

Early Permanence Network

Supporting the development of early permanence placements for young children in care proceedings nationwide.

Context & Definitions

Early Permanence placements include both concurrent planning and fostering for adoption, and aim to reduce delay and the number of placement moves experienced by babies and very young children in proceedings. **All these placements involve uncertainty re the final outcome and do not pre-empt the court's decision.**

Concurrent Planning is an evidence based approach to achieving early permanence for young children in care proceedings where the risk to them may be identified pre-birth, at birth or soon after. Where (on the basis of previous history and current circumstances) the likelihood of adoption is high (in excess of 80%), the placement of choice may be dually approved foster carers/adopters – ie concurrent planning carers. In these cases viability assessments or full assessments should have been undertaken in respect of extended family members who might be available to care for the child on a permanent basis, but some assessments may still need to be completed eg if a relative comes forward later in proceedings. In these cases there is likely to be ongoing contact with parent(s) and/or relative(s) during proceedings.

Fostering for Adoption (FfA) placements provide a legal framework to secure early placements for children in care proceedings where the local authority has completed assessments in line with the requirements of the Public Law Outline and considers that adoption is in the child's best interests. FFA placements may be made with approved adopters who have been approved as foster carers for a particular child by the ADM (Reg 25a). These placements may also be made with dually approved adopters/foster carers for a particular child by the ADM (Reg 25a). Some contact may be required during proceedings; eg if a relative who is potentially able to care for the child is identified late in the proceedings.

In all EP placements there is a period of fostering whilst the court considers the evidence and reaches a decision. These placements protect the child from unnecessary moves and broken attachments. For the child the outcome is win/win, whether the child is returned home or is adopted. It is the adults who shoulder the risks.

Until the court is satisfied that all necessary assessments have been completed and has made a Placement Order, the outcome of proceedings cannot be pre-empted. All these placements are on a continuum of risk and uncertainty re outcome until the court has made a judgement and the carers need to understand and accept their role as foster carers during this time.

Relinquished Babies Early Permanence placements can also be made where parents wish to relinquish their baby/child for adoption, but parental consent has not yet been formally given. There are similar issues re risk and uncertain outcome in these placements, including issues re the ability of a member of the extended family to provide care for the baby.

Good Practice Guide

The updated *Good Practice Guide to Fostering for Adoption* (2017) by Elaine Dibben and Viv Howorth and the *Fostering for Adoption Guide for Prospective FFA Carers* are available from CoramBAAF to support the development of excellent practice.

Evidence Base

In 2014 Coram produced an Outcome Study on concurrent planning placements made between 1999 and 2011. The Outcome Study demonstrated the strength of attachments formed during these placements, with no disruptions in the first 12 years of either children who were returned to the care of their extended families, nor those who were adopted. Adopters testified to the importance of early bonding and greatly valued having had the opportunity to get to know the parents of their child during the fostering phase of the placement. This study was followed up in 2017/18 and is available on the Coram Early Permanence website. It has important lessons for practice, including the need for access to support at different times. Two young people who were adopted via concurrent planning placements were interviewed and their views are included in the report.

The Coram Early Permanence Network

Since 2014 Coram has offered training in Early Permanence (Concurrent Planning and Fostering for Adoption) to support the development of good practice. This largely focusses on the Early Permanence Network Conferences three times a year which provide a forum where LAs, VAAs and RAAs can share learning, gain peer support and be updated on legislative developments, research and practice.

Topics covered include legal updates, preparation and assessment of dually approved and Reg 25a FFA carers, managing contact in early permanence placements, systemic early permanence planning including pre-birth planning, and embedding Early Permanence Placements in RAAs.

In 2017/18 member agencies placed over 130 babies and young children in early permanence placements.

Regional Adoption Agencies

RAAs and LAs will need to pay particular attention to the interface between the LAs who are responsible for the child's journey and the RAAs which provide EP placements. VAAs who provide early permanence placements are in a similar position in their relationship with LAs. Close communication and collaboration will be essential to ensure that such placements are made in a timely way.

Key benefits of network membership

- Tailored programme and training
- Peer support
- Access to practice leaders
- National quality assurance
- Ofsted preparation

Early Permanence Network

- The basic membership fee is £200 per year, which purchases one place at each of the three annual Network Days.
- Most members send their Early Permanence Champion to Network Meetings on a regular basis as peer relationships and learning are developed over time.
- Members may send additional participants to benefit from the key learning from particular topics.
- Additional places for the three annual meetings can be purchased for £150 per participant or £50 for a single session.

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to enquire about Network Membership.