Who Am I?

Making Records meaningful

Research to support archiving and record-keeping
in Victorian Out of Home Care

Co-constructing Who Am I? Ensuring the voice of the child or young person is at the heart of 'the record'

Current Practice WORKSHOP 2: 26 June, 2009

Preliminary discussion paper:

A collaborative life story archive? Issues for reflection and discussion

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Background

In the Who Am I? project to date, an emergent theme has been *Improving the child's voice in and ownership of 'the record'*. 'The record' has several dimensions and the focus of this paper is on the collaborative building of a life story archive. This discussion paper draws from and integrates: the concerns of the previous *Who Am I?* Current Practice Workshop 1 (24 April 2009); a review of the literature; and preparatory visits to a range of Victorian community service organisations (CSOs).

Who Am I? Current Practice Workshop 1 (24 April 2009) highlighted problems surrounding the suitability of the agency 'care file' for supporting the child's sense of identity and addressing their needs for information. Key tensions emerged in relation to the ownership, authorship, purpose and accessibility of the 'care' files. The comments included:

- Statutory recording style frequently focuses on risk and negative incidents
- Records tend to be de-personalised by managerial and proceduralised recording
- May be difficult for care leavers to find relevant, balanced and accurate information in relation to their identity and experiences in the large volumes of records currently being created
- Limited access to files due to restrictive interpretations of freedom of information and privacy legislation
- Difficulties obtaining children's essential documents, including: birth certificates, Medicare and health care cards and medical histories

The possibility of developing a separate archive for the child was also raised during the workshop to restore priority to the child's access to important personal documents, memorabilia, information, memories and history. A range of needs were identified:

- Planned arrangements for recording children's memories, stories and important events
- Planned arrangements for retaining and storing children's personal items and memorabilia

To inform this discussion paper, a range of organisations were consulted during March, April, May and June '09, including: Anglicare, Berry St, Bendigo Aboriginal Co-op, CREATE, MacKillop, St Lukes, Westcare & VACCA. They raised a number of concerns in relation to life story work. The comments included:

- Lack of life story resources and training within the sector
- Loss of practice wisdom and life story work skills in workers
- Variability in quality of life story work undertaken with children – some children leave care with carefully created work while others receive very little
- The need for a comparison of different life story work models and resources to inform practice

- Attention to the risk of re-traumatising the child - need to consider the different stages of life story work and ensure proper supervision
- Care leavers often did not have access to 100 points of identity on leaving care
- Confusing relationship between LAC and life story work – 'many workers thought LAC replaced the need for life story work'
- Time constraints and workload pressure – 'workers can't do any more'
- Questions around one's identity and life story may become important during different stages in life. Records need to address the child's developing identity as well as contain information and memories that may be important for the future.

In summary, organisations welcomed the return of focus to life story work with children and young people. It was agreed that a clearer understanding of the life story work concept needed to be developed, including a focus on models, sector resources, and realistic planning for a manageable, principled application.

With these key issues in mind, this discussion paper reviews the professional literature and poses further questions surrounding the co-construction of the child's life story. We continue to be guided by the key research questions of the Current Practice strand of *Who Am I?*, that is,

A. What principles should underpin record-keeping and archival programs for children and young people currently in out of home care to support their ongoing construction of identity?

B. What are the factors which enable or create barriers to effective practice in record-keeping and archival programs for front line workers, managers and organisations providing out of home 'care'?

Introduction

Lifebooks emerged in the 1970s to give children placed for adoption a factual narrative about their life history and birth families in order to prepare them for permanency (Rose & Philpot, 2005). Since then the concept has been used in out-of-home care and has shifted to a broader terminology of 'life story work'. Over time, the life story work has been developed through a range of **key texts** (refer to reference list), **practice guides** (Fahlberg, 1991; Henry, 2005; Nicholls, 2003; NSW DoCS, 2008; Rose & Philpot, 2005; Ryan & Walker, 2007; Scott & Cameron, 2004), **models and resources** (Betts & Ahmad, 2003; Camis, 2001; Fostering Network, 1992; NSW DoCS, 2006; Tongerie, 2009; VACCA) as well as **community and private sector training courses** (MacKillop Family Services, Victoria – *no longer running*; Association of Children's Welfare Agencies, NSW; British Association of Adoption and Fostering).

Over the last decade, the life story work literature has been invigorated by critiques of the out-of-home 'care' system as well as developments in key areas including trauma, record-keeping and information technology. However, it seems that more collaboration is required to translate this into practice. Currently, life story work seems to be a 'loose concept' that appears vaguely understood, unevaluated and variable in practice (Baynes, 2008; Betts & Ahmad, 2003) and is yet to be consolidated into sector-wide policy and standards.

In order to support policy and practice in this area, it is suggested that the key developments mentioned above require integration into a more coherent and manageable practice framework. An exploration of this task, including the concerns raised by agency partners during visits and Workshop 1, will structure the focus of this discussion paper.

Please note this paper proceeds in two parts. Part one draws from and integrates current research (including research undertaken in the *Who Am I?* project to date) to suggest a more coherent framework for practice. This framework provides the 'ground' for part two, which considers and poses questions in relation to: the use of different models; issues surrounding a manageable, principled application; and the range of sector resources required to consolidate the child's life story as a core task and an informed part of the 'care' system.

PART ONE – Developing a more coherent framework for practice

Trauma and therapeutic life story work

Much attention has focused on the placement instability, identity issues and attachment disorders experienced by children and young people in the out-of-home 'care' system (Glare, Honner, London & Scott, 2003; Rose & Philpot, 2005; Triseliotis 1983). In this context, Rose & Philpot (2005) suggest that the traditional factual narrative provided for

adopted children be replaced with a different kind of life story work. They consider that 'children in care often have a negative sense of themselves, a damaged sense of identity' (p.26) and may benefit from a 'deeper, richer, more detailed approach' (p.14) based on a therapeutic model.

