



LILAC 

FINAL REPORT FOR
ANGLIA FOSTERING
AGENCY 2014

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An assessment of Anglia Fostering Agency (AFA) took place in November 2014, against the seven LILAC standards which denote a quality participation service, see below for full details. We are pleased to announce that Anglia Fostering Agency has been judged by care-experienced young people to have fully achieved all seven LILAC standards. Well done Anglia Fostering Agency.

ABOUT LILAC

Lilac is a project run by A National Voice. The key purpose of LILAC is to draw upon the experiences and expertise of care-experienced young people to improve the policy and practice of agencies in how they involve and consult with children in care and care leavers. It does this by using a framework of quality standards for involvement which has been developed by care-experienced young people. Young people from care are trained to assess the performance of agencies against the LILAC standards. LILAC involves care-experienced young people:

- ✘ Carrying out assessments of how well services involve and consult with children and young people
- ✘ Delivering training on participation and the LILAC standards

The LILAC standards are based on the well-known *Hear By Right* approach to participation but they have been developed to closely reflect the nature of the care system. They have been developed by care-experienced young people to reflect what is important to them. Each standard is backed by a number of criteria to ensure a robust methodology that focuses on quality over processes.

THE TEAM

Two trained Assessors took part in this Assessment: Ruth and Sarah; both have many years combined Care experience and have lived in a wide range of placements including foster care, residential care, kinship placements, supported lodgings and independence. They have been trained by LILAC to deliver training and to carry out assessments. The 3-day accredited training focused on building skills such as presentation skills, team work, listening and communication skills, carrying out interviews, delivering training, and being professional and non-discriminatory.

LILAC Assessors act as outstanding role-models for other young people in care, having achieved a variety of accomplishments including owning their own home, being married, having children, being in paid employment, doing an apprenticeship and succeeding in both further and higher

education. Their main motivation behind being involved in the project is to improve the lives of looked-after children and give children and young people in care a voice.

THE ASSESSMENT

This Assessment is based on:

Policies and procedures submitted by AFA

Two days spent 'on-site' conducting group interviews with 8 young people, 3 Placement Managers (supervising social work staff), 4 Foster Carers, and 2 Directors of AFA.

Altogether more than a third of children over 10 and their foster carers were consulted in questionnaires and interviews thanks to a high rate of participation. A very high proportion of staff also took part in the LILAC process.

HIGHLIGHTS

We could see that AFA takes the views of young people very seriously and there many positive findings in our assessment.

The LILAC assessors were impressed by how AFA staff, foster carers and young people were involved in the running and shaping of the agency.

Messages from LILAC Assessors

"It was a pleasure meeting with the Directors, there was a genuine attitude in making the children and young people feel supported and contribute in services".

"It is evident that AFA is leading by example, there is clearly some good evidence of good work involving children and young people from care".

STANDARD 1: SHARED VALUES

ACHIEVED

The Local Authority or agency adopts shared values that enable children and young people to be actively involved in services that directly affect them, including honesty about what can and cannot be changed and any limitations due to the organisation's responsibilities.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

Anglia Fostering Agency has developed a broad range of policies and procedures to help implement effective participation.

There are two children's guides, one for younger children and one for older children, which were developed with the guidance of the young people who are looked after by AFA. LILAC assessors really liked the guides and could see that they were designed in a child friendly manner, they had lots of information about being in care, about the agency and useful information on who to contact in external organisations.

LILAC could see evidence that AFA tries really hard to involve the young people as much as possible. They embed what they say in their Mission Statement: "Quality Care with Integrity and Respect". "We want to care for children. Respect is for everyone, young people, foster carers, Local Authority and families of the children" said one of the Directors.

88% of children and young people returning their questionnaires said that they felt involved and listened to by AFA. In the live interviews all children agreed with this and there was a clear passion displayed by the young people interviewed.

In addition, 75% of children and young people returning their questionnaires said they have been given information on how they can give their views on changes needed in AFA.

There is also a dedicated children and young people's AFA website www.afakids.co.uk, this website has lots of blogs on it, from book and film reviews, to short films created by children and young people.

When interviewing the children and young people it was evident that they were satisfied that if things cannot be changed they were given adequate reasons why not.

The agency has also funded the production of a book entitled "Pilchard's New Family" by Leon Maclean and Paul Harris which all foster carers have a copy of and which assists them in providing information to and supporting children in their care. The foster carers and children that were interviewed found this book to be really useful.

AFA also runs a 'Children Who Foster' group (birth children) which acts as support for them but also seeks to include them in further development and understanding of their needs.

Senior managers and elected members adopt a style of leadership that champions and promotes the involvement of children and young people at all levels of the Local Authority or agency. They demonstrate the need to work in partnership with children and young people.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

60% of young people returning questionnaires said that they know who the Directors were. Senior Managers within the organisation are easily approachable for children and young people; young people interviewed felt they could talk to staff members easily and felt comfortable in doing so. All children and young people interviewed were also able to name senior managers and staff in the organisation, and how they would get in touch with them.

