



‘Safeguarding and Staying Put for residential care leavers’.

I am confused why this issue appears to have all the qualities of an efficiently tossed boomerang! This short blog is written in an attempt to bury some myths and as a potential focal point that those who cite the remarkable fact that once one is 18 years of age one becomes a safeguarding risk – well not anyone, just a residential care leaver.

Various members of the ECLCM team have on numerous occasions had people who one might expect to be rather better informed, express a view that young people over 18 can't live in a children's home "because of Safeguarding concerns". This has been cited as a reason why Staying Put cannot be extended to children in residential care. In isolation this is, of course utter rubbish! Let me explain why:

Young people over the age of 18 are frequently allowed to continue to live in their children's homes now. So long as a persuasive case can be shown to OfSTED that such a plan is in the young person's interests and has the support of the 'parent' Local Authority, the children's home provider and crucially the young person.

1. Young people becoming 18 years old who are placed in foster care are allowed to remain there 'Staying Put' and rightly so.
2. Commonly young people living within their birth families will include a considerable age range including those both under and over the age of 18.

In both the above cases it will commonly be the case that there will be other, younger people and children in the same household. There is no process metamorphosis that occurs during the night preceding a child's 18th birthday that turns them into a safeguarding risk that did not exist when they went to bed.

It is accepted that in the case of children in care, unlike those living 'at home', a formal process of Risk Assessment starts on the day they arrive and is constantly reviewed throughout their placement. These reviews are necessarily thorough and subject to the scrutiny of the Inspectorate and the requirements rightly set out in Fostering NMS and The Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards. There is no reason whatsoever why this process cannot, should not and does not continue regardless of the age at which a child or young adult leaves their placement. If the placement was considered to be appropriate for the child (and others in the home) at 17 years and 364 days then why wouldn't it be the following day?

The question has been posed, for example, "Well, what happens if a young adult still living in a children's home comes back having had too much to drink?" My answer is invariably is, "The same thing that happened in my family when my (relatively newly) 18 year old daughter came home the worse for drink, despite good parental advice and to the great amusement of her then 11 year old sister. She was helped to bed, reminded her where the toilet was and monitored her until she was settled ensuring that she did not manage to make too much mess or 'show us what she'd been eating and drinking'!" Lesson learned for both her and her much younger sister! I can see no reason why exactly the same life lesson doesn't apply to children in and leaving care. Children in care are children like any other child. Children in care becoming young adults are just like any other young adults. The only difference is that they are considerably disadvantaged by

not having had the consistency and stability that fortunately most of the rest of our society has enjoyed. Is this something that we should penalise them for? Do we feel comfortable with policy and practice that merely accentuates and labels the differences rather than celebrating and supporting them in their successes and journey toward adulthood? If we are able to plan towards leaving care as a process as described above then it is most unlikely that the outcome of having an 18-year-old living in the same 'household' (albeit a children's home) as younger children will present an insurmountable challenge. However, in respect of pending legislation 'Staying Put' for children in residential care is not currently under active consideration whilst 'Staying Close' most certainly is.

There are currently eight Pilot programmes underway in various parts of the country. These include Local Authority and Independent provisions. These are being closely monitored by the DfE who will conduct an evaluation based on which it is anticipated, but not known, that an option to 'Stay Close' will be afforded to all children leaving residential care