

“Right to Read” Tips no.4 – Looked-after children and young people: separate or integrated provision?

As with many socially excluded and vulnerable groups, looked-after children and young people [LAC] may well not want to be identified or provided with separate services. In addition, many foster and residential carers (and Children's Services staff) do not want to see LAC given “special treatment”.

So – how should libraries respond?

From the evaluation of the “Right to Read” and other projects, the following points have emerged:

- It is a good principle to aim to integrate provision for LAC into other mainstream services for children and young people
- However, to start with, it is important to identify the specific needs that LAC (and their carers) will have (remembering that LAC are going to be amongst the most vulnerable young people we meet)
- In preparing other library staff to work with LAC (and in developing training programmes as part of this), it is vital to begin by focusing on their specific needs, identifying why LAC are vulnerable, what reasons there may be that have led them to being in care, etc
- To overcome barriers to using libraries, it may also be necessary to begin by targeting foster families and/or residential care homes specifically, for example by running specific events for them. Some examples can be seen on The Network's website (see: http://www.seapn.org.uk/phf_goodpractice.html)
- You can build on these initial links by getting involved in LAC's own activities, eg there may be an Achievement Day event for LAC and their carers and teachers
- Eventually, you will want to get to the position where LAC and their carers will get involved in a range of mainstream activities (although you may still want to target them, by inviting them specifically to events, sending them Summer Reading Challenge joining material, etc).

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