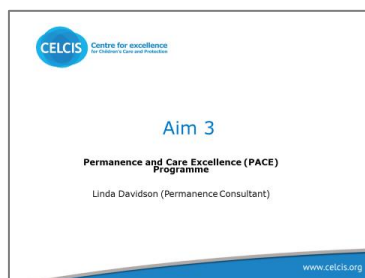


DATE: August 2020

TITLE: Aim 3, Permanence and Care Excellence Programme

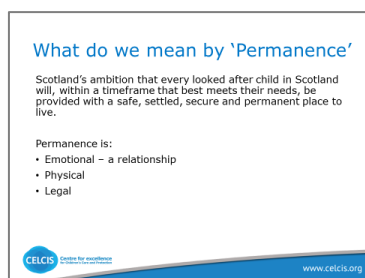
SPEAKER: Linda Davidson, Permanence Consultant

You are watching a webinar about the PACE programme from the delivery team in CELCIS at the University of Strathclyde. PACE is a Quality Improvement programme aiming to reduce drift and delay in permanence planning for looked after children. These webinars were recorded in the spring of 2020, so please be aware that key changes in legislation, guidance and practice may have occurred since this time.



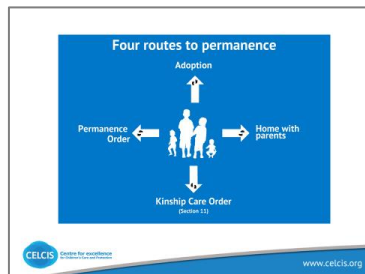
Hello everyone, my name is Linda Davidson I'm one of the permanence consultant's on PACE team and I'm going to talk to today's webinar about Aim 3.

I'm going to start by saying a little bit about permanence and the PACE programme - you may have heard this already if you've listened to the previous aims webinars, so I'll move through this quite quickly.

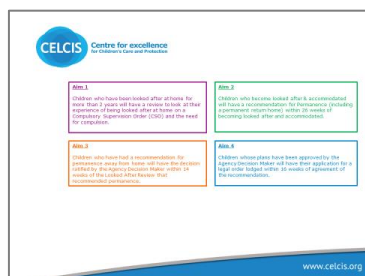


What do we mean by permanence? What does it mean for children? It's Scotland's ambition that every looked after child will, within a time that best meets their needs, be provided with a safe, settled, secure and permanent place to live.

For children permanence is essentially emotional, it's being provided with a relationship, or relationships, that will keep them safe throughout childhood. It's also physical, it's getting to that safe relationship, that safe place. And permanence is also legal, and follows a legal process, to secure children as much as possible within the setting and the relationships that will keep them safe.



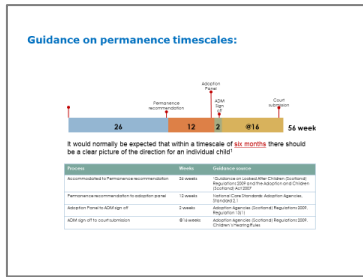
There are four routes to permanence for children: the first is to return safely or remain safely at home with parents, and for about 35% of children in Scotland that's the route to permanence; to stay at home. To move to family members or friends, with a kinship care order, and that's an increasingly large number of looked after children in Scotland. To obtain a permanence order to secure a child through the care of the local authority, and adoption where a child is secured with an alternative family.



The four aims are key stages in a child's journey; the first stage is a child that becomes looked after at home. Aim 2 covers the period where a child becomes accommodated, up into the point where rehabilitation is ruled out and a permanence recommendation for that child is made.

Aim 3, which I'm going to talk about today, is the point at which a recommendation has been made and the time from that recommendation to the agency decision maker's decision.

Aim 4, which is the period from the agency decision maker's decision through to the point where there is a legal order in place for the child.



I'm going to talk about Aim 3 and that 14-week period from making a recommendation to the agency decision maker sign off, that's the period in orange on this slide. The national care standards for adoption agencies makes a recommendation in Scotland that this should take 14 weeks; 12 weeks from the review or the meeting that makes a permanence recommendation to the panel and then 2 weeks from the panel for the agency decision maker to sign off the recommendation.

What have we learned in the PACE programme about the challenges of the Aim 3 period in a child's journey? 14 weeks is quite challenging for many local authorities; when we've looked at the PACE data this can be a period where children experience significant drift and delay. There's also a variety of meetings that exist in Scotland at which that permanence recommendation could be recorded.

