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| **Unit No. 10** | ***The looked after children’s world*** |
| **Unit objectives**   * To highlight the impact of their home environment on looked after children’s capacity to participate fully in school activities. * To consider the range and impact of different care settings. | |
| **Outline of Unit**   * Introductory small group activity * Paired activity: Changing Lives * Large group activity: Fact and Fiction * Large group activity: Life in a residential unit * Video clip | |
| **Resources required to deliver unit**   * Handouts: *Kieran’s cards; Kieran’s routine* * Statement cards * Flip chart paper * Video Clips; Zachari & Who Cares Scotland, *Extracts from Learning With Care Video (LWC 1 & 2)* | |
| **Resources required to support this unit**   * The CELCIS website – [www.celcis.org.uk](http://www.celcis.org.uk) * The Scottish Social Services Council website – [www.sssc.uk.com](http://www.sssc.uk.com) * BLOG - [www.owntwofeet.wordpress.com](http://www.owntwofeet.wordpress.com) | |
| **Introduction to trainer**  This unit is specifically for education staff (i.e. teachers, educational psychologists, classroom assistants, etc.) and is to help them to understand something of the experience of looked after children and how this might affect their learning and behaviour in school. Although it discusses all looked after children most of the unit is concerned with children looked after away from home as there are commonalities in the experience of children who are looked after in foster, residential and kinship care placements that can be explored. Emphasise that for children who are looked after at home education staff must be aware that their family experiences and home background are diverse. It is also important to emphasise that the care trajectory for many looked after children will include experiences of a variety of care settings (both at home and away from home). In supporting these children’s education, education staff should respond to every child’s individual circumstances. | |

**Introductory Activity**

In small groups ask the participants to discuss and list what qualities and attributes they most like to see in the children they work with. When they have generated a list ask them to identify another list describing the factors in the child’s home environment that they believe are most likely to create or maintain such qualities. Return to the large group and share both lists.

Participants are most likely to value qualities and attributes such as respect, politeness, a capacity to listen, attentiveness, concentration, interest, hard work, punctuality, organisational skills, warmth, mutuality, appropriate fun, good humour, concern for others and high aspirations.

They are likely to recognise that home factors that support such qualities include good early experiences, positive adult-child relationships, strong values in the home, safety and security, interest in learning and education, available adults and clear boundaries.

Lead a discussion that focuses on the lack of most of these experiences for many looked after children. Those who are looked after at home may be still struggling on a daily basis with chaotic lifestyles and getting to school at all may be an extraordinary achievement. Remind participants of the importance of secure attachments for learning and the adverse impact of trauma on children’s capacity to manage school. Even those children who are now looked after away from home are often deal with the legacy of traumatic events or failed attachments. They may also continue to worry about their parents or siblings at home. In addition being cared for away from your own family is in itself disturbing and difficult no matter how adverse the home situation may have been or how loving and thoughtful new carers are.

**Paired activity: Changing lives**

Distribute blank cards to all participants and give the following instructions:

1) Write down in detail your morning routine from the moment you get up until the time you leave the house for the day. Include for example such detail as what you eat and who else will be around you.

2) Exchange cards with another member of the group and consider what it would be like to follow this new routine.

Ask for feedback on some of the feelings evoked by trying to adhere to someone else’s routines. This activity is designed to reinforce some of the learning provided by earlier activities in the unit ***Transitions and Trajectories*** which deal with change and managing new situations. It is important to emphasise that when children become looked after away from home, they leave behind everything that is familiar: home, people, routines (or lack of routines), the neighbourhood etc. The previous activity will have shown the impact of such change on emotional and physical functioning but change also impacts on a child’s sense of self-identity. The routines and rhythms of where we live reinforce our feeling of belonging, of predictability and provide a secure base from which to operate. The absence of a secure base, or a changing base, means that children often lack these essential supports.

Moving to a foster, kinship, or residential placement may provide a child with a safer environment than they were living in previously, or a more stimulating and ordered setting, but adjusting to new routines, becoming the youngest in a household when you have been the oldest, becoming the only boy, the only black child, sharing a room with someone strange all have an impact on a young person’s sense of self.

In residential units, routines and expectations are likely to be set out so that a child knows what is happening. Sometimes, however, the mix of troubled children means that it is hard for staff to maintain routines. In foster placements the routines are not usually formalised adding to the sense of discomfort about what is expected of the children.

Schools can help in a number of ways when a child moves home, particularly if the child remains in the same school, by ensuring that information is made available to new carers about timetables, equipment, clothing etc. If a child has to move school, it is important to provide clarity about school routines, expectations and any buddy systems so that the child entering the school does not always have to ask questions

**Key messages**

* Changes in home base create feelings of unease and discomfort.
* Having to interpret unfamiliar behaviour and signals can be demanding and anxiety provoking.
* Moves can undermine a child’s or young person’s sense of identity causing them to revert to the behaviour of a younger child

**Large group activity: Fact and fiction**

**Trainer’s notes**

This activity is intended to provide participants with a better understanding of the range of home environments in which looked after children live. Foster care and residential units have changed dramatically in the last decade and some misconceptions exist about the size and regimes of children’s residential units in particular. The increased demands on foster carers to care for very difficult children and professional expectations about managing contact or report writing challenge the myth of a foster carer as a "kindly body" who loves children. The development of National Care Standards for foster and residential care, the introduction of fee paid schemes, competency based carer assessments, and residential workers and foster carers undertaking SVQ and other training, may not be familiar to staff working in education. They may also be unaware that residential workers are required to be registered with the [Scottish Social Services Council](http://www.sssc.uk.com/) (SSSC) and have a minimum qualification.

