

# The Hackney Pledge

## To Looked-After Children and Young People

Created by Children, Young People and Hackney Staff  
supported by Hackney Corporate Parenting Board

### Introduction

The Hackney Pledge to looked-after children and young people was created during 2008/9 by the Pledge Leaders Youth Group, who consulted with over 100 children and young people in care from Hackney about how they wanted services to be more child-centred. The consultation was completed via questionnaires, group sessions, and interviews in person and by phone. Hackney staff and social workers were also consulted and the Pledge represents the common themes of how children, young people and staff want to see services develop.

This Pledge document has been agreed by the Hackney Council Corporate Parenting Board (October 2009), and drives the work of the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2009-10 with annual action Plans created to forward all changes. A sample of foster carers was also consulted on the final Pledge and is in agreement with the developments.

The Hackney 'Our Voice, Our Choice' (OVOC) Children in Care Council now play a critical role in developing the new work and systems, promoting the Pledge and reviewing, monitoring and evaluating Action Plans. OVOC will be asking to see staff reports on how progress is being made and will regularly consult other children and young people to check that change is happening and the Pledge is making a real difference.

This final agreed version has been checked against all previous versions and is for service providers/staff to use in their work. There are also appropriate and shortened versions for children and young people available from the Youth Service. This Pledge will be reviewed by October 2010.

The Hackney OVOC Council and Participation Unit  
Youth Service  
December 2009

# 1. Coming into Care

Hackney pledges to listen to children and young people's feelings and worries and to give clear, continuous and supportive information about placements and carers

## **Hackney will:**

- Give clear reasons to children/young people about why they are coming into care in the form of a letter, pictures, or a booklet; personal to each young person, that can be kept and referred to after a verbal explanation has been given
- Ensure that all family members /friends have been asked to see if they can offer a home for the child/ young person before they are taken into care (as is standard practice)
- Be honest and clear with children and young people about the plans for them, especially about whether or not they are likely to be returning home
- Provide a full and detailed information pack about coming into care (what to expect, who's who, your rights, support etc) to go to all children/young people. The pack will be in a variety of forms and age appropriate
- Train and support the Hackney 'Our Voice Our Choice!' Council (OVOC - Hackney's Children in Care Council) to be able to offer the opportunity for new children/young people in care to talk directly to their peers with experience of the Hackney care system
- Give an information profile on all carers to children and young people before they move in, which gives an idea of the family/placement they are going to – the set-up of the household, hobbies and interests
- Develop a new questionnaire system to bring out more information about the personality of carer and the child/young person to be used in the matching process
- Make sure counselling is offered to all children/young people
- Move children's belongings in suitcases
- Help children and young people think about how they will answer some of the difficult questions they may face such as what to call foster carers, who to tell at school and friend's questions etc
- Ensure that all children and young people should be able to visit a new placement before they move in and if possible to stay overnight. When emergency moves happen children/young people should be given the carers profile.

## 2. Being in Care

Hackney pledges that you will have a home where you feel cared for, loved and safe.'

### **Hackney will:**

- Do everything possible to provide loving, secure and stable placements
- Involve children and young people in all usual 'parent/child' decision making within a placement e.g. about food, activities and outings, holidays, room decoration, etc, and ensure that these things are on the agenda for placement agreement meetings
- Ensure that all carers treat fostered children 'as their own', for example, by being part of all family trips /holidays and displaying photos of the young person in care as well as their birth family photos with as many photos and of the same size. Other evidence of the child within the family should also be displayed e.g. drawings, things children have made etc
- Place children and young people with carers who will respect their religious choices and vice versa. This aspect of caring will be covered in detail within the assessment of potential foster carers and in diversity training provided to all carers.
- Produce and publicise an 'allowance' guide for young people, carers and social workers so that everyone knows clearly the agreed rates for pocket money, going out money, holiday plans, birthdays etc.
- Support and train young people to be involved in the recruitment, assessment and training of all Hackney foster carers
- Ensure that all carers will keep skills up to date by completing six pieces of training a year if they wish to continue to be foster carers
- Ensure that all new carers complete one days training with young people before they take up their first placement
- Provide compulsory semi-independence training for all carers
- Establish a way for private and independent foster carers who are caring for Hackney young people to be enabled, encouraged or required to come on training provided by Hackney young people
- Offer carers more specialist training if they need it to be able to support children in school and with their homework. If this is not possible to ensure that the Looked After Children Education Service is involved and offer support in school and with homework
- Praise and recognise carers for supporting young people with their educational achievements
- Offer young people a "break" – a holiday for themselves that also gives the carer a break

### 3. Meetings and reviews

Hackney pledges to involve you in meetings about your care to make sure that any decisions are based on what you really want to happen