What are the Aim 3 challenges?

Recommendation to panel to ADM decision – 14 weeks.

- When is a recommendation a decision?
- The assessment that rules out rehabilitation.
- Report writing Form E, CAPR or alternative?
- Legal advice
- Advice Hearing
- Medical undertaken and medical advice
- The Fostering and Adoption or Permanence Panel.

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So when is a recommendation a decision? It could be that a recommendation is made pre-birth, particularly if it's a subsequent child and there's been no change in the parent's circumstances, but essentially it could be any other stage in a child's life.

The important point is the recommendation that rehabilitation is unlikely or has been ruled out, and for many children if kinship is not an option that means that the local authority is looking for a permanence order, or permanence order to adopt, or a direct petition for that child.

Rehabilitation may not be possible and it can be useful to think about that from the beginning. So thinking from the beginning of a child's journey, about why is this situation or event is significant, and in what way harmful to the child can be very useful. The test of "significant harm".

Parenting capacity assessments vary across Scotland. There's a huge national variation in timing and documents used, but an assessment is required, and we have heard from the PACE areas that particularly legal services are looking for a parenting capacity assessment.

The word 'capacity' was added to parenting assessment to consider not just whether or not a parent can parent safely now, but whether or not a parent, or parents, or family, have the capacity to keep a child safe over time.

It's this point in a child's journey, at the point of Aim 3, where a report will be prepared for panel. Again, the panel varies in terms of what it's called in Scotland - so some local authorities have an adoption and fostering panel, some have a permanence panel - but this is the point at which a report will be required to submit to the panel. And in Scotland, again, we have a mixed landscape of the report formats used; some local authorities use Form E, some local authorities use the updated CAPR form and some use alternatives.

For example Aberdeen and Midlothian, (to name just two local authorities that have looked at alternatives), looked at the legal requirements of a Form E and incorporated those requirements into existing report formats so that workers didn't have to restart the process of gathering the information that they already had for the purpose of a report to panel.

Midlothian have recorded a webinar on their development of an 'outcomes based assessment' document that follows a child from the point of first becoming looked after, to the Children's Hearing system, through to their fostering adoption panel and you may want to link onto that webinar to find out more.

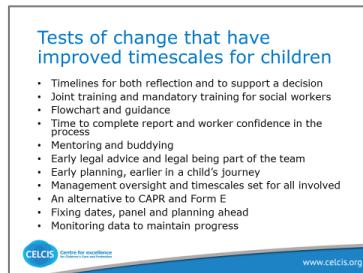
Early legal advice can make a huge difference and should be sought whenever permanence away from home might be considered for a child. At this stage, at the point of Aim 3, legal advice to the panel is required and many PACE areas have worked to ensure legal advice is provided as early as possible in order to achieve the 14 week target to panel.

Many, or most children, will be subject to a compulsory supervision order at this stage in their journey and so following the ADM recommendation an advice hearing is legally required and again, this can be planned ahead to save time and to be held as soon as possible after the agency decision makers' decision.

A medical for the child, and medical advice, is also required for the panel and we know from PACE areas that this can also cause significant delay. However in some PACE areas social work and medical advisors have worked to try to simplify the system and to work to the 14 weeks guidance.

To be honest, early planning at all stages of a child's journey can ensure improved time scales for the child and working closely with health and legal services at this stage in a child's journey can make an enormous difference.

Whatever the panel is called, in each local authority, the purpose of the panel is the same - which is to consider a recommendation being made that will be in the best interests of that child.



So what are the tests of change that have improved time scales for children in Scotland?

Many local authorities have used our 'timeline tool' for both reflection and to support a decision. Timelines have been used for children in East Lothian, Stirling, West Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Dumfries and Galloway, and other areas.

Timelines have been used to reflect on cases where children have experienced drift and delay, in order to learn about what got in the way and what caused the drift and delay for children, but in some local authorities timelines, and an opportunity to look at a child's journey, has been used in Children's Hearings, reviews, presented at fostering adoption panels and in one case, court. There are two webinars on the CELCIS website looking at why timelines might be useful and also a webinar on how to make timelines. So if you are interested you can have a look at both of them.

One of the other things that has improved timescales for children, at this point in their journey, is training. Training to understand the system jointly with all partners that have a role to play, but also mandatory training for social workers. In some areas they have extended this to five days of permanence training for social workers - mirroring the training that social workers receive for understanding child protection systems. This training has enabled social workers to develop confidence, importantly understanding the clarity of the process in their particular local authority and the timescales and report format their local authority is using.

