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| **Unit No.** | ***Making it better in the education system*** |
| **Unit objectives**   * Emphasise the importance of professionals having high aspirations for looked after children * Highlight barriers to achieving which are commonly experienced by looked after children. * Identify existing and potential support strategies. * Consider the role and core tasks of the designated manager (DM) * Examine issues which arise in learning | |
| **Outline of Unit**   * Introduction * The experiences of children and young people who are looked after * Support strategies * Issues which arise in learning | |
| **Introduction**  This unit is aimed principally at designated managers (DMs), teachers and related professionals working in pre-school settings, and primary and secondary schools. The unit is also relevant to education officers, careers advisers, and certain staff in further and higher education institutions. The unit is designed to stand alone, but could follow from Unit 1: Introduction to Being Looked After.  While the neglect and trauma (see [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org)) typically associated with being looked after can often mean that the child presents behavioural and emotional challenges in school, good relationships with teachers can make a significant contribution to the quality of a child’s life. The experiences of children who are looked after can be very different.  *“One of the greatest concerns of the young people consulted was that they should be labelled or seen as one homogeneous group about whom sweeping generalisations about behaviour or life-chances can be made”* (Ritchie, 2003, p.17).  This quotation comes from the report “Care to Learn?,” based on focus group interviews with looked after children. It serves as a warning to preface any attempt to describe experiences of looked after children. For many, becoming looked after will have followed a period (perhaps a long one) of neglect and possibly also abuse. The child’s circumstances will be unique and their reactions to these circumstances will also be very personal.  **Activity: Harvard Summer School Scholarship**  Download the 8-minute film “Harvard Summer School Scholarship” which includes interviews with three 17 year old students who were awarded scholarships by Who Cares? Scotland to attend Harvard University’s Summer School for high school students. It is aimed at those preparing for college or university (see <http://www.summer.harvard.edu/programs/secondary-school>). There is more background in the paper *From Care to Harvard* (Connelly & Boyce, 2012) included in the resource materials. After viewing the film spend 5 minutes or so brainstorming ways in which teachers or other professionals can demonstrate high aspirations for achievement for looked after children.  You might also like to view the video clips Ros 1 and Ros 2 in which a teacher involved in a project aimed at improving the outcomes of looked after children talks about her work.  **Activity**  View the classroom scene from “Craig’s Story” which ends with Craig rushing from the room, brushing past teacher Mr Scammell and knocking his papers to the floor. As a result of the incident Craig is excluded from school. If you have not previously seen the entire film, you might prefer to view it first and then to replay the classroom scene.  After watching the scene, consider the incident both from Mr Scammell’s perspective and from Craig’s. Your thoughts might cover such things as:   * *How might Craig / Mr Scammell be feeling?* * *What might have caused then to react as they did?* * *How could the incident have been avoided?*   To follow up view the scene at Newcross and also the meeting at school. What was Michael’s role? What are your own responsibilities, specifically in trying to anticipate and avoid difficulties, and in communicating with schools?  **Barriers looked after children face in school**  As a group looked after children face many barriers which may include some or all of the following.   * Bullying * Stigma * School moves caused by placement moves * Gaps in education * Low expectations by adults * Poor physical and mental health * Disability and ASN * Limited opportunities to develop resilience * Lack of access to sport and music * Being in the care system can also cause barriers   It is important that one person in a school (often this will be the designated manager) takes responsibility for getting to know a pupil who is looked after, and is available when required to provide support and reassurance.  Accounts of looked after children interviewed by researchers highlight the difficult tightrope adults walk: avoiding having unrealistically high expectations on the one hand; on the other hand (and more commonly) having patronisingly low expectations. Some children have pointed out the narrow dividing line between showing understanding of difficult home circumstances and colluding with a poor self-image that embodies low expectations. Contrast these two comments by young people:  *“She used to let me off with not handing in homework because she knew I was in a home.”*  *“This one German teacher said: I’ve got a free period. If you’re that dedicated you give up your free period and I’ll tutor you. He did that for six months and because of him I got a 3.”