

PAUL HAMLYN FOUNDATION

Improving access to books and reading for looked- after children. A checklist for local authorities

[version sent to DfES by DCMS June 2006]

- 1) Children's Services Directorate managers and staff working with LAC should be made aware of the potential of library services to offer important opportunities to the children in their care including the delivery of the five Every Child Matters outcomes. Partnership working with library services should be improved and the outcomes of *Right to Read* projects should be disseminated to appropriate staff and elected members within the authority. Library services should be represented on the Looked after Children steering group or its equivalent.
- 2) Library staff should have training to develop their understanding of the needs of LAC and the barriers to be overcome to encourage their use of library services including reading materials to provide educational information the children and young people may be missing if excluded from school or moving between schools.
- 3) Training and advice should also be given to carers and residential social workers so they understand that books and better reading skills improve children's confidence and self esteem, and provide informal learning opportunities. Library services should be involved in induction and ongoing training for carers and residential social workers. Library membership/use should be part of the inspection checklist and the children's Personal Education Plan.
- 4) Childrens Services Directorate staff should ensure that books, magazines, on-line resources and other materials (including information to support study) should be available within the home, whether it is with a foster carer or in a residential home. Library services should issue carers' tickets and loan suitable materials to residential units. These should be changed regularly.
- 5) Book ownership by LAC should be recognised as important and funding should be earmarked for the purchase of books for individual children. Those in Library services and the children and young people themselves should be involved in selecting appropriate titles.
- 6) As the corporate parent of Looked -After Children (LAC), the local authority should create a new borrower category for LAC. Procedures should be reviewed to encourage use of libraries by LAC including the

abolition of proof of identity and the guarantor role for LAC. Similarly, all fines, fees and charges for lost or damaged books should be waived, at the very least until the young people have left care. Initiatives, outlined above, to promote use of libraries and books to LAC should be funded and evaluated. Successful practice should be disseminated within the authority and to other authorities, for instance by using the DfES Every Child Matters website.

- 7) Because these benefits (identified through the *Right to Read* projects) have a significant beneficial impact on LAC, increased partnership with library services and implementing the changes outlined above should become priorities within Children's Services Directorates who should make the funding available for their successful delivery.