The logic of this model derives from the neurobiology of trauma. The central concern is that trauma can distort the child's internal working model and attachment style in ways which become 'burned into the unconscious at the neurobiological level' (Schore, 1994, cited by Rose & Philpot, 2005, p.32). Life story work with traumatised children is then defined as a way to assist children to make sense of that distortion, 'gently loosen their defences and open themselves up to nourishment through exploration, knowledge and realization' (Rose & Philpot, 2005, p.34).

The model progresses through three stages:

(i) Gathering information (the external story)

(ii) Internalising the life story
Making sense of the external story enables the co-construction and internalisation of the child's own life story. This stage 'allows children to explore safely and securely how they have reached where they are and to attach identity and meaning to their lives, to consider, to think, to understand and to reflect (p.84). Rose & Philpot emphasise the importance of this stage: 'Without such an opportunity, the child's own beliefs about what has happened and who they are will take on the form of fact' (p.91).

(iii) Producing the life story book

Crucial to the therapeutic model is the time to develop a relationship with the child, where the focus is on the process, rather than the product (Ryan & Walker, 2007). Schofield & Beek (2006; cited by Ryan & Walker, 2007, p.6) capture this point in saying that, children 'in care' *are on a journey, and many parts of it are difficult. They need to feel that someone is with them on that journey, and they need a framework to help them think about it and feel safe'*.

Rose & Philpot's (2005) therapeutic model of life story work with traumatised children has made an important contribution to the literature. However, not all children and young people will be able or sufficiently supported to complete this work in 'care'. In reality, 'internalisation' is unlikely to be a bounded process with a beginning and end; for many, this process may develop and progress in stages over time. The ongoing relevance of the childhood life story is reflected in an emerging separate strand of literature that focuses on the importance of recording memories, stories and information about the young person's life. MacKillop family services, for instance, have learnt much about the information and identity needs of clients throughout the life course as children, young people and care leavers (Glare, Honner, London & Scott, 2003; Murray, Malone & Glare, 2008; Scott & Cameron, 2004).

The importance of record-keeping: Memories, identity and self-esteem

Stable and enhancing connections with family and community are crucial to the development of a positive and continuous identity for children and young people (Glare, Honner, London & Scott, 2003; Moss, 2009). In a system plagued by placement instability, serious concerns have been raised over the 'risk of systemic abuse of children in care'[1] through the resulting identity issues and attachment disorders (Glare, Honner, London & Scott, 2003, p.12). While placement instability is a complex problem, children's trauma is often further compounded by the loss of connections, memories, photographs, stories and information about childhood, as well as opportunities to understand them, which are normally available to children living with their families of origin.

Key reasons for the loss of children's life history have been identified:
- Multiple 'care' placements and worker changes (Glare, Honner, London & Scott, 2003; Scott & Cameron, 2004)
- Lack of consistent systems for recording and storing children's memorabilia (Who Am I? Workshop 1 April 24th 2009)
- Disconnection from family and community, including tensions in worker relationships with parents (Agency visits; Scott & Cameron, 2004)

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[1] To reduce the risks to children and young people in out-of-home 'care', MacKillop's (Glare, et al. 2003) *Submission to the Senate Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care* underlines children's needs for stability in placements and relationships, greater attention to identity books and emphasis on family connections.

As a result, Scott & Cameron (2004, p.63) recommend that 'practice needs to place a strong emphasis on identity development, and on preserving items that will help children and young people understand themselves and develop in self esteem'. This directive raises several important questions:

- What parts of the child's life should be recorded to assist the development of identity and fill in the life story? (We consider this further in the later section that reviews life story work models).
- How can the 'care system' meet its parental responsibility to ensure important items are preserved and stored for children and young people?

Specific memory and life story recording tools will be explored further when we review the current array of life story work models. More generally, however, MacKillop has learnt that records have layers of significance and may become important during different life stages (J. Glare, p.comm, April 29th '09). For instance, they assist care leavers to construct life stories as well as find out practical information such as exact date of birth and medical history (Murray, Malone & Glare, 2008).

An initiative used by MacKillop to preserve children's personal items has involved providing identity and memorabilia archive boxes for children (Murray, Malone & Glare, 2008). This idea of keeping a 'treasure box' is also a broader practice supported in the published and online life story work literature (Nicholls, 2003). Issues around storage will be considered further in part two of this paper.

In summary, this strand of the literature highlights the important role of practical and life story records as well as personal items and memorabilia in supporting the identity and life story of children and young people when they are in 'care' as well as into the future. In the unfortunate context of widespread placement instability, Cook-Cottone & Beck (2007) underline the importance of the life story archive as a means of placing a sense of permanence in the child's hands.

Contemporary definitions and goals of Life Story Work

As demonstrated so far, multi-layered foci appear in the research. These include the need for:

- Preserving basic identity and practical information
- Retaining memories; supporting identity and self-esteem
- Therapeutic understanding

Recent definitions and goals reflect and integrate the second and third layers, providing a dual focus at the level of the 'record' and at the level of 'therapeutic experience' or relationship-based understanding.

> *Life story work is a method used to record the child or young person's history and personal development and assist them to develop a sense of self in relation to their life experiences.*
>
> *It is a record of a child or young person's life in words, pictures, photos and documents made by the child or young person with help from a trusted adult or other person having a meaningful relationship with the child or young person* (New South Wales, Department of Community Services, undated).
>
> *Life story work allows children to explore safely and securely how they have reached where they are and to attach identity and meaning to their lives, to consider, to think, to understand and to reflect* (Rose & Philpot, 2005, p