

# Trainer's notes

## Unit No. 2 Pre-care and post-care experiences

### Unit objectives

- To learn about the experiences of children before they enter the looked after system
- To learn about outcomes for looked after children
- To consider what factors affect the outcomes for looked after children

### Outline of Unit

Presentation and large group discussion

### Resources required to deliver unit

PowerPoint Slides

Flipchart & pens

### Resources required to support this unit

Extract from article on impact of care

### Introduction to trainer

The purpose of this very brief unit is to expand on the introductory unit by highlighting the difficult life experiences of many children before they enter the looked after system and the poor life outcomes experienced by many of them. The structure of the unit is designed to make participants aware that negative outcomes are not necessarily linked to a child's experience of care. Indeed, in many cases the care experience will have prevented worse outcomes, and may have helped secure better outcomes than might have been possible if no action had been taken. Many young people leave the looked after system as responsible, productive and happy young people and have benefited from their time being looked after. Unfortunately, others continue to tell us that issues linked to difficulties in their family life were made worse by their time in care. What can be done to improve outcomes for the whole population of looked after children as well as strategies for working with individual children will be explored in later units. This unit highlights the fact that any attempt at understanding poor outcomes for looked after children must take into account their adverse experiences prior to becoming looked after. Some of these themes will be revisited in the later units "Transitions and Trajectories" and "Leaving Care Well

## **Presentation: Life experiences of looked after children (20 minutes)**

Create a presentation using the PowerPoint slides. Stop after slide number 4 and ask participants what they think causes these poor outcomes for so many looked after children. Record their suggestions on a flip chart. Some participants may be quite clear that children's experience before they enter the looked after system is a strong contributory factor, others may focus more strongly on the time when a child is looked after. Whatever the balance of the group's views, it is important to acknowledge that the public perception is that these outcomes are **caused** by the experience of being looked after. This view is shared by many professionals and can lead to strenuous attempts to keep children with their own families beyond the point that is appropriate. Point out that currently the group of children who have the worst educational outcomes (achievement and attainment) are those looked after at home.

Continue your presentation by focusing on the experiences that children have had prior to coming into care. Emphasise throughout that all looked after children have different and individual early experiences and life outcomes. The statistics you are presenting are helpful to understand patterns but each child should be understood within their own history, strengths and aspirations. The number of very young children becoming looked after is increasing and most children who enter the system do so as a result of family difficulties rather than their own behaviour. Remind participants that a child may have a very brief experience of being looked after or spend most of their childhood being cared for away from their birth family. In both cases they could be included in outcome statistics but the amount of influence that the care experience would have on the child's future is very different. Many care leavers have not spent a substantial part of their childhood and adolescence being looked after and it can be very difficult to completely change entrenched patterns of behaviour and attitudes. Some children who are looked after away from home also experience several attempts to return them to their families which can increase the instability and insecurity they have to deal with. All these factors impinge on the long term outcomes for looked after children. Use the quotation from the psychologist to highlight this.

Finish your presentation by acknowledging that the system itself can put barriers in the way of children's achievement and explain that these will be addressed more fully in later units. Point out, however, that most of the problems children experience while they are looked after are as a result of systemic failure rather than lack of care or concern from individual adults. On the whole many young people speak very warmly and appreciatively of their relationships with carers. Use the extract from the article by Donald Forrester to emphasise that the message of this unit is confirmed through what research is available.