



Lifelong Links - building lifelong support networks for children and young people in care

Lifelong Links is a new project being offered to children & young people in care in Hertfordshire, that hopes to find and safely connect them to their family members and other known adults, such as former foster carers and teachers. This innovative approach aims to identify and engage relatives and other supportive adults connected to a child in care, who are willing to make a lifelong commitment to that child. Research shows that the continuity and permanence of these familial relationships will offer the child ongoing emotional and practical support, help provide an explanation of historical events, and reinforce the child's identity and sense of belonging.

In May 2016, Tom* was accommodated into long term local authority foster care under a full care order, due to concerns around drug use and domestic abuse at home. When Tom came into care, the only contact he had with family was sporadic contact with his mum (his dad died when he was 6) and occasional telephone contact with his maternal grandmother. His mum sadly died a few months later and soon after, his maternal uncle contacted children's services about seeing Tom, around the same time the Lifelong Links trial started. The Lifelong Links coordinator worked with Tom to help him identify his maternal and paternal relatives and by the end of the project, he was aware of more than 80 living family members. With the coordinator, he planned his Family Group Conference and invited 35 relatives to meet him and to create a lifelong plan of support and contact. Since the review conference in July 2017, Tom has had regular contact with his family, meeting up, day trips, telephone calls, birthday and Christmas cards and a big birthday party, hosted by his foster carers.

Lifelong Links will be offered to children and young people under 16, who have been in care for less than three years, where there is no plan for them to live within their family or to be adopted. If you would like more information on Lifelong Links or you know of a young person who you think may be interested and meets the above criteria, please contact Ben Carr (ben.carr@hertfordshire.gov.uk) on 01992 588346.

**not his real name. The young person has given consent for this information to be used.*