



We are the bairns

A Guide to Corporate Parenting by looked after children for their corporate parents

By the Young People's Organising and Campaigning (YPOC) Group

March 2014

Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL



Introduction

In November 2011 Councillor Anne Robertson, then Leader of the Council, asked the YPOC Group to put together a Guide to Corporate Parenting from the perspective of looked after young people. This is what we have come up with.

What is corporate parenting?

This is what we think that corporate parenting means.

“When Aberdeenshire Council and partner agencies like the NHS, and all the people who work there, act as our parents and take responsibility for doing everything that a good parent should do for looked after children and care leavers”

Why have we written this Guide?

- To make the council and its partners accountable to looked after children and young people by letting us know what they are doing as our corporate parents.
- To make sure that the council lets everyone involved in our care know what their responsibilities are as our corporate parents.
- To make sure everyone who is involved in our care understands what their role is as a corporate parent, and why they should be acting as our parent.
- To make sure that the council and their partners are listening to looked after children and young people and care leavers and taking our views into account.
- To make sure that they are valuing looked after children and care leavers and celebrating our successes.
- To make sure that the Council stick to their promises or explain why they haven't.



Who is it for?

The guide is for everyone in the council and their partner agencies who all have responsibilities as our corporate parents.

It is for everyone involved in our care, like carers and parents, teachers, social workers, their managers, LAC Review Managers, etc.

It is for all looked after children, young people and care leavers.

10 key things that all corporate parents should do

This is what we think that everyone who is our corporate parent should do.

1. Make sure that you know what promises Aberdeenshire Council has made to us and that you know what your responsibilities are as a corporate parent.
2. Do all you can to make sure that we are well looked after wherever we live.
3. Get to know us and understand our situations. Know the kind of challenges that we face whether we are looked after at home or away from home, and as care leavers. Remember it will be different for each of us.
4. Always treat us with respect.
5. Speak to us.
6. Listen to us.
7. Advocate for us.
8. Support us in everything we do and celebrate our successes.
9. Help us to move on from care and to become successful and independent adults. Do what you can to provide employment for us as a family friendly firm.
10. Respect our confidentiality. Think carefully about how you share information and what information you share, and if possible ask for our consent.

Councillors

We think that councillors have a very important role as our corporate parents. You are responsible for making sure that the promises that the council has made to us are kept. You are the ones who need to make sure that everyone else is doing their job properly.

We think that as councillors you should make sure that you have all the information you need to do this.

This is what we think you should do

- Make sure you know what promises the council has made to us as our corporate parent.
- Give due consideration to the needs of Looked After Children and care leavers when making decisions on behalf of the council and while conducting day to day council business.
- Give feedback on how exercising your corporate parenting responsibilities has made a difference to Council business and decisions.
- Get information from the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group on an annual basis on:
 - the numbers of looked after children in your area and where we live eg at home, foster care, residential care, etc. without breaching individual children's confidentiality
 - how the looked after children in your schools are getting on, on a yearly basis, again without breaching individual children's confidentiality
 - how our health needs are being met and to identify any problems needing sorted out
 - reassurance that we are getting opportunities for leisure and social activities and to identify any gaps
 - the numbers of care leavers in Aberdeenshire, where we are living and what we are doing
 - whether we are in suitable accommodation and if we aren't, find out why and what you can do to sort things out
 - whether we have the right support if we are in College or University and follow our progress so that you can celebrate our achievements
 - whether we have the right support if we are in work
 - if we are unemployed make sure that we are given opportunities for work experience, apprenticeships and jobs through Aberdeenshire's Family Firm.

We think that you should get this information so that you can have an overview of how Aberdeenshire Council is carrying out its corporate parenting responsibilities, celebrate our successes and know where the challenges are.

We also think that it might be good if you can identify two Councillors as Champions for Looked after Children, one in the North and one in the South. We know that every young person has the right to speak with their own local councillor but we think it is important to have Champions who can be responsible for all the looked after children in their areas and can be identifiable and approachable to these children so that they can come to them if they have any good news, problems or concerns.



“We need a clear plan and the right people supporting us.”