Almost all areas have felt it beneficial to produce flow charts and refreshed permanence guidance for staff. They have queried, openly through the PACE programme, whether we write too much, and whether or not (particularly workers who haven't been involved in any permanence planning before), can in a very straightforward way find the information they require.

Time has been an issue that's cropped up on many occasions, in many local authorities. The time that it takes workers to be able to focus on the additional report writing that's required at this stage and a number of local authorities have looked at ensuring that social workers are given the space to do report writing and that it is planned in a way that supports the worker.

Many local authorities have also looked at a mentoring and buddying system. How colleagues can support each other and also how the supervision process with line managers can be used to support a workers confidence in this area.

Some local authorities - Aberdeen City is one - have created specific posts and mentoring roles for social workers to be supported, particularly when it maybe not relevant to all the looked after children through the actual process to panel.

Again early legal advice, and legal being part of the team working to timescales for children, is something that has been adopted in many of the PACE areas.

To be honest, the feedback we've had is that the earlier the legal advice, the more support for social work staff in understanding what is required from them and the legal process to be followed. So where possible legal being a really clear part of the permanence team in each local authority is incredibly helpful.

From the point that a child first becomes looked after and accommodated: earlier planning; clear review process; clear route to a recommendation and timescale set can make an enormous difference. Many of the local authorities have looked at that earlier planning - that you may have heard of in earlier webinars - about having an earlier review when a child becomes accommodated and a very clear and purposeful journey to the point where a recommendation is made.

Having management oversight and timescales set for all can be incredibly helpful to ensure a child's journey is tracked and that timescales have not only been set, but that actually timescales are being achieved for as many children as possible.

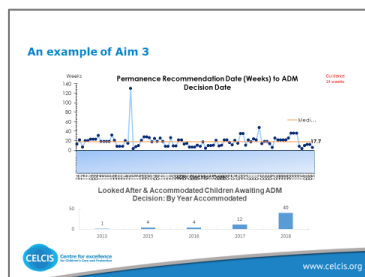
There has been many local authorities that have tested, or considered, an alternative to the CAPR and Form E. Primarily because of the time it can take at the Aim 3 period in a child's journey to complete lengthy report formats.

Many local authorities have considered how they gather information, from the beginning of a child's looked after journey, that would not require them to then have to repeat that information in the form of a CAPR or a Form E.

Aberdeen and Midlothian's report format meets the legal requirements of a Form E but is their own version and the experience from court, and feedback from permanence panels, in both areas, is that the alternative form is as useful, if not more useful than the Form E's and the CAPRs that they had used previously.

And being able to fix dates, plan ahead and have panel dates in the diary. Most local authorities have used tests of change around ensuring that there's a clear process to the permanence planning at this stage in a child's journey; by fixing panel dates early (you can always cancel a panel) as many local authorities have reported that panel dates are taking some time to secure. Really purposeful planning ahead to make sure dates are in the diary has made a significant difference.

And last but certainly not least, having management oversight, but also sharing with social workers and teams the data in terms of timescales. How they are working, what they are achieving in terms of timescales and how they can maintain any progress and improvements made. Having real clarity and forward planning for workers 'what I need to do by when and why' has made an enormous difference in many local authorities.



So this is an example of an Aim 3 where we're looking at weeks on the left hand side of the run chart and agency decision maker dates running along the bottom, which we have removed for GDPR purposes. This local authority, in particular, had been working very well at this point a child's journey so the national guidance at the top in red is the 14 weeks I described earlier. This local authority was, in terms of a median, achieving a child getting to that ADM decision within roughly 17.5 weeks, over a period of time. They were also, in terms of the bottom chart, able to monitor how many children were still waiting for that decision.

Any questions in relation to Aim 3 or in relation to this webinar: you can email CELCIS at celcis@strath.ac.uk and our Aim 3 resources that I have mentioned in this webinar will be available on our website.

Thank you for listening and goodbye.

Other resources

CELCIS Knowledge Bank:

<https://www.celcis.org/knowledge-bank/>

Independent Care Review and The Promise:

<https://www.carereview.scot/>

Getting it Right for Looked every child (GIRFEC):

<https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

Getting it right for looked after children and young people strategy:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/getting-right-looked-children-young-people-strategy/>