

“Right to Read” Tips no.1 – Making libraries more looked-after children-friendly

- Welcoming, targeted provision which recognises the specific needs of looked-after young people and their carers, but doesn't focus on them to the extent that they are uncomfortable
- Involve looked-after children and young people and their carers in developing services from the beginning (this could be via your local authority's Children's Rights Unit or participation/consultation team)
- Development of strong, working partnerships between the public library service and other local authority departments – for example with Children's Service (formerly Education and Social Services) – to run joint promotions, access funding, reach young people and their carers, assist to develop joined-up services as part of the Corporate Parent
- Development of strong partnerships between the public library service and other organisations, including charities and voluntary organisations – this will need work to establish shared knowledge and goals, and to build a environment of mutual understanding and compromise
- Evaluation methods should be devised from the start in order to assess the impact of the service changes on the children and young people themselves, and also to enable these developments to be assessed against the outcomes required by “Every Child Matters”, the Shared Priorities, and “Framework for the Future” (eg by long-term educational tracking, in order to assess impact on attainment levels)
- Ensure that all your library colleagues are aware of the needs of looked-after children and young people and of the range of services that you and the library service are offering – training should be provided for library staff at all levels to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs of looked-after children and young people
- A named librarian responsible for work with LAC in each relevant library so that LAC, carers etc know who to contact
- Advise and train residential and foster carers and social workers about books, reading and the use of information
- Relaxed, welcoming joining procedures, eg no need for ID or for young people to have a guarantor sign their joining form
- Create a new borrower category for looked-after children and young people: this is vital, so that we can track usage of the library service in terms of library membership, library use and book borrowing with statistics and 'case study' examples, as well as ensuring that charges are not imposed
- Create a carers' ticket for foster carers and residential social workers

- Remove overdue charges for all children and young people¹
- Similarly, remove charges for lost or damaged items for looked-after children and young people
- Ensure that your library service is aware that young people are entitled to return their library materials to a library anywhere in the UK if they are suddenly moved
- Provide an exciting array of library materials catering for a wide age range with different reading levels, and selected with the involvement of young people
- Ensure that information and study support are made available
- Provide a wide range of library materials and services for carers too. Some of them may be studying, some may be struggling to keep up with their children's schooling, some may want suggestions of books to read for themselves ...
- Book ownership is important too, so, if funds allow, books should be given to looked-after children and young people (and, in foster families, to their foster siblings), funded by the local authority, but selected with input from the library service
- Offer loans of books and other library materials (which should be changed regularly) to residential homes and units
- Develop outreach approaches (eg library staff running reading groups in residential homes) to meet those young people who are unable to visit a library
- Provide a wide range of activities and events that promote reading, the use of the library service, and information-handling. Ensure that you target young people in foster and residential care – and consider carefully whether they would like events just for them, or would rather be part of a wider group of children and young people
- Funding for the work with looked-after children and young people is mainstreamed – ie it is no longer externally-funded, but provision is made by the local authority out of its own budgets. This needs to be considered from the outset of the project, ensuring that senior managers and members are aware of the value of the project, to avert cuts later.

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¹ But, if this is not possible, then at least remove them for all looked-after children and young people.