

Response ID ANON-AA8Q-75G7-N

Submitted to **Knowledge and Skills Statement for Achieving Permanence**

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Response form

1 What is your name?

Name:

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2 What is your email address?

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3 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

CoramBAAF

4 What sector do you represent?

Sector:

Voluntary - as a membership organisation we represent both the voluntary and statutory sector

5 Are the five sections in the statement the right ones?

No

Please give your views:

1. Although there is a section on Legal, we believe there must be a heading on Health. The health issues - physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive and social are key considerations in placing children in permanence placements. The health professions make a major, core contribution to this and no placement can be planned, decided upon or delivered without health involvement. Social workers must therefore have the knowledge and skills to work with health colleagues and services at every stage in the permanency planning, decision making and making process and this should be identified in the Statement.
2. There similar issues with education and schools and the Statement needs to reflect that.
3. There is a fundamental questions in this Statement about the degree to which the principles for permanency planning are the same whatever the age of the child. To some degree this must be the case but there are significant questions about the skills and knowledge need and change as the child is older - particularly after the age of 5 or so and certainly into adolescence - the majority of children who are in care. This includes much more work with the child or adolescent directly, the child or adolescent's experience of and views about their family and their views and experiences of family life. There are likely to be a range of issues about their development and their needs and how this should be taken into account in any permanency planning. There is little in the knowledge and skills statement that is explicit about this and just as two examples - unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, and young people in conflict with the law. It is not clear how this might be addressed - as a new section or as an additional range of knowledge and skills issues under the current sections.
4. These issues raise the importance of there being explicit recognition of the similarities and differences between placement types and role of the social worker and others. it would be easy to assume form the current draft that permanence is still equated with adoption.
5. Knowledge and Skills are two key components but there is an equally important third component - Values and Ethics - issues that must be addressed by any professional. It is not clear why this has been omitted as the role of the social worker will draw on their value and ethical base and these will be intimately connected to their implementation of their knowledge and skills.
6. The organisational context within which social workers work is a vital part of the delivery of permanence. This includes a knowledgeable, skills focused and enabling employer that is has designed and delivered a stable, organisational environment that is informed by the fundamental child centred principles of permanency planning. This will be driven by a combination of leadership, resources, structure, operation and professional support.

6 Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family worker needs to have to decide on the best permanence option for a child that are missing from section 1?

Yes

Please give your views:

It is critical that recognition is given to the complex issues of professional judgement in permanence. The evidence base is complex and probably is better described as evidence informed rather than evidence based.

There is little certainty in permanence planning and delivery and professional skills and knowledge need to reflect the fundamentals of relationship based practice where complex thoughts and feelings need to acknowledged, worked with and used to positive effect.

This section needs to identify the importance of the child or young person's views, experiences, wishes and feelings and the social worker having the skills and knowledge to work with the child or young person in understanding this.

This section also needs to recognise the wide range of people that might need to worked with in identifying an appropriate plan - extended family members, foster carers, other people who are significant in the child or young person's life or have been significant and who they have lost contact with.

Cultural Competence

It is essential that social workers have the skills and knowledge to address the realities of both institutional racism and individual discrimination. The requirements of the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 are the best opportunity in a generation to ensure that public bodies responsible for permanency planning proactively promote race relations and eliminate discrimination and identify how they will do so.

As a part of this, it is essential that the skills and knowledge framework for permanence further work be undertaken to formulate Codes of Practice in relation to service standards and delivery, education and training that promote racial and cultural competence in organisations and professional practice. These should include -

- the values and ethics underlying planning, decision making and delivery,
- the need for self awareness in professionals around issues of ethnicity, culture, religion and language
- the competence, including knowledge and skills, to work across the wide ranging boundaries of difference,
- the importance of being able to take a proactive response in relation to race and culture including acting as an advocate and informing others about ethnicity, culture, religion and language
- the importance of recruiting supporting and maintaining a diverse workforce that reflects the community in which services are delivered
- the need for the training and education of all professionals to enable and promote racial and cultural competence

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7 Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to negotiate the legal process that are missing from section 2?

Yes

Please give your views:

Recognition needs to be given to compliance with the pre-proceedings phase of the PLO - letter before proceedings, family group conferences, viability assessments etc. This will also include the preparation of required reports such as the CPR, health reports and the submission of an agreed evidence informed, holistic and balanced argument whatever the plan identified. Where adoption is the plan this will include submission to the ADM for authorisation.

