

The key elements required to comply with the ECLCM vision of an acceptable STAYING CLOSE placement

Caring Teams

ECLCM believe that for a Staying Close placement to have a realistic chance of being successful and to mirror as far as is possible the security and support offered by a good Staying Put placement, there are 11 key areas that have to be addressed. These may be remembered by the use of the acronym “Caring Teams”. The acronym represents:

C**entrality of the young person** - Each young person’s plans must be individual, bespoke to that young person and addressing their specific needs, wishes and aspirations. They should not be part of a ‘one size fits all’ template.

A**ge to 21** – The placement should be able to offer the young person a supported home until s/he has attained at least the age of 21, and ideally longer as required.

R**evaluations and planning (Role of the IRO?)** - It is vital if the Staying Close plan is to remain focused and to be implemented as planned for it to be reviewed. It is suggested that formal six monthly reviews might be held for the duration of the placement that are chaired by someone independent but recognised by each of the agencies, who would be responsible for interviewing the young person to seek their views before each review and producing a written report following each review. An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is an obvious candidate to fulfil such a role.

I**nspection** - In order for the placement to be seen to be safe, appropriate and meeting the young person’s needs and agreed plans, it is vital that it should be inspected and monitored. The placement should be inspected at prior to admission and at least once annually by Ofsted or an agreed inspection agency to ensure it meets agreed standards. It might then be monitored at monthly intervals via “Regulation 44” visits that would feed into Ofsted and advise the provider, young person and Ofsted of their findings.

N**ear** enough to the children’s home to walk there in 15 minutes in an emergency at any time of the day or night or merely to facilitate regular and on-going contact as agreed in their care planning. This is consistent with the principle of “Staying Close”, and mirrors the accessibility of carers in “Staying Put”.

G**overnment** funded to ensure that the availability of Staying Close is not a post code lottery and that funding is provided to meet the agreed plans and the young person’s assessed needs, and not be totally dependent upon benefit levels or any other form of financial support from other agencies.

Team around the child – The placement must be supported by a multi-agency team representing the support in place as part of the Staying Close plan. – Social work, Housing, Health, Employment/Education, Residential provider, etc. Care planning decisions should be made by this team and the young person

Early planning towards independent living – It is not sufficient or appropriate to offer training or teach young people independent living skills when they reach the age of 16 years old. This must not be left until young people enter in to a Staying close plan. Training towards independent living should be offered according to age, understanding and ability from the day a child is first admitted into care, and where possible, they should have these basic skills prior to their “Staying Close” placement.

Accountability of each party - Each and all of the agencies or individuals comprising the ‘team around the child should have clearly outlined areas of responsibility and tasks included in the care plan, for which they will be accountable and held to review

Maintains the relationships formed between the young person and the residential team with whom they have been living. The placement and care planning, protects and promotes the maintenance and development of relationships significant to the young person – perhaps the key worker (or other member(s) of the residential team), a youth worker, teacher, social worker or other identified person

Staying Close - A clear definition of what constitutes ‘Close’ agreed in each individual case. The principle behind staying Close is that a young person might ‘Stay Close’ to the residential home that they lived in prior to their being discharged from care at 18 years of age or before. Staying Close should mean exactly that, not that a young person is decanted at 18 into a house retained in an area for the purpose with a group of other young people in similar situations, and visited occasionally – Supported lodgings with visits. The appropriate Staying Close placement should be agreed as appropriate and suitable with the young people and the team in each individual case. This would mirror the spirit of Staying Put as introduced for young people who were being discharged from foster care.