carers have reported children having distorted perceptions of carers.

Children need support to talk about their experiences. We need to be sensitive in how we talk about experiences and build on any positive experiences in the child's life.

Over time, children will have created coping mechanisms, some good, some harmful or ultimately unhelpful. They may be used to confronting, intervening or directly challenging their parent. Self-destruction is another

possibility – becoming the distraction or avoidance/ distraction – which can be seen in quiet, vulnerable children who retreat or do nothing at all. We need to recognise these mechanisms to help children either let go of such behaviours or utilise them in positive ways.

### *Supporting the placement*

Help given may take the form of:

- helping carers understand the child's impact and needs
- getting full and honest advice, such as from a paediatrician about the possible impact of drug misuse in pregnancy
- addressing carers' fears about a child's risk of drug-misusing behaviours or related health risks
- offering financial, practical and emotional support in cases of kinship placements.

Babies under one year appear to have the most placement moves. Carers are not necessarily knowledgeable about the effects of neo-natal drug misuse and its effects. There needs to be honest advice, for example from a paediatrician, about the possible impact of drug misuse during pregnancy; addressing carers' fears regarding the child's risk of developing drug misusing and other problems.

### *Contact with parents*

- Parents may experience a 'downward spiral' leading to loss of contact.
- Carers and professionals may find contact difficult, leading to the temptation to 'allow it' to lapse.
- There is a need to balance the child's fears or guilt feelings against the impact of erratic contact.
- Some contact may be better than none.
- There is a need to help parents to help their children.

Many children fear the death of their parent. Not knowing where the parent is, due to a lapse in contact, can have a severe impact on the child. The multi-agency approach could use the substance misuse worker, for example, to maintain some contact. The harder we work to engage with helping parents to help their children the better. A final decision that a child is to live elsewhere does not necessarily mean we should cut ties with their parent.

### *Children and young people moving on from a placement*

Planning needs to take into consideration future relationships, including those with their family which might be missed, for example when a young person is preparing to leave care. Concerns about a child's own potential substance misuse need to be addressed. There also needs to be planning and practising of coping strategies and alternatives to feared learned behaviours, to look at how children might resist emulating the behavioural patterns they fear. It is important to bear in mind that children will

have mostly had some positives when living at home, and that acknowledging and building on these could foster their resilience.

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## Improving placement stability and outcomes for looked after children

*Dr John Simmonds is the director of policy, research and development, British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF).*

### What is stability for children?

Is it...

- the length of time a child stays in one placement or the number of times they move?
- the stability and security of their relationships?
- the stability and security they feel inside themselves?
- the stability and security of the world around them?

John posed the questions 'How do we measure stability for the child? Is it the length of time a child stays in one placement? Sinclair's research highlighted that placement stability did not necessarily mean that children were happy in those placements. Does the placement necessarily meet a child's needs even if it appears to be stable?

Does stability and security come from their relationships? If so, the relationships with whom? Is the key relationship in a particular case between the child and their carer or their social worker? What about mother,

father, siblings, or other family members? Do these relationships matter? Are they stable? How is their stability in relation to that with their birth parents; and how is the instability of other people affecting them?

Many children do not feel good inside themselves even when the world around them is stable. Stability is not just about the external world but also applies to the internal world. Equally, for some children, the world around them is not secure even if they feel good about themselves. How we create stability and security is a significant issue.

The study by Sinclair and others tried to explore stability and security from a number of different perspectives. It is important to have a comprehensive view of stability. (Sinclair, I and others (2007) *The Pursuit of Permanence. A study of the English child care system*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.)

### The story stem assessment profile

The story stem assessment profile attempts to measure what children feel inside themselves, tapping into the internal model. There are standardised sets of stories, which were first developed in the USA; and a further battery of stories developed in the UK, particularly by Great Ormond Street Hospital in London.

Children are presented with the beginning of a story that activates the attachment system. The story is spoken by an interviewer and played out with dolls and animal figures. Then the child is asked to complete the story: 'Show me and tell me what happens now?'

