

Staying Put Policy

1. Introduction

The Staying Put Project will aim to build on and improve the existing arrangements for young people in foster care to remain with their carers after the age of 18.

The aim is for young people to remain with their former foster carers until they reach 21 years of age (or for a substantial period beyond their 18th birthday HC current criteria to remain in supported lodgings with former foster carers after the age of 18 required a young person to be engaged in, or actively seeking to be engaged in ETE, or exempt from doing so as a consequence of ill health. Young people Staying Put will also meet this criteria. This is conducive to the stability of the placement, and consistent with wanting the young person to achieve economic well-being by offering the young person continuity of support to improve their life chances.

2. Aims

The key aims are:

- Enable young people to build on and nurture their attachments to their carers, so that they can move to independence at their own pace and be supported to make the transition to adulthood in a more gradual way just like the other young people who can rely on their own families for this support;
- Provide the stability and support necessary for young people to achieve in education, training and employment; and
- Give weight to young people's views about the timing of moves to greater independence from their final care placement.

3. Objectives

The Staying Put Project meets objectives within the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 to improve the life chances of young people in and leaving local authority care. The guidance of Children (Leaving Care) Act recommends converting foster placements at 18 into supported lodgings. The Staying Put arrangement promotes the Acts main aims to young people, which are:

- To delay young people's discharge from care until they are ready and prepared;
- To improve the assessment, preparation and planning for leaving care;
- To provide better personal support for young people after leaving care;
- To improve the financial arrangements for care leavers.

This project also fits within the Public Service Agreement 2 National Indicators 147 and 148, which identify whether:

- The young person is living in suitable accommodation;
- The young person is in Education Training or Employment.

Staying Put supports HC's Children and Young People's Plan and in particular gives young people who are in stable, supportive placements the opportunity to pursue education, training and employment in order to participate both socially and economically as citizens, without the disruption of having to move into 'independence' during this critical period of their lives.

Both The Green Paper "Care Matters - Transforming the Lives of Children in Care" and the White Paper "Care Matters - Time for Change" refer to the importance for young people of 'entering adult life at the right time'. To remain with foster carers beyond 18 is identified as an area for development.

Many young people who have been looked after by the local authority experience a compressed transition from childhood to adulthood (Professor Mike Stein - University of York), and the option to Stay Put seeks to protract and normalise the young person's experience of moving into adulthood. Staying Put fits within HC's aspiration to be a good corporate parent to all young people to whom it has acted as a substitute family.

The project also provides a framework to allow care leavers at university to return to their former carers during vacation time, and young people who commence basic training with the armed services to return to their carers during breaks, reflecting the ongoing support which would be available to young people living in supportive families.

Staying Put can also contribute to 'decreasing' the role of the Personal Adviser with these young people, by taking into account the relationship and support provided by the former foster carer to the young person, enabling the Personal Adviser to work with other Care Leavers who may be living independently with less support and in more disadvantaged circumstances.

Staying Put will offer carers improved training opportunities and prepare them to support teenagers into adulthood in a planned and individual way. The training offered will complement the Induction Standards for Children's Workforce training requirements for foster carers. The investment and commitment of the foster carers is acknowledged through better levels of remuneration and support, increasing the retention of foster carers who find their task rewarding and fulfilling.

The Staying Put Project reflects the Government's determination to improve the experiences of children in care, to challenge the poor outcomes historically experienced by young people in care, and to reduce the gap between the quality of life of young people in the care of the local authority and those raised in supportive families.

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