We think that these Champions should have a particular responsibility for promoting corporate parenting across the council; for having an overview of how the council is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities; and have a role to meet with the YPOC Group and young people annually to hear about the successes and challenges for looked after children and care leavers.

We have drawn up a job description for the Champions and we think that interested councillors should be interviewed by looked after children for the post.

So how will we know that you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- Aberdeenshire Council should set up a Corporate Parenting page on the Aberdeenshire website and every year the Children’s Champions should report on all the information they get about how looked after children and young people and care leavers are getting on, without identifying individual young people unless you have their permission.
- This page should be used to report on how the council is meeting its corporate parenting responsibilities and to celebrate the achievements of looked after young people and care leavers. Only identify them with their permission.
- Tell children and young people what the council is doing well and if it needs to do some things better, what steps you will take to do this.
- If something has not been done include your plans for dealing with this.
- Meet the YPOC Group once a year to report this to them so that they can put it in their Rights Matters Newsletter and keep other looked after children informed.
- Send out a report in leaflet form to all looked after children on what you have done in the past year to achieve your corporate parenting role.

Chief Executive & Senior Managers in the Council

We think that the people at the head of the council also have a really important role to play as our corporate parent. We think that as the Chief Executive and senior managers you should have overall responsibility for making sure that children and young people who are looked after by Aberdeenshire Council are well looked after and get the chance to do the best they can in life.

You need to make sure that all the services in the council and partner agencies know what they should be doing as corporate parents and work together to get the best for their looked after children and care leavers.

You have key responsibility for making sure that the council keeps its promises to looked after children so you need to know what the promises are and to keep checking that they are being met or finding out what else needs to be done to ensure they are. We think that you should get all the same information that the councillors need to help you do this.

We think that as the Chief Executive you should ask for regular updates from your senior managers about how many looked after children there are, where we live and how we are getting on; and about us as care leavers to make sure that we are living somewhere suitable and are getting the support we need.

As Senior Managers we think that you should know what your Service is doing to make sure that they meet their responsibilities as a corporate parent as set out in the promises the council has made and to look at ways to develop that role. We think you should ask your managers to give you the information you need to make sure that all your staff are playing their part as a corporate parent.

So how will we know that you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- Make sure that the role of a corporate parent is included in induction training for all staff so that they know what it is, what promises have been made to looked after children and what responsibilities they have as a corporate parent.
- Use the Corporate Parenting page on the Aberdeenshire website to report to councillors and to children and young people on your progress on meeting your promises as a corporate parent to the children in your care.
- Tell children and young people what you think you are doing well and if you need to do some things better, what steps you will take to do this.
- As Chief Executive, extend your blog to young people to use or set up a new one.
- Meet with looked after children and young people and care leavers regularly through a special yearly event, to hear directly from us about how we think you are doing as a corporate parent – make time for us.
- Meet the YPOC Group once a year to report this to them so that they can put it in their Rights Matters Newsletter and keep other looked after children informed.

Teaching staff

Teachers and pupil support staff have a very important role in helping looked after children to make the most of their education. They can make the difference between whether looked after children succeed in their adult life or not.

We think that schools should all know who their looked after children are and should keep an eye on our progress and make sure we have the support we need in school.

We think it is important for teachers and pupil support staff to be aware that looked after children might be finding it difficult being away from home or with the challenges we face at home and to understand how this might affect our education. We think that you should get training and proper support to know and understand the challenges we can face as looked after children and young people.

“If you’ve been in trouble before and change your ways and do one little thing, teachers make a big deal out of it.”

We think it is important for us to get encouragement from teachers and support staff to make the most of our education. We need you to see us as individuals, give us your time to talk to us and listen to us properly. It is important that you recognise when we are struggling in school and find out the reason why, so that you can make sure that if we need extra support we can get it.

“A good teacher is someone who listens and understands.”

Make sure we have someone to go to who understands what it’s like to be looked after, if we need support. That can make all the difference to us.

We need you to work with the rest of the people who look after us to make sure we can get the best from our education.