75% of staff returning questionnaires felt that Senior Managers and the agency Directors, were approachable for children and young people.

LILAC Assessors were really impressed with how much the senior management involve themselves directly with the children and young people and felt that the 'Leaders' are leading by example and the staff are echoing their attitudes and beliefs.

In our interviews with Foster Carers, they agreed that agency Directors are easily approachable by them and by the children and young people who are looked after.

It was evident that the management team visits the children and young people on a regular basis. When there is a new child who has been placed into care the management will always meet with them and welcome them. This was confirmed by all young people who were interviewed.

LILAC Good Practice Proposals:

AFA should upload photos of the Directors/Placement Managers to the children's website and also include them in the children's guides.

Structures are in place to ensure that children and young people are involved in the planning and evaluation of services and that these structures are flexible. They do not rely on the involvement of a small articulate group of children and young people, but take into account different abilities, experiences and skills.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

There is a dedicated children's consultation group running within the organisation. This seeks to gain the experience and views of looked after children and birth children in order to consider how best to provide information to them and their peers, alongside creating more meaningful ways of gaining their views and ideas.

AFA have developed a 'Children or Young Peoples' feedback leaflet and a 'Children who Foster' feedback form to gain views from the young people about how things are in the placement and this is an opportunity for both looked after children and birth children to give their views/feedback about anything that AFA has to offer.

There are regular consultation events held by AFA for the young people, and young people are at the core of the planning and running of the event with support from staff and management. This was evident in our interviews with the children and young people and foster carers.

The children's consultation group have helped design leaflets that relate to bullying which are written for two age groups and include where they can get support and help if needed.

It was clear that AFA has developed a range of methods in consultation with children and young people. Children and young people stated they were sent leaflets, letters, questionnaires and newsletters about getting their voices heard.

All the children and young people who were interviewed confirmed that they participate in activities and events held by AFA, and furthermore their views were taken seriously if they wanted to make changes.

78% of foster carers answering the questionnaires stated that they knew about the children's consultation group. Furthermore, 60% said that they had encouraged or supported their children and young people to get involved with it. All foster carers who were interviewed also confirmed that they knew about the participation service.

Anglia Fostering Agency has also developed a dedicated children and young people's website. Children and young people were consulted and have been directly involved in developing their own website.

Staff are expected to support and contribute to practice and policy on the active involvement of children and young people in services that affect them.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

When staff members were interviewed they stated that they had received training by attending conferences delivered by care leavers, which proved very useful, around the importance of effective participation.

One of the staff members is from a care background and explained that they regularly offer advice and support to colleagues and foster carers around the importance of involving and listening to children and young people and can share their personal experiences when necessary. This member of staff is also responsible for the training of foster carers.

In the interviews with foster carers 90% confirmed that they received training from AFA on participation. The 'Skills to Foster' preparation course includes a care experienced young person as a facilitator. In our interviews with foster carers one carer stated "Skills to foster course has a care experienced adult who is part of the delivery of the course and it was very effective to listen from a care leavers point of view of how fostering had an impact on his life."

In addition, 78% of foster carers answering the questionnaires confirmed that looked after children are involved in their annual reviews/appraisals.

When interviewing staff it was evident that children and young people are also involved in the appraisals for staff which is done informally. This was also evident in our interviews with children and young people.

LILAC Good Practice Proposals:

Encourage young people to engage with national organisations such as A National Voice, The Who Cares Trust, National Care Advisory Service, and take up training opportunities offered nationally for young people.

Children and young people should be involved in the recruitment and selection of all staff and carers who will work with them or be responsible for them.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

The Foster Panel central list includes a wide range of experience. The Independent Chair and Vice Chairs are experienced professionals. There are currently three members who are care experienced, two independent Foster Carers and a Health Visitor as well as experienced Social Workers.

Although AFA does not have children and young people who are directly involved in the formal interviews, as part of the AFA Consultation groups, children and young people have indirectly participated in the types of questions which are used in interviews for staff and also participate in the person specification attributes and their ideas of the ideal Social Worker.

There is no policy for involving children and young people in the recruitment and selection process for staff or Foster Carers.

Only 33% of foster carers answering the questionnaire stated that children and young people were involved in their recruitment and selection.

LILAC Good Practice Proposals:

As part of the AFA consultation group sessions, AFA should assist children and young people in recognising the ideal candidates for foster carers and what makes a good foster carer.

Develop strategies to make sure that the young people's views continue to influence the decision making and where there is a disagreement they receive adequate feedback.

Children and young people should also be involved in short listing applicants and have an equal say in the decision making.

Children and young people should feel involved in the decision making that affects their lives and all decisions about them should be fully explained. All decision making, planning and review processes should be easily understood.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

Care Planning

Anglia Fostering Agency has a Participation Policy of full involvement of children and young people in Care Planning and Reviews.