Education staff may not be up to date with the increased focus on kinship care and the fact that these carers are now more open to scrutiny but also entitled to more material support and training. Education staff will, however, be able to identify with the whole area of scrutiny and inspection, registration, having to undertake risk assessments and balancing the needs of one child against those of the group. Other areas of common interest and concern will be feeling vulnerable about possible allegations or complaints and a perception that few sanctions are available in order to moderate children’s behaviour.

Reference should also be made to the fact that in some authorities the average age of foster carers is forty plus, often with grown up children of their own, which means that it is some years since carers and their children were themselves at school, and they may not be familiar with current systems or curricula. Many children who are in kinship care are being looked after by grandparents who will also have had different and sometimes difficult educational experiences.

Participants should also be reminded that abuse can and does occur in foster, kinship and residential placements, and that concerns about a child’s health, welfare and safety should always be passed on in line with existing child protection procedures.

Look at / download the Fact or Fiction statement sheet. You should select and write some of the statements on cards; you may wish to add some of your own statements. The statements should be based on a range of issues to do with parents, foster, kinship and residential carers.

Ask participants to pick a card and say whether they think the statement is true or false.

Trainers should be prepared to respond and use the opportunity to talk about the local situation, including information about local resources e.g. number of foster carers, residential units, local guidelines etc.

**Key messages**

* The wide range of people who can be considered as prospective foster carers, including those who have overcome some difficulties in their own lives.
* The existence of rigorous recruitment, assessment/selection processes for both foster carers and residential workers.
* Kinship carers often provide valuable care for children to maintain their family connections and identity, but they may not receive sufficient support in this task.
* The challenge of providing individualised, nurturing care to children in settings which have to meet health and safety and other external inspection standards.
* The wide range of challenging behaviours and complex situations that foster, kinship and residential carers are expected to deal with.
* Parents of children looked after at home do not always get appropriate support and help to improve their own and their children’s lives.
* Being looked after in a "care setting" does not automatically protect children; there is always the potential for difficulties to arise.

**Large Group Activity: Life in a residential unit**

**Trainer’s notes**

**Resources required:**

* One set of character statement and event cards which should be printed out (Handout “Kieran’s Cards”)
* Handout: “Kieran’s Routine”. Copies for all participants

This activity provides an opportunity for participants to learn about the experience of a child in a residential unit. It is important not to over dramatise the various events, but to use them to illustrate the range of situations which can occur within a unit.

The focus in the activity and in the subsequent discussions should be on the impact of the events on the child concerned, although obviously there will be questions about the implications of incidents for other residents and staff at the unit.

For the activity you will need four volunteers. Explain that you will ask them to represent a particular character and will read out some scenarios and ask them for their responses.

Hand out “Kieran’s Routine” to all participants

Ask volunteers to stand on a piece of flipchart paper clearly marked with who they are:

• Kieran

• Early morning staff member (1);

• Evening staff member (2);

• Evening staff member (3).

The activity works in the following way:

* Hand a statement card (a) to the child and (b) to the relevant worker.
* Ask the "child" to read out his card followed by the "staff member" and continue through the cards.
* From time to time you should pass one of the other cards (designated A-J) to a member of the group and ask them to read it out.
* The purpose of the activity is to give participants a sense of the complexities of life in a residential unit. Ask the characters to expand on the information on the cards as to how the child or staff member might be feeling.
* At the end of the activity you should ask each of the four participants to leave the character behind, by reporting what they have found out by being in the shoes of the child or staff member.

**LIFE IN A RESIDENTIAL UNIT (40 minutes)**

**EXERCISE 5.3**

Complete the activity by discussing:

* What might be different in a foster placement? Examples might include more consistent adults, the intensity of experience, smaller space, fewer adults; no escape; feeling left out, some young people associate families with abusive and unhappy experiences.
* What systems exist at school which would support a child coming from such an environment?

**Video Clip: From the Learning with Care video (LWC 1 & LWC2)**

This highlights the difficulties that can occur in residential units and reinforces the message that communication between the adults is vital, because children are not always able to speak up for themselves about what is going on. It is important to say to the participants that these video clips are now quite old and that the references to the curriculum, for example, are now out of date. However, the messages about ‘life in care’ and ‘at school in care’ remain valid. Emphasise that you will be looking at communication in greater detail in a subsequent unit.

Depending on time constraints and the knowledge / experience of the participants you may also wish to make use of the some of the following other short video clips to reinforce the key messages of this unit.

* Zachari
* Who Cares Scotland video – ‘In their Own words’

Similarly you may wish to consider distributing the hand-out that accompanies the ‘In their own words’ video. This video was made by children themselves for presentation at the 2008 Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC) National Conference. The hand-out is composed of quotations from a number of reports that describe children’s lives in the looked after system. They are all direct comments and thoughts from children.

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**Key messages**

* The number of different people involved in caring for a child in a residential unit.
* The potential for information not to be passed on.
* The lack of consistency, so that a child has to renegotiate interactions/share information.
* Practical difficulties in creating an environment in which to study.
* The impact of other people’s emotions and actions on a child.
* The importance of establishing good communication links between the school and those caring for the child.