

Interface between the Department of Education and Training and the Department of Human Services' Partnering Agreement and the Looking After Children framework

The Community Service Organisations (CSOs) who deliver out of home care services for children and young people, and the Department of Human Services use the Looking after Children (LAC) framework to address the needs of children in out of home care. The Looking After Children framework provides a best practice way of supporting those who share the complex parenting responsibilities while children and young people are in out of home care.

At a simple level, the Looking After Children framework attempts to strengthen communication and collaboration between the members of the 'parenting team', which usually includes the birth parent(s), the carer(s) / foster carer(s) or key residential care worker, the placement agency case worker and the child's allocated Child Protection worker. It provides a set of tools for planning, reviewing and recording how best to meet the developmental needs of the child or young person while they are in out of home care in the following seven life areas:

- health
- education
- emotional and behavioural development
- identity
- family and social relationships
- social presentation
- self-care skills.

It is important to understand that each of these seven life areas is considered from the perspective of a good parent. This means that when considering each of the life areas, including education, the primary focus is on what parents need to do to promote good outcomes for children. Clearly this is closely related to but not quite the same as the focus of the work being undertaken through the development of Individual Education Plans that address the specific educational needs of the child in relation to the role of teachers, schools and educational services as well as involving carers and parents in this process.

The Looking After Children implementation has established a series of more consistent placement planning and review processes that are expected to support the complementary processes being established for developing, implementing and monitoring Individual Educational Plans for each young person in out of home care. The expected Looking After Children sequence of placement planning processes that are likely to interconnect with Individual Education Planning processes are described below.

Note that the processes are only described in relation to new placements. The implementation process for those already in out of home care will be undertaken on a case-by-case basis until fully implemented.

Placement start

At the point of placement, basic client information is recorded by the Community Support Organisation in the Looking After Children Essential Information Record Part 1 (EIR1) and the Placement Plan Part 1 (PP1).

The Essential Information Record 1 includes a place to record the following basic current educational information about the child/young person:

- school name
- year level
- principal or deputy's name
- class teacher's name
- school address, phone, fax and email address.

First two weeks of placement

The first two weeks of a placement are crucial for establishing the day to day arrangements for ensuring that the child/young person's needs are met in a placement.

Collation of the Essential Information Record 2

The process of identifying and recording additional relevant information about the child, including historical information, starts during the first two weeks of placement and continues on an ongoing basis. This information is recorded in the Looking After Children Essential Information Record Part 2 (EIR2) as it becomes available.

There is a place for recording the following educational information in the Essential Information Record 2:

- all schools attended by period attended, name, type and reason for leaving
- whether the child has a Program Support Group (can refer to a disability-related support group as well as to Individual Education Plan-related support group).
- (for children over 14) whether a plan has been made with regard to a child leaving school
- maximum school level / qualification achieved
- further education qualifications achieved (eg Training And Further Education)
- other courses and training undertaken
- achievements in sport, music, drama etc
- who holds the young person's certificates, trophies etc.

Initial care and placement planning

The Community Support Organisation placement agency case worker will usually convene a Care and Placement Planning meeting within the first two to three days of the placement and invite the child/young person's foster carer or key residential worker, the allocated Child Protection worker, parent(s) or significant

adult family member(s) wherever possible, and the child or young person (if they are old enough to participate in this process).

A combined Care and Placement Planning process is undertaken to identify the child's care needs and how they will be met during the placement. The range of overall needs that must be met in order to provide good out of home care are documented in the Looking After Children Care Plan (which is also informed by the Statutory Child Protection Case Plan as applicable) and then addressed in the Looking After Children Placement Plan Part 2 (PP2), which records the plans for the day-to-day arrangements that will respond to those needs.

Educational issues are one component of this practical planning process. It is expected that the initial Looking After Children Care and Placement Planning process undertaken in the first two weeks of placement would include consideration of a number of immediate practical education-related matters, such as:

- Can the child/young person stay at the same school or do they need to change schools? If they stay at the same school, who will liaise with the school about the placement? If they need to change schools, which school will they attend and why? Who will tell the old school? Who will start the contact with the new school? What needs to happen immediately to support a positive transition to the new school?
- How will the child/young person get to or from school?
- Does the child have sufficient school clothes/uniform, books or other requisites to fit in at school?
- How will the signing of consent forms for school excursions be managed?
- What co-curricular activities is the child involved with and how will these be supported and managed?
- Are there any family access requirements/prohibitions that must be supported and managed in relation to school attendance?
- Who should attend school events, parent/teacher interviews, receive school reports?
- What needs to be done over the next four to six weeks to support the child in settling or resettling at school?
- Who will participate in the process for developing the Individual Education Plan? What specific issues should be addressed through that process?

Effective Care and Placement Planning during the first two weeks of a placement will contribute to the development of the first Individual Educational Plan. It is desirable that the Individual Education Plan commence as soon as possible after the first Care and Placement Plans have been developed. The development of an effective Individual Educational Plan will significantly enhance the educational components of ongoing Looking After Children Care and Placement Planning processes.

Six weeks after placement

The initial Placement Plan (PP2) covers a four-week period and is first reviewed, using the Looking After Children Review of Arrangements (RoA) record, six weeks after the placement commenced.

Feedback from the member(s) of the parenting team participating in the process for the development of an effective Individual Education Plan would greatly assist the LAC Review process. The Review of Arrangements provides an opportunity for all parenting team members to be informed of any education-related actions that they all need to support. Further matters might also be identified for follow-up with the

Student Support Group and would also be recorded in the education section of the new or revised version of the Placement Plan 2 developed after a Looking After Children review.

Ongoing review cycle and the use of the comprehensive Assessment and Action Review (A&AR) record

Using the Looking After Children framework, the Placement Plan 2 is usually reviewed again (using the Review of Arrangements) after three months (four months after coming into care) and then at least every six months for as long as a child or young person is in out of home care.

After the first six months a comprehensive age-related Looking After Children Assessment and Action Review record (A&AR) would be completed. Assessment and Action Reviews are then usually completed annually, coinciding with every second Review of Arrangements review.

The Assessment and Action Reviews record incorporates a detailed assessment of the child/young person's strengths and difficulties in all life areas including education. It is expected that the child/young person's teacher/key education support worker would be directly consulted and closely involved in the process of completing the education section of the child or young person's Assessment and Action Reviews.

For above description and timeline see Diagram 1 below

More information about Looking After Children

More detailed information about the Victorian implementation of the Looking After Children is available on the Department of Human Services Community care website at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/lac-victoria

Diagram 1