*  These quotations highlight the distinction between unhelpful and truly supportive attitudes. There are, however, often more complex issues at work. A child may have established ways of behaving which are not conducive to learning or which teachers find challenging. Paradoxically these behaviours may appear in school when a care placement seems to have stabilised. It is important that teachers are themselves supported and that school staff, social worker and carer work consistently as a team.  The ***Care to Learn report*** identifies four different stages ‘where looked after young people seem to falter within the education system’ (Ritchie, 2003, p.1). These are:   * Getting through the school gates * Settling in at school * Ready to learn * Fulfilling potential   For each of these stages the report identifies key factors which cause difficulties and also strategies which young people find helpful. These are summarised on pp. 2-3 of the executive summary of the report and more details, including extracts from focus group interviews with children and young people, are contained in the main body of the report.  Download the hand-out, ***Care to Learn Stages***. Take each of the four stages in turn and spend some time reflecting on the particular ways in which you can be supportive to looked after children in your own professional role. What are the obligations to collaborate with others in carrying out this aspect of your role?  **The role and core tasks of the designated manager (DM)**  Each school has an obligation to appoint a senior member of staff who accepts the role of Designated Manager (DM). The DM is usually a head or depute in an early years’ establishment or primary school; in a secondary school the role may be performed by a member of the pastoral care or additional support for learning teams. Detailed guidance about the role is provided in a Scottish Government paper called *Core Tasks for Designated Managers in educational and residential establishments in Scotland.* The core tasks are listed under four headings: communication; meeting the needs of looked after children and young people; advocacy; learning and development.  Here are some Communication tasks:   * The designated manager must know which pupils in their establishment are looked after and, in the same way as for all other pupils, maintain confidential files in relation to each of them; sharing relevant information on a need to know basis. * The designated manager must consider who else in the establishment needs to know some details of a child or young person's background, how much of this should be disclosed and consider how best to take into account the wishes of the child or young person; including any desire for confidentiality which can be reasonably and legally accommodated.   The main responsibilities are to ensure that the school plays its part in relation to the action plan within the Child’s Plan and to collaborate effectively with the other agencies involved. It is important to think about these specific tasks within the broader context of the general arrangements for supporting all pupils. These are set out in the document, Happy, Safe and Achieving their Potential – a standard of support for young people in Scottish schools. Refer to the 10 Standards of Personal Support in Schools which are provided in an appendix in the Core Tasks for Designated Managers.   * Opportunities for developing knowledge, skills and attitudes * Access to information to make decisions and informed choices * Opportunities for citizenship and involvement through participation * Regular review of progress * Help with transitions * Help to plan for the future * Access to staff by children and parents / carers * Co-ordinates support between agencies and schools * Respects confidentiality * Ensures time and space to seek help   **Issues in learning**  Engaging with learning can be a very positive experience for looked after children, and achieving success in an important aspect of life can make an enormous contribution in helping to develop resilience. Many pupils who are looked after will have a history of poor relationships with adults. For example, they may not have had the experience of reading with a parent at an early age. The pleasurable interactions between child and parent associated with early reading are important for the development of positive attitudes to learning generally in later childhood and adolescence. Missing out on such important early milestones has a significant impact on a child or young person’s capacity to follow teachers’ instructions and to engage with the various sophisticated intellectual demands of schooling.  There are two characteristics which typify looked after children: problems in attendance at school and gaps in education which lead to low attainment.  There is research evidence which indicates that where looked after children are given additional support explicitly intended to improve their attainment the effects can be quite dramatic. For example, researchers at the University of Strathclyde collected 5-14 National Assessment data in reading, writing and mathematics over two successive years for 230 looked after children who had participated in projects aimed at improving attainment or their attitude to education. About 40% of the children advanced by one 5-14 level, better than the average progress of looked after children and about the same as the progress achieved by all children (see: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/09/12095701/0).  