#### Example story: Picture from school

The little girl is at school, while the rest of the family are at home. The girl makes a picture at school. She says 'This is really good, this picture I made. I like this picture! I'm going to take it home when I go home from school'. She takes it home after school and knocks at the door...

#### Show me and tell me what happens now.

The story presented is a positive one and involves a transition from school to home.

The following examples show how different children responded to this story and what they said.

#### Irene (aged seven)

Irene showed the child immediately climbing on the parents' laps and saying 'Mum! Dad! I got a picture for you', to which the mother responds 'Wow!' with admiration. The child sits 'on her daddy's lap' and watches TV with the parents.

This response to the story shows a smooth appropriate transition. Irene relays a story, showing a sensitive response from her father. Her story provides a sense that the parent admires the picture, reflecting the way that the child had felt about it.

### Jane (aged five and a half)

No-one answers the door. The child comes in and puts the picture on the mum's lap, saying 'There'. No comment from the parents. The girl sits by her sister and they watch TV. Asked directly if the mum or dad said anything about the picture, Jane then showed them saying 'It's a very good picture, well done'.

(No enthusiastic affect, no negative affect, no praise/affection, no parental response until prompted.)

This story demonstrates an ambivalent response. In Jane's story, the child is trying to get her parents to respond but they do not and there is no praise until they are prompted.

### Steven (aged eight)

The dad answers the door and asks 'What's that stupid picture?', then throws it away. The child figure runs away. The dad 'rips up his picture'. When asked, Steven said that no-one else said anything about the picture, or noticed it.

The rest of the family goes on a picnic, leaving the boy behind. They hide from the boy, who looks for them but cannot find them. He goes to his room at the top of the house and throws himself out – he 'cracked his head'.

The dad is very angry with him, calling him 'stupid' and locking him in the room. The boy then calls the police who say 'stupid kid'.

This story shows disorganised and anxious attachments. From Steven's story, one has to wonder what his experiences had been and how it might give a picture of what's going on for this eight-year-old currently.

## York study

Sinclair, I, Baker, C, Lee, J and Gibbs, I (2007) *The Pursuit of Permanence: A study of the English child care system*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

The DCSF funded this publication. BAAF will shortly be disseminating the messages and materials from the study.

The study was carried out by York University and covered 13 councils, which reflect the differing demographic characteristics of the English population. These 13 councils

also differed in their performance ratings. The data was collated in 2004 and precedes the Care Matters reforms.

The research looked at 7,500 placements and:

- what kinds of children are looked after
- children's movements in, out and through the care system – why they came into care, how and why they moved around, and the reasons for them leaving care
- how far children and young people's chances of stability and well-being depend on:
  - their own characteristics and circumstances
  - the placements they are in
  - the social work teams or councils who are responsible for them.

## Retention

Sinclair and others (2007) identified correlations between the length of time a child had been in care and predictions as to how long a child was likely to stay in care. Sinclair's research identified that 20 per cent left care quickly, within the first 20-week period. The study showed that unless a child goes home quickly, there is a progressively higher chance of remaining long-term in care.

## Leaving care curve

Sinclair and others (2007) study identified that:

1. 89 per cent who entered care stayed for at least a week.
2. If they stayed for a week, 90 per cent would stay for 4 weeks.
3. If they stayed for 4 weeks, 89 per cent would stay 12 weeks.
4. If they stayed for 12 weeks, 91 per cent would stay for 26 weeks.
5. If they stayed for 26 weeks, 83 per cent would stay for 52 weeks.

## Leaving care over 20 years

Although there are fewer children in long-term care than there were in the 1980s, the retention rate overall does not appear to have changed, according to Sinclair's study.

## Factors that led to coming into care

The study identified defining factors as to why children came into and left care at particular ages. It revealed a marked difference between those under 11 and those over.

It identified six categories of looked after children:

- young entrants – those coming into care under 11
- adolescent graduates – those coming into care under 11 but still in care as adolescents
- abused adolescents – adolescents coming into care as a result of neglect and abuse
- adolescent entrants – those coming into care as

adolescents for issues such as breakdown in relationships within their family, challenging behaviour, etc

- young people seeking asylum
- disabled young people.