8 Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to help a child find permanence quickly that are missing from section 3?

Yes

Please give your views:

It is not clear what the difference is between 1) Deciding the best permanence option and Section 3?

This section does identify the importance of preparing, supporting, assessing and approving prospective carers although not quite in those terms. However, it does not identify the importance of social workers having the skills and knowledge to understand the core issues and then the differences in various types of permanent placements - with extended family members or friends, adopters, stranger foster carers or residential care. It also does not identify the assessment and provision of support issues that may be fundamental to the placement before any child is placed.

9 Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social workers needs to have to support families in transition that are missing from section 4?

Yes

Please give your views:

Transitions fundamentally involve the breaking of one set of relationships to create a new set of relationships. From the child's point of view this is very likely to create anxiety and loss and grief as the Statement makes clear. These issues will also impact on the child's foster carer/s, others in the family, the child's birth parents and extended family members and the adopter/s and their family again as the Statement makes clear.

While it very important that social workers have the skills and knowledge to address this, it is also very important all those involved have an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the issues and to support one another throughout the transition. This includes having a plan that facilitates maintaining relationships and not just assuming that a transition brings one relationship to an end as another begins.

10 Are there any knowledge and skills that a child and family social worker needs to have to support the placement, including managing disruption and breakdown, that are missing from section 5?

Yes

Please give your views:

The Statement identifies 'building a network of expertise to help families'. While individual social workers will need to be a part of this, networks are usually the responsibility of the organisation and a wide range of people within the organization that identifies the structural, operational and resource issues including working with other organisations through collaborative, commissioning or contracting arrangements.

Disruption as a term is more typically associated with adoption. The Statement does include a recognition that there may be 'different dynamics that each permanence option brings' but it is not just social workers that are affected by these dynamics.

The issues that bring foster care placements to end and the way that these are thought about can be very different to adoption - foster carers deciding to stop fostering, the LA deciding that an IFP placement should end because it has a policy to make placements 'in-house'. There are similar questions in relation to children placed with family and friends carers whatever Order is in place to frame these placements. And others for young people in residential care.

So one critical issue in the Statement should be that the issues, plans and decisions are child and young people focused in the context of the family or placement that is their identified family for life.

The second must be an in-depth understanding of dynamics of family life in the context of child maltreatment, adversity and recovery.

The third must be an inter-agency and multi professional approach.

The fourth must be the skills and knowledge to undertake an assessment at an appropriate level working with other professionals as necessary.

The fifth, an understanding of the evidence informed models of intervention acknowledging the very limited range of current evidence.

And lastly an approach to providing support that is comprehensive - addressing identity, contact, social media and other issues alongside those that have a more therapeutic focus.

11 Which child and family social workers should the permanence continuous professional development programme be aimed at?

Please give your views:

All children and families social workers will need to have the knowledge and skills identified in this Statement. Social workers working in safeguarding, or working with disabled children, with children in need or children in care, in private fostering, with unaccompanied asylum seeking young people, with young children or 16 and 17 year olds will need to understand the fundamental principles of permanence. But this will need to be appropriately structured with CPD an identified part of career progression reflecting direct professional responsibilities. For some social workers, the detail will be critical on a day to day basis, for others it will be a set of principles to be considered alongside other issues. The fundamental issue to be addressed is that every child and young person needs a strong sense of who their life long family is - their secure base. There is for all children a strong narrative that weaves continuity with discontinuity, a sense of belonging and commitment alongside a need to reach out, explore and achieve Independence. Understanding the challenge in this, is core to social work practice whatever the direct level of involvement the professional has.

12 Do you have any further comments?

Please give your views:

While values, ethics, knowledge and skills are core to individual social work practitioners, it can't be stressed strongly enough that most social work takes place in the context of relationships. It also takes place in the context of uncertainty, a limited evidence base where plans, decisions and delivery have profound implications for everybody concerned. The need/desire to 'get it right' is compromised by the risks, uncertainties and unexpected challenges that come over the course of time as placements are made and life unfolds.

The way relationships are made, sustained and develop needs to reflect these complexities including uncertainty and anxiety. The Framework must be clear that an understanding of these issues is key to excellence in practice.