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- More of us will be happy at school and doing well at school and getting the most from our education. This should be recorded and reported at our reviews and to councillors and senior management without identifying us individually.
- You need to ask us though – don’t just rely on exam results.
- You should put together information about how looked after young people are doing at school and how they get on after they leave school.
- There should be training for teaching staff on looked after children as a matter of course and on the duties and responsibilities of corporate parenting.

Social Workers

Social workers are very important to looked after children and young people and to care leavers. You have a key role to make sure that we are well looked after and all our needs are met.

We rely on you to take responsibility for our Care Plan and to work with other agencies to take forward the plan and ensure every area is met. We need you to keep us informed about our Care Plan and involve us in it. If there are problems with the Care Plan let us know and do your best to sort things out.

To do this we need you to be reliable and committed to visiting us and speaking to us, so you can get to know us as a real person and not just a file and can find out what is important to us. We need you to listen to us and to be honest with us and not to make decisions without talking to us and making sure we understand. We need you to keep our information confidential. If you need to share it, explain to us why and if possible ask for our consent. And we need you to do what you say you are going to do and not make promises you can't keep.

We need to be able to trust our social workers and to know that you are working to move things forward for us, to make sure we are kept safe and that we can have contact with our families unless there are good reasons not to. If you write a report you should let us read it or go over it with us to make sure we know what's in it.

“A good social worker doesn't let me down.”

“My social worker helps me understand things.”

“I like my social worker because she speaks to me and listens.”

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- There should be a Forum or other ways for children and young people to give feedback on their Social Worker.
- We should be able to fill in a short questionnaire at least once a year to say what we think about our social worker. We should get independent support to fill this in if we want.
- Team managers need to check that social workers are visiting us regularly. How often will depend on our circumstances but should be agreed between ourselves and our social worker.
- Team managers should make sure that social workers are going over their reports with us before our meetings.
- Team managers should also make sure that social workers build relationships with us and have our best interests at heart.
- Social workers should get enough time to visit us regularly and Team Managers should make sure of this. If there are problems with this they should report this to Senior Management.

“It’s hard when you move placements. Everyone is a stranger and the rules are all different.”

“If it is at all possible you should be able to see your family. If you aren’t able to it should be explained why you can’t.”



Foster Carers

Good foster carers can make all the difference to the lives of children and young people who are looked after, especially if you look after us well and as if we were your own family. We depend on you as our foster carers to provide us with care and support and to act as our parent on a day to day basis.



“The best foster carers give us support even after we have moved on. That is important to us.”

We think that it is important that you encourage us to do well with our education, and help us to do homework, or make sure we do it. You should also encourage us to keep healthy, making sure we get the right food to eat and looking after our emotional health by making sure we have someone to speak to when things are worrying us; and taking us to the doctor, dentist and optician when we need that.

We think you should encourage us to socialise and help us to develop our values and to know the right way to do things; and to become independent. All this will help us to develop our confidence. You also have a role to help keep us safe and to advocate for us at our meetings.

We need foster carers to be honest with us and treat us with respect; to talk to us about what we need and how we feel; and if we do things wrong, to tell us and help us to do things better. We all have our own challenges so it is important that foster carers can support us with them.

Foster carers need support too, so they should make sure that they can get this from their link worker and our social worker. They should also be accountable for their own learning.

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- Make sure we get the chance to give our views for Foster Care Reviews and listen and take our views into account during these reviews.
- Social Workers should visit us regularly and make sure we are happy where we live or help us to sort out any concerns.
- Looked after children should be able to access the Children’s Rights Service as and when needed.
- Make sure there is a proper complaints procedure for complaints against foster carers which children and young people can use.
- Make sure foster carers are properly trained and that they have someone to speak to for support as well.
- Monitor foster carer training and make sure it includes all of this.

Residential care staff

Residential care workers also have a very important role with looked after children and we need you to look after us properly and well and to treat us like you would your own children. It is important that you should speak to us and find out what we think about things. We need you to listen to us and take our views into account and help us to sort out day to day issues like family or school.

We need care staff to treat us with respect and the way they would like to be treated.