### **Young entrants (under 11 years old)**

The York study identified the following facts about the young entrants coming into care.

- Young entrants make up 43 per cent of the care population.
- The primary need code is abuse (65 per cent of under 11s compared to 35 per cent of over 11s) and neglect.
- They are much more likely than other groups to be in care on a Care Order.
- Very few children who first enter care under 2 years old are still looked after at 16.
- Entering care between the ages of 2 and 4 increases the likelihood of being in care at 16+.
- Children entering care between the ages of 5 and 9 are commonly still looked after when they are aged 10 to 15.
- The leaving care curve produces a 'build up' of a population of children requiring 'care and upbringing'.
- Many of these children are in stable placements but are deeply unhappy.

### **Adolescent graduates**

- Adolescent graduates form 26 per cent of the care population.
- Defined as entering care under 11, they start their pathway as a 'young entrant' but are still in care as an adolescent.
- Their chance of going home in the next year is low – only around 5 per cent of those aged 11 to 15 will leave the system before the year is out.
- They have more difficulties at school and their behaviour poses more difficulties for the adults who are caring or responsible for them.
- Just under a fifth had spent less than six months in their latest placement.
- Just under a fifth had spent five years or more in their latest placement.
- Many of the 16+ young people are not in stable placements.
- Wherever they are, they will be confronted by the care system's need for them to move on.

### **Abused adolescents**

- Abused adolescents make up 9 per cent of the care population.
- The primary need code, their reason for coming into care, is abuse or neglect.
- They are more challenging in their behaviour.
- They are more disaffected at school and doing poorly there.
- Nearly half (49 per cent) had been in their latest

placement for no more than six months.

- Only 18 per cent had been in their placement for more than two years.

Sinclair felt that foster carers and schools were not trained in dealing with the emotional needs of abused adolescents.

### **Adolescent entrants**

- They make up 14 per cent of the care population.
- Their family difficulties were quite pronounced.
- Integration and performance at school was poor.
- They exhibited high levels of challenging behaviour.
- Six out of 10 had been the latest placement last for less than six months.

### **Young people seeking asylum**

- They make up 5 per cent of the care population.
- Almost all are over the age of 11.
- They are far less likely to display challenging behaviour or have difficulties at school.
- 40 per cent had a current or last placement that had lasted for less than six months.
- Only 12 per cent had a placement that lasted for more than two years.

For asylum seeking young people, their immigration status was a significant factor for their well-being and has a major impact on stability and security.

### **Disabled young people**

- They make up 3 per cent of the care population.
- They tend to be older.
- Are looked after for longer.
- They are more likely to be male and show higher levels of challenging behaviour.
- 18 per cent have a latest placement that has lasted for less than six months.
- 38 per cent have a placement that has lasted for two years or more.
- 40 per cent are in residential care.

The disabled young people had a combination of physical and emotional/learning difficulties.

Each group has distinct needs/characteristics and local authorities need a detailed picture of their looked after population so as to plan services accordingly. They need to recognise that different groups will need different services. Services at the present do not reflect the individual child's needs.

## Final reflections

- The care system is not one system.
- Stability and permanence take on a different meaning depending on which of the systems the child or young person is in.
- Unless a child leaves quickly, we need to plan on the basis that we may have responsibility for the child for a relatively long time.
- Stability or instability is 'inside' the child – what they feel about who they are and the circumstances in which they find themselves.
- Stability or instability is 'around' the child – the commitment and sense of belonging of those that care for children, that is, the family or carers.
- Stability or instability is 'around' the family or carers – the systems and resources that plan and make decisions.
- These systems interact – instability in one can create serious instability in the other.

A major finding of the study is the importance of the quality of the relationship between the child and their primary carer.

## Key issues

- Is permanency planning as core to children's services as safeguarding?
- Good leadership is key to service provision.
- Gateways – expert staff and resources are core to placement provision.
- Lawyers, judges and CAFCASS are also key players.

Whether a local authority has high rates of kinship care placements, adoption placements, permanent foster care placements or returns home is dependent on local leadership providing gateways to planning and decision-making, and backing these up with skilled staff who understand the intricacies of different kinds of placement provision.

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