



The Concurrent Planning Service

A guide for Local Authorities

January 2018



EARLY PERMANENCE AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCURRENT PLANNING SERVICE

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 placed a duty on the local authority to consider placing a child with a foster parent who has also 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. Caritas Care and Adoption Matters (both voluntary adoption agencies, rated as Outstanding by Ofsted) have a well established service which began in April 2014 to provide concurrent planning placements, initially in the north west and expanding into the north Midlands and Yorkshire.

Concurrent Planning

In Concurrent Planning, a child who cannot live with their birth parents is looked after by carers who are 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 needed it. However, if the Court decides that the plan to return the child is not safe and appropriate, as is often the case, the foster 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 attachment bonds 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 contributes 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 have repeatedly told us that this relationship is enormously reassuring for them. They value knowing their child's adoptive parents and also feel confident 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 care for them through the time in their life when they are most vulnerable which is not always possible with traditional adoption. They get to know the parents of the child from taking the child to contact sessions 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 form a positive relationship with birth family and support a child's return to their care where appropriate.
- 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 are 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, training and assessment are provided to all prospective carers.

- **Intensive and high quality support** from a Concurrent Planning Social Worker and from the wider team including post approval training and support groups
- **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. Specialist preparation, training and assessment are provided to all prospective carers.
- Intensive and high quality support from a Concurrent Planning Social Worker and from the wider team including 24 hour telephone support, post approval training and support groups
- Support from other carers at the monthly support group and stay and play 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:

- Children aged under 4 years old
- Be or about to be the subject of an Interim Care Order
- Viability assessments indicate that there are no extended family members available
- Rehabilitation of the child to birth parents is being considered but the likelihood is that an adoptive placement will be needed.

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.



Contact

Contact is a fundamental part of Concurrent Planning and is the forum through which carers and parents build a relationship. The Concurrent Planning Service offers the supervision of contact sessions in their own venues or at a local authority venue for an additional fee. Parents are given constructive feedback by the supervisor after every session and written reports are sent to the child's social worker.

The delivery partnership

Caritas Care and Adoption Matters have formed a partnership to deliver these services. Both are registered adoption agencies, Caritas Care is a registered Independent Fostering Agency and together they have a longstanding track record of delivering high quality permanency services to local authorities across the north west of England and beyond.

Further information about the service can be obtained at www.nwconcurrentplanning.org.uk or for specific queries or referrals/case discussions by email at info@nwconcurrentplanning.org.uk or by telephone on 0161 743 3682.

