

Six monthly update on some of the key issues for the Independent Review Service

Profile of LAC of Nottinghamshire

Since January this year there has been a noted decrease in the number of looked after children, from 873 to 788 in September. The rate per 10,000 continues to remain lower than the England average and that of our statistical neighbours, which were 60 and 57.8% (2014-15) respectively. Given this decrease in numbers, although there is no indication that our thresholds have altered, this will be kept under review by our operational colleagues and the IRO service managers. It should be noted that during this quarter 31% of those no longer being looked after were young people reaching the age of 18 and progressing onto independent living.

During the past 6 months between April and September 2016 IROs have chaired 1,061 LAC reviews. The percentage of children who had their looked after reviews held as set out in statutory timescale within this period is 98.2%.

Areas for Development 2016-17 as identified in the Annual Report 2015-2016

Implementation of child friendly reports from reviews

As detailed in the Annual Report 2015-16 work had been undertaken in consultation with the Nottinghamshire children in care council on producing child friendly reports from reviews 'my LAC review report'. This document is written specifically for the child and is in addition to the standard minutes. The report is considerably shorter and simplified; focusing on what the care plan is, what has gone well since the last review, how they are feeling and what they want to achieve going forward and actions required. This approach was piloted by a group of five IROs and feedback was sought from the young people who received the child friendly minutes and their comments were positive; 'brilliant' - 'good' - 'fair' and the 'detail was better than they thought'.

Given the success of this pilot child friendly minutes have been offered to children and young people aged 9 upwards from 1st September 2016 and if they do not want their own minutes this will be recorded in the Chair's report.

Further development of the 'person centred approach'

During the year, particular focus has been given to sharing practice tools and experience in a 'person centred approach' within the East Midlands regional IRO network. The aim of person centred reviews is to ensure the child is at the centre of discussions and actions. This will identify what people like and admire about the child, what is important to them and what help and support they believe they need.

Person centred planning can be particularly successful in engaging teenagers and disabled young people in reviews.

Three IROs met within the region to consider what tools could be used in respect of undertaking a person centred approach within the review meetings. The following was identified as a means of creating a more embedded process around engagement, with the main focus being on preparation;

It was acknowledged that each meeting needs to centre on the child's needs and help them to engage.

From this meeting an action plan was devised and shared with the nine local authorities within the region to enhance the use of a person centred approach in reviews. This includes a "person centred pack" which involves engagement tools that can be used with the children and young people. The action plan will be reviewed at the next Regional Managers meeting on 23rd January 2017.

Regional Workshops during this 6 month period.

Due to the success of regional training workshops for IROs during 2015, workshops have continued to be held quarterly throughout this year, with topics including the emotional wellbeing of looked after children; immigration and pathway planning and learning from serious case reviews and implications for permanence. The IROs within the region value the time to reflect their experiences and practice in relation to the topics set. These workshops continue to be well presented and feedback about the visiting speakers had been very positive.

Overall

Overall it is noted the caseloads of the IROs has remained stable over this past year and this has enabled them to be increasingly proactive including visiting some children and young people between reviews. It is also positive that the service is now fully staffed with permanent workers and as a group the IROs are becoming more involved in contributing to the development of the service.

The service continues to make a positive contribution towards good outcomes for children looked after in Nottinghamshire. Anecdotally the positive feedback from young people, parents and carers has continued. We will be repeating surveys collecting views systematically in January 17 and will be able to provide further details in the end of year report.