We need you to help us with our everyday needs like going to school and health appointments. We think it is important that you make sure we are okay on a regular basis, and if not, find out the reasons and help us sort things out. If we behave badly don't just assume the worst. Help us to tell you what the problem is and help us to sort it out.

We would also like you to make sure we are getting equal opportunities at school, leisure and health and are not stigmatised through being looked after. We would also like you to encourage us in extra activities.

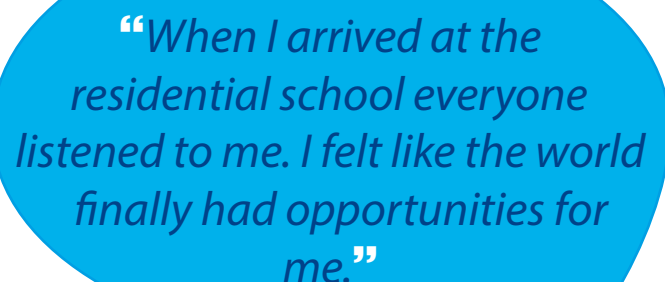
We know that all children need rules to make sure that we keep ourselves safe. We depend on our care staff to set these rules and explain the reasons for the rules and what will happen if they're broken. The rules should be fair, everyone should know what they are, but there should be a bit of flexibility for different ages and different needs.

We think it is important that all staff are properly trained and supported to do their job.

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- There should be regular visits by an independent person e.g. Children's Rights/Who Cares? so that we can tell them about any concerns or worries and they help us to sort them out and can report these back with our permission.
- Regular inspection reports by the Care Inspectorate should always get the views of children and young people.
- Social Workers should visit us regularly and make sure we are happy where we live or help us to sort out any concerns.
- Looked after children should be able to access the Children's Rights Service and Who Cares Scotland? as and when needed.
- Children and young people should get access to their daily log.
- Unit managers should write an annual report saying what you are doing to care for the children you look after.



“When I arrived at the residential school everyone listened to me. I felt like the world finally had opportunities for me.”

LAC Review Managers

Because LAC Review Managers chair our meetings at least every six months you are in a really good position to make sure that looked after children and young people are doing well in their lives and getting the care they need.

We think that when you are chairing our reviews you should make sure that everyone involved in a LAC Review follows our Guide to Meetings, and you should make sure the views of children and young people are heard and taken into account.

You have an important role to ensure that everyone who supports us is doing their job properly to make sure that we are getting all the services we need; and if not, to do something about this. We think that you should also make sure that decisions made at one meeting are followed through even if people change.



“I don't really like meetings but I like it when the people at the meeting listen to what we need to say.”

We also think it is important that if we need extra help you do your best to make sure we get it. We need you to make sure that contact with our family and friends is looked at and put in place unless there are good reasons not to; and to make sure that we understand our own care plan.


We think it would be good if you put together a Meetings checklist based on our Guide to Meetings and make sure it is followed by all those involved in meetings. Because you have an overview of all our care plans, you should also be responsible for highlighting trends and issues and for keeping information about planning and feeding these in to Management.

We also think that you have a role to follow up with young people between reviews on issues that were raised and action that was agreed, to make sure they are being addressed.

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- You should have produced and be using a Meetings checklist, based on our Guide to Meetings.
- Where necessary, you should be keeping in touch with young people between reviews and making sure things are followed up for us.
- At the end of the year you should produce a report for young people and management to highlight trends and issues.



“The people doing the meeting should encourage children to speak up for themselves.”

Housing staff

Housing staff are especially important to looked after young people when we are moving on from care. This is a scary time for many of us as we take steps towards independence and looking after ourselves. We have a lot to learn and often we are doing it at a much younger age than other young people who are not looked after. Having safe and suitable accommodation can make all the difference as to how well we manage.

We think that you should make sure that we have access to appropriate and safe housing when we leave care. We will all have different needs so we think there should be a range of accommodation options and that they should be in various areas across Aberdeenshire, so that if we want to stay in the same area that we were in care because all our supports are there, we can.



“We need the right people supporting us.”

