



# The North West Concurrent Planning Service

A guide for Local Authorities

November 2015





## Introduction

Many children who cannot live with their birth parents are adopted and become part of a new family who give them the love and security which are crucial to their future happiness and development. However, traditional adoption can take a long time and usually means that a child suffers the disruption of moving from a foster family to their adoptive family just at the time when they need stability and permanence.

The Government wants to see more children being adopted by loving families with less delay. Section 22 of the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on the local authority to consider placing a child with a foster parent who has been approved as a prospective adopter where a placement with the family is not appropriate.

Concurrent Planning is a tried and tested way of doing this, providing the parents with the opportunity to show that they can care for their child in the future, whilst also providing babies and young children with a potentially permanent family placement and avoiding the need for children to move between carers. This means that adults take the risk of uncertainty and change - not babies and young children. The NW Concurrent Planning Service is now contracted with 13 local authorities in the North West to provide this service.

## Concurrent Planning

In Concurrent Planning, a child who cannot live with their birth parents is looked after by carers who are dually approved as **both** foster carers and adopters whilst their future is decided by the court. The birth family has regular contact with their child and is given the opportunity to show that they can care for the child in the future. The concurrent carers agree to support the plan to return the child to the birth family and take the child to supervised contact sessions on a frequent basis. If the courts decide that the birth family has shown that they are capable of meeting the child's needs, the concurrent carers have the satisfaction of knowing that they have given the child love and security when they most needed it. However, if the Court decides that the plan to return the child has not been successful, as is often the case, the carers go on to adopt the child.

## What are the benefits for the children?

Concurrent Planning works best for children if there is a possibility that the child may return to the care of their parents, but where the likelihood is that, based on previous information about the birth family, the child will require a permanent placement with adoptive carers. In Concurrent Planning the child does not have to move from one carer to another and can settle into one loving and secure family. Child development research consistently shows that the attachments which children form early in their lives are crucial to their future development and that disrupting these attachments, particularly early in life, should be avoided wherever possible.





## What are the benefits for parents?

Parents have the opportunity to show that they can care for their children by attending high quality supervised contact sessions with their child which contribute to their overall assessment. If their child does go on to be adopted they will also have had the opportunity to get to know the future carers. Parents tell us that this is enormously important for them and that they very much value knowing the carers and knowing that their child will grow up with real knowledge and information about them.

## What are the benefits for carers?

Carers who go on to adopt get to know and love their children from a very young age and help them through the time in their life when they are most vulnerable which is not possible adoption. They get to know the parents of the child from taking the child to contact which can form the basis for meaningful contact in the future and be an important source of information for the child in later life.

## What kind of carers are we looking for?

Concurrent carers can be couples or single carers and from any background, however they need to be:

- Able to support the return of a child to their birth family.
- Loving, emotionally resourceful and at all times able to put the needs of very young children first.
- Able to respect and work with birth families and prepared to support contact between children and their birth families
- Prepared to deal with uncertainty
- Have their own strong support networks through family and friends

## What support is available for carers?

- **Specialist preparation, assessment and ongoing training** are provided to all prospective carers.
- **Intensive and high quality support** from a Concurrent Planning Social Worker including 24 hour telephone support and advice.
- **Support from other carers** at a monthly support group and Stay and Pay sessions
- **Financial support** - During the fostering phase, concurrent carers will receive a fostering allowance. One carer is required to look after the child on a full-time basis during the fostering phase.

## What are the referral criteria for this service?

Children should be:

- Under the age of 4 and pre-school
- Be or about to be the subject of an Interim Care Order
- Have negative viability assessments on any potential extended family carers
- Rehabilitation of the child to birth parents is being considered but the likelihood is that an adoptive placement will be needed.
- The parents are able to cooperate with the demands of a concurrent placement.

An early discussion of potential referrals to the service is helpful in agreeing whether concurrent planning is appropriate and so that potential carers can be identified.

## Fostering for Adoption

Concurrent Carers are trained to understand and deal with uncertainty about the outcome for the child they care for. All concurrent carers have been prepared for the possibility of a child returning home. They are therefore well placed to act as carers in Fostering for Adoption situations where the only plan for the child is for adoption but the Court has yet to agree to this.

## The delivery partnership

Voluntary Adoption Agencies Caritas Care and Adoption Matters have formed a partnership to deliver the Concurrent Planning service. Both organisations are proudly rated as '**Outstanding**' by Ofsted and registered adoption agencies. Together they have a track record of delivering high quality permanency services to local authorities across the north west of England.

Caritas Care is also a registered Independent Fostering Agency with an Ofsted rating '**Outstanding**'.

We are a team who are passionate about concurrent planning and the outcomes that achieves for the child, carers and birth parents. Our social workers all have a background in children and families social work, fostering and adoption.



Fostering service

**Further information about the service can be obtained from Cathy Sowden, Service Manager on Tel: 0161 743 3682 or 07966 719 802 or by email: [cathysowden@caritascare.org.uk](mailto:cathysowden@caritascare.org.uk)**

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