AFA achieved this standard due to the largely positive views of children and young people. 89% said AFA had helped them to understand why they were in care. The vast majority of children and young people who answered the questionnaire felt that they knew why they were in Care (85%).

Further questionnaire responses from children and young people also showed that 84% knew what their Care Plan was, 50% said that they had helped to write/agree it, and 78% said that they felt it reflected their wishes and feelings.

65% of children and young people said that they had a choice in the placement they wanted to be in. Furthermore, 68% of Foster Carers answering the questionnaires felt that the children and young people had been given a say in their placements.

70% of children and young people also stated that they had a choice in which school they wanted to be in.

During the live interviews all children and young people knew why they were in care and felt it reflected their wishes and feelings. It was also clear from questionnaires that staff have also advocated and championed on their behalf in cases where they wanted the Local Authority to make certain changes in their care plans. There are also systems in place for children and young people to give feedback when on the rare occasions placements end or break down.

Reviews

70% of children and young people answering the questionnaires stated that they attend their reviews. A further 75% said they were able to express themselves in the reviews. 75% of children and young people said they were listened to at their reviews.

During our live interviews there were examples of how young people were supported and encouraged by AFA staff to attend their reviews. The majority of the children and young people interviewed were given choices of where their reviews are held and gave them the option of chairing their own reviews.

LILAC Good Practice Proposals:

Create more awareness amongst children and young people about the importance of attending their reviews and how this can have a positive impact on their wishes and feelings. Also ensure that they have a choice of where their reviews are held and include this in the leaflets, posters and guides.

STANDARD 7: COMPLAINTS & ADVOCACY

ACHIEVED

Children and young people should know what to do if they are not happy with the way they are being treated and feel that their complaint will be listened to and treated seriously. Children and young people should have access to an advocate if they wish and the Authority or agency should promote the advocacy service. They should receive feedback on the process and outcome of their complaint and support in coming to terms with the decision.

How Anglia Fostering Agency achieved the LILAC Standard

Complaints

Anglia Fostering Agency has a Complaints Policy that is accessible to the children and young people placed with the agency and to the agency Foster Carers. This is placed in the Children's Guides and Foster Carers handbook, and is accessible on the kids' website.

Anglia Fostering Agency's 'Statement of Purpose April 2011' states "AFA has a full complaints and representation service in place... AFA undertakes to manage complaints and representations quickly and efficiently and seeks to resolve such issues within 7 days where formal process is instigated". The Children's Guides have contact details that include the Local Authority Social Worker, IRO, Anglia Fostering Agency with e-mail address, NYAS, Children's Rights Office, the e-mail contact for the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families and Ofsted.

78% of children and young people returning their questionnaires said they knew how to make a complaint if they were unhappy during a placement with Anglia Fostering Agency. A further 78% of children and young people said they would feel safe about making a complaint if they needed to.

During our live interviews with children and young people all knew how to make a complaint and how the complaints process works. There were a few examples of complaints made about Local Authority Social Workers where young people were supported by AFA staff and Foster Carers.

Advocacy

Advocacy services are the responsibility of the commissioning Local Authority; however, it shows good practice that they are also provided by the agency. Agency Directors indicated that Advocacy services are used if it becomes necessary. Links to NYAS (www.nyas.net) Childline (www.childline.org.uk) and NSPCC (www.nspcc.org.uk) are all provided on the Young People's page on the website.

AFA have an advocacy policy which states 'The agency will identify from a range of sources, an independent advocate who is felt to best meet the circumstances of the person who requires an advocacy service. The agency undertakes to engage advocates with relevant experience or qualifications who can provide objective and sensitive support. The agency will provide an independent advocate without cost to those who require the service, for a period of time that is mutually agreed and regularly reviewed'.

56% of children and young people returning their questionnaires said that they know what an Advocate does and a further 50% said they knew how to contact one. During our live interviews it was clear that the older children and young people knew Advocates as independent visitors and knew how to access one if needed. They were also promoted via Foster Carers and staff at AFA.

LILAC Good Practice Proposals:

Get young people involved in a campaign to raise awareness of what an advocate does, e.g. use peer mentors, and make a DVD. This should perhaps be targeted at the 8-14 year age group, as LILAC has found that younger children are less likely to understand Advocacy.

Invite an Advocacy service to give a workshop/training on Advocacy, separating the Foster Carers from the children and young people when delivering it. This should preferably include a Care experienced young person in its delivery

Information on Complaints and Advocacy should be made available in languages that children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds can understand.

THANK YOU FROM LILAC AND A NATIONAL VOICE

Everyone involved in the project would like to thank Anglia Fostering Agency for commissioning our services. Thank you for making us feel so welcome and for supporting the project.

We have included some LILAC good practice proposals to help you to further improve the services you provide to children and young people. Congratulations on fully meeting all seven LILAC standards. We here at LILAC will be happy to offer future support in any way we can.

Leading Improvements for Looked After Children



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