We also need support and advice about what accommodation's available, and we need you to make information on options accessible to us. And we need you to make sure we can manage our own tenancy and give us the supports we will need to do this. It is important that you remember that we will all have our own challenges and will need different kinds of support. Some of us will find it really hard to manage rules and regulations if they are too inflexible and will need help to manage the expectations other people put on us. We would like to see more flexible rules that take account of our individual needs.

To do this we think it is important that you have well trained and knowledgeable staff and policies and guidance for other professionals to follow.

So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- You should report back to us via the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group, in the form of an annual report, highlighting all of the above
 - How many have accessed housing?
 - What type of accommodation we have been given?
 - What support we have had?
 - How well we have managed in the accommodation provided?
- You should get our views every year of what we have thought of the service, what has worked well for us and what we think could be better, through a survey questionnaire.
- This can also be put on a Corporate Parenting web page, taking care not to identify us individually without our permission.

Health Staff

Looked after children and young people will come across lots of health professionals in their life and we rely on you all to meet our health needs when we need this input. This will include our GPs, dentists, school nurses, health visitors, opticians and mental health specialists.

We rely on all of you to ensure that we are emotionally and physically healthy and that we have access to appropriate services when we need them. We think it is important that you remember that we may have extra support needs because of our experiences so please do your best to give us the help we need when we need it.

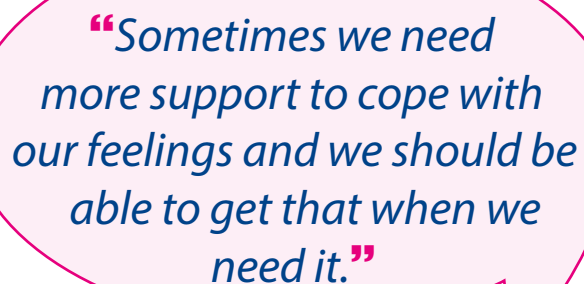
Don't just put us on a waiting list.

When we have complex health needs, please make sure that someone from health comes along to our meetings to make sure that everyone is working together to give us the health care we need.

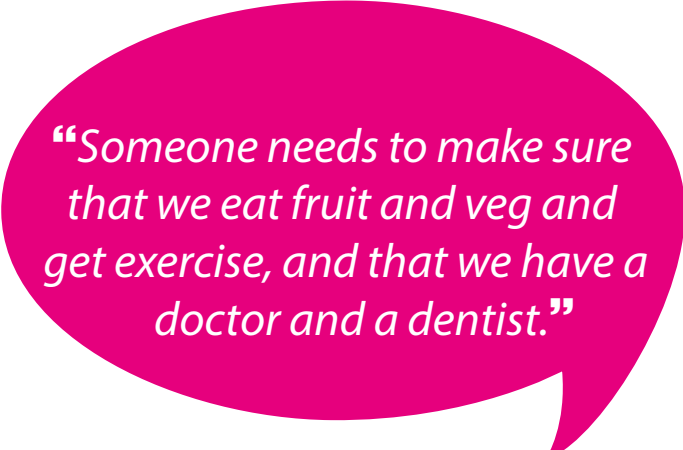
So how will children and young people know you are doing this and doing it well?

This is what we think should happen

- When we have our LAC Reviews, we are always asked about our health. If we are not getting the supports we need that should be recorded and addressed.
- You should report back to us via the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group, in the form of an annual report, highlighting how many of us are getting the health services we need and any gaps.
- This will mean that more of us will be getting the health services we need.
- There should be training for health staff on looked after children as a matter of course and on the duties and responsibilities of corporate parenting.



“Sometimes we need more support to cope with our feelings and we should be able to get that when we need it.”



“Someone needs to make sure that we eat fruit and veg and get exercise, and that we have a doctor and a dentist.”

Conclusion

This is what the young people in the YPOC Group think you should all be doing as corporate parents. There will be other things that you all know you should be doing on a day to day basis and when you are planning our services, to make sure that we get the same opportunities as your own children would.

Remember too, that wherever you work in the council, you are still our corporate parent, so even if we haven't mentioned you here, you still need to act as a good parent would for looked after children.

We hope you will find this helpful.

The YPOC Group

March 2014





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