In a study by researchers at the University of Ottawa, foster carers received a six hour briefing in tutoring primary-aged children in reading and maths. The carers provided three hours per week of home tutoring for 30 weeks, using a specific programme. The children made significantly greater gains in reading and maths scores, compared with children in a comparison group that had not yet received the extra help (see: [www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/crecs/eng/documents/ef\_tu\_foster\_parents.pdf](http://www.socialsciences.uottawa.ca/crecs/eng/documents/ef_tu_foster_parents.pdf)).  It is not a simple matter to combat the effects of difficulties which have their origins in early childhood and which have persisted over many years. Schools can however help in a number of ways. Early intervention is important and it is vital to have in place effective arrangements for the assessment of needs and for tracking attainment. There are things that schools can do to help.  **Key messages**   * Know that a child is looked after and have information about their placement * Communicate and share information with other professionals involved with the child and family * Guard against lowering expectations for appropriate behaviour just because a child is looked after * Tackle bullying * Help children and young people to develop their own support networks * Understand the school’s obligations in relation to the assessment of the needs of looked after children under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 * Have high aspirations for looked after children   Schools need to know that a child is looked after and have information about their placement. This might mean getting to know the foster carer or key worker in a residential unit, who can give valuable advice about how to build a relationship with the child and how to avoid triggering emotional outbursts.  Sharing sensitive information is more complex in a secondary school where a pupil is taught by several teachers. The child’s right to privacy has to be balanced against the teacher’s need to have information on which to base his or her approach with the child. Different teachers may hold different degrees of information: for example, it might be sufficient for a subject teacher to know a child is looked after and to receive advice about learning support, social and emotional needs.  A pastoral care or guidance teacher should know about the placement circumstances and the educational aspects of the child’s plan. The way in which information is shared should be discussed with older children. While it is important to be sensitive to children’s different views about the extent to which adults are given information, it is also wise to have a clear school policy and to stick to this. It is possible a social worker will be unwilling to share information about a child’s circumstances with a school, citing confidentiality reasons. If this happens, the approach must be challenged; on the other hand, schools must be able to guarantee social workers that sensitive information will be treated respectfully.  A child with attachment difficulties learns that adults behave inconsistently. It is important that teachers don’t lower their expectations for appropriate behaviour in the classroom and attitudes to learning in school and at home, while also being understanding and supportive when difficulties arise. The child may expect a teacher to give up, to be relieved when they are absent, and to be tempted not to follow this up diligently.  A high proportion of looked after children report being bullied at school, often apparently because they appear different to other children. Looked after children may exhibit bullying behaviour towards other children and the school may receive complaints from parents. The school’s anti-bullying policy and strategies will be helpful in tackling problems as soon as they arise.  The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009 introduced amendments to an earlier Act (2004). One important amendment is the presumption that a looked after child has additional support needs unless the local authority decides otherwise after assessment. Read the hand-out ‘LAC ASL Briefing (produced by Enquire)’, the practical implications are outlined in Supporting Children’s Learning: Code of Practice (Education Scotland, 2010). See: www.educationscotland.gov.uk/supportinglearners/additionalsupportneeds/aboutasn/principlesofsupportchildlearn/introduction.asp.  **Further information**   * CELCIS website: [www.celcis.org](http://www.celcis.org) * Child Trauma Academy: [www.childtrauma.org](http://www.childtrauma.org) * Nurture Group Network: [www.nurturegroups.org/](http://www.nurturegroups.org/) * The International Child and Youthcare Network: [www.cyc-net.org](http://www.cyc-net.org) * Education Scotland Journey to Excellence: [www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk](http://www.journeytoexcellence.org.uk) * Harvard summer school: [www.summer.harvard.edu/programs/secondary-school](http://www.summer.harvard.edu/programs/secondary-school) * Supporting Children’s Learning: Code of Practice [www.educationscotland.gov.uk/supportinglearners/additionalsupportneeds/aboutasn/principlesofsupportchildlearn/introduction.asp](http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/supportinglearners/additionalsupportneeds/aboutasn/principlesofsupportchildlearn/introduction.asp). * Pupil Inclusion Network Scotland: [www.pinscotland.org](http://www.pinscotland.org) * Count us in: Improving the education of our looked after children (HMIE, 2008). | |