

## Background to Post of Looked After Children (LAC) Psychologist

The 'Learning With Care' report of 2001 (HMIE/SWSI) highlighted the fact that being looked after away from the family home significantly reduces life outcomes for children in terms of educational attainment and increases the likelihood of offending, mental and physical health issues and social disadvantage.

The report also emphasised the need for schools, social workers and carers to work together towards a shared understanding of the important role played by education in improving the life chances of children in care.



## The Post

The post of LAC Psychologist was set up in June 2003 as part of a Pilot Project to promote joint working between Social Policy and Education with the aim of providing a more holistic approach to meeting the educational, social and emotional needs of West Lothian children looked after by the Local Authority.

An educational psychologist with experience of the effects of trauma, loss and change in children's lives was recruited from within the team of local school psychologists. The LAC Psychologist has a working knowledge of the local area and the needs of local schools and liaises with services in Education and Social Policy.

The post has increased from a 0.5 post (in school session 2003-2004) to a full-time post (in session 2004-2005). The LAC Psychologist post now sits alongside a multi agency provision for looked after children comprising: 3 outreach teachers, one of whom is an Acting Principal Teacher, a nurse, 0.5 FTE Children's Rights Officer, and young person's development worker. This LAC Team is unique to West Lothian and to date has not been replicated elsewhere.

## Remit and areas of work

- Providing consultation and advice to foster carers and staff in West Lothian Council's local Young People's Centres. The aim is to support staff in understanding the specific needs of looked after young people so that they can access and make the most of the educational provision offered to them.
- Attending LAC Reviews of young people where there has been case involvement.
- Developing training materials and resources for professionals within Education and Social Work. A series of training sessions was piloted with carers and YPC staff on various educational and psychological issues which impact on the behaviour and emotional wellbeing of children in care.
- Supporting social workers with individual children and young people. The aim of such support is to help the young people to understand their life experience and develop social and emotional skills which will enable them to become more resilient.
- Involvement in the Strategy Group for Looked After Children, steering developments at Council level.

## Working with schools and school psychologists

The LAC psychologist is able to provide information and insight to other agencies about the school curriculum and strategies employed by schools in trying to keep distressed children and young people within the educational system. Carer consultations maintain a strong focus on the child's behaviour in school and on how carers can support and communicate with the school usefully.

The educational psychologist has also visited the designated teachers for LAC to get a picture of how their role is developing. This input will continue to develop as the team evolves.

A school's request for support or advice should always be made known to, and discussed with, the school psychologist, who retains case responsibility for LAC in his or her school. The LAC psychologist can help you in the following ways:

- The school psychologist may ask the LAC psychologist for a consultation about the specific effects of being in care on a child's behaviour and emotional state. They may also ask the LAC psychologist to liaise with Social Work professionals about a child's 'looked after' status and any current issues in the child's care situation.
- Develop further staff support and training in areas identified as key concerns for staff and other professionals working with LAC.

- If necessary, a school visit can be arranged to:
  - Speak with key staff to suggest and advise on appropriate strategies for supporting the child, teacher and support assistants.
  - Meet with key staff, social worker, psychologist and carer to discuss difficulties, share current relevant information and facilitate consistency of approach.
  - Attend a Case Conference involving class teachers and key professionals in situations where the LAC psychologist has current or has had previous case involvement.
- A multi-agency training session based on the 'Learning With Care' training materials has been piloted and delivered to groups of carers, social workers and education staff. This training will continue to be made available to school staff during the coming session.

### For further information contact:

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## Educational Psychologist

for Looked After Children in West Lothian



West Lothian  
Council

Education & Cultural Services