#### **Hackney will:**

- Consult with individual children and young people about how meetings will happen including giving them support to chair their own meetings if wanted. Children and young people will not be talked about as if they are not in the room.
- Design new ways of making all meetings with children and young people 'child-centred'; relaxed, informal, positive and comfortable. Children and young people will not be expected to talk about other people in the room e.g. their foster carer or family and if confrontation is likely staff will think ahead and make sure any issues are discussed before the meeting with the right people.
- Ensure that staff behave seriously about children and young people's meetings: arrive on time, make sure they have planned adequate time for the meeting and not give the feeling that they may need to be somewhere else
- Provide all children and young people with a 'child-friendly' 'Meeting Information Sheet' to explain what the meeting is for and how social workers will make meetings comfortable and relaxed
- Talk about personal issues such as health, sexual health/activity, obesity etc in the Review meeting only if the child or young person agrees, otherwise such issues will be dealt with as the child/young person wants
- Ensure that all Reviewing Officers meet with children and young people on their own on a day before a review meeting happens. This may happen in conjunction with the rollout of a new online review tool that will help children and young people to be open about their experiences and what they want to change.
- Make reviews more like a celebration; they will be smaller and children/young people will be encouraged to say more about what they don't/do want discussed in the meeting; the consultation forms that go to young people before their reviews will be redesigned by staff and young people.

## 4. Information about you

Hackney pledges that all private information will be kept private and shared only with people that need to know (unless there's a danger to carers, young people or staff).

### **Hackney will:**

- Respect children and young people's privacy in all matters (unless there is a danger to children/young people, carers and social workers). Young people will know who knows what about them and why
- Ensure that all foster carers do not talk loosely about the child/young person they care for to their own family, their friends or other carers
- Train and remind all staff and carers that young people have a right to see the records Hackney keep and so be mindful, on writing notes, of what it may feel like for a young person to read their records in the future

## 5. Social Workers

Hackney pledges that your social worker will get to know you well, stay in touch between visits, keep you informed and celebrate your achievements.

### **Hackney will:**

- Encourage all social workers to build strong relationships with children and young people; social workers should take children/young people out to get to know about them and their needs
- Develop a questionnaire that helps children/young people to reflect openly about their relationship with their social worker and put forward these ideas to the reviewing officer at each review
- Involve children/young people in decisions about how often the social worker visits; social workers will visit at least every 6 weeks unless the child/young person asks for something different. They will stay in touch between visits by phone, text and letter. Visit frequency will be monitored and if it is not enough, will be dealt with
- Ensure there is differing and appropriate levels of contact for different age groups and changing life circumstances; e.g. coming into care, moving placement, leaving care, events in birth families, difficult anniversaries etc
- Inform each child or young person of their “lead” worker within the social work unit
- Make sure that social workers do what they say they will do and provide accurate information for children and young people

## 6. Leaving our Care

Hackney pledges that on leaving care children and young people will have the right support and life skills to be able to live successfully and independently.

### **Hackney will:**

- Provide life skills training for young people beginning from 12 upwards, with different expectations at different ages to ensure that young people learn age appropriate skills with an increased “push” around 16
- Provide easy quick access to a range of emotional support/counselling for care leavers
- Work with the Leaving Care Team and OVOC to help young people to meet with others who may have already left care to share experiences and learn about the reality of independent living
- Ensure all independence training includes practical tasks like shopping, budgeting, cooking, paying rent, benefits etc as well as ‘emotional intelligence’ training such as self motivation, managing feelings etc
- Facilitate a ‘summer programme’ of life skills training for the older age group run by the Leaving Care Team
- Consult with OVOC about the term “leaving care” to see if, as a name, it produces anxiety and would be better changed to a more positive term
- Work more intensively with foster carers during the potentially difficult teenage years, with the expectation that they will keep placements going through this time
- Ensure that young people can remain in foster care until they are ready to leave to independence
- Give care leavers the necessary support and information to understand the “bidding system” when trying to get their permanent housing
- Ensure that any care leavers can access given good quality housing – “somewhere I would be happy for my child to live” (quote; social worker)
- Provide an education/personal advisor for care leavers up to 24 to assist with university/college applications and links to training or employment
- Provide a tutor for young people in university education who want extra help (particularly those who are speaking English as a second language)
- Provide work experience, training and apprenticeships for care leavers in all areas of the council such as: leisure, environment, housing, youth services, and administration
- Ensure that the Children and Young People’s Services will fund care leavers to undertake university
- Ensure that all Council staff offer mentoring to care leavers to help support and motivate them towards education, training or employment during the transition time of leaving care
- Work with every young person 18 and over to have a story book or record of their lives – what happened when, key achievements, events, who was in their lives at different times, with photos and letters from people who have known them over the years

## 7. Rights and responsibilities

Hackney pledges to inform children and young people of their rights, listen to complaints and take immediate action.

### **Hackney will:**

- Create a range of creative, accessible and participative ways to ensure that all looked-after children and young people know about their rights and entitlements; e.g. via 'Our Voice Our Choice' Road shows, leaflets, a LAC website and training
- Provide training for all social workers and carers to ensure that they are able to spread accurate information about looked-after children's rights
- Work together with OVOC to reduce labelling of children within the department; OVOC to initiate a positive image campaign within the service, more widely across the council and with the general public to change the image of care
- Develop a new information poster using a step by step picture format to explain the formal complaints procedure
- Provide and promote various options for children/young people to use to make complaints or talk about concerns, in addition to using the formal procedure, with clear explanations about what will happen in each situation
- Treat all comments, feedback and complaints seriously e.g. by giving a written response from managers, and/or recording what young people, carers and social workers have said and agreed to do.