

Good decisions for children in care: Matching in Foster Care

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Foster Care Transforming Lives

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Research project – making good decisions for children in care, or on the edge of care

The matching research is part of a wider research project looking at what contributes to good decisions for children in care, or on the edge of care

- Phase One – matching for children in foster care
- Phase Two – to commence in Spring 2020

Research aims

- To provide learning for inspectors and to sharpen our inspection practice when looking at matching
- To provide information to the sector about what contributes to good decisions when matching children and foster families
- To inform wider policy
- To inform longer-term plans for the 'good decisions' research project

Research activity

- Four visits to local authorities, including one pilot visit
 - 24 case studies
 - Focus group meetings with foster carers, social workers and managers/commissioners
- Two focus group meetings with independent fostering agencies – attended by 21 agencies
- A focus group of birth parents
- Online survey questionnaires
 - children and adults with experience of foster care
 - foster carers
 - fostering service managers
- An expert advisory group has met twice

Matching in foster care

The connecting of children in care with foster families, including:

- How the decisions are made where children who need foster care should live
- How information is shared
- Planning for the move
- Support for the children and carers
- Contextual factors

Why is good matching important?

- It promotes stability for children
- Increased stability promotes positive attachments and is linked with better outcomes for children, including:
 - Behaviour and wellbeing
 - School stability and academic attainment
- If matching is poor, foster carers may experience high levels of stress, feel that they are not fit to foster any child, and take a break from or leave fostering altogether

[Matching in foster care: lessons from research](#) (Ellie Ott, 2017)

Some emerging themes



Relationships



- Birth families and foster carers
- Current and previous carers
- Child's involvement in decision making
- Knowledge of foster carers
- Chemistry – what does it mean?

'One of my children was placed with a lovely foster carer who took the time to build a relationship with the birth family...This built up a good level of trust for my daughter and, in turn, gave her the confidence to build a strong relationship with the carer'

Birth parent

'It makes a huge difference when the social worker knows the child. There is a sort of passion there.'

IFA representative

'It was very important for mum to be on board'

Supervising social worker

Information-sharing

- Up-to-date and transparent information sharing between professionals and foster carers
- Child's prior knowledge of foster family
- Local authority knowledge of child and foster carers
- Carers' knowledge about the child

'The bugbear of most foster carers is that you don't know much about the children before they come.'
Foster Carer

Matching considerations

- Culture, religion and language
- Location
- Age and age gaps
- Brothers and sisters
- Special educational and/or behavioural needs
- Foster carers' birth children

'Our supervising social workers talk to birth children on a regular basis ... It's important as they can make or break a placement. More so than foster carers, if the child is not on board it's not going to work.'

IFA representative

Planning

- Planning for care early on (before child enters care)
- Monitoring cases when short-term turns to long-term - are changing needs considered?
- Choosing carers with a view to future needs as children grow older
- When is staying put considered as an option?

'Most important was the chance for all to visit before moving in.'
Foster carer

Support

- Supervising Social Worker
- Relationships with child's social worker and previous carers
- Access to training and/or therapeutic services
- Access to 'respite' care
- Carers' own support network (for instance extended family)

'Whenever you place a child consideration should be given around support, particularly around adolescence. The need for respite...and if you do that at the very start, it is not sending away, but it is how families function. Going to stay with aunts, uncles and grandparents is what families do.'

Psychologist

More themes

- Sufficiency of carers
 - Recruitment activity/analysis of need
 - Local issues, e.g. cost of housing
 - Changing profile of children in care
- Emergency versus planned
- Long-term/short-term
- Learning lessons
- Local authority/agency carers

Next steps

- Data collection, analysis and report writing
- Feedback and discussion with participating local authorities
- Report publication in early 2020

We're now starting to think about the next phase of the good decisions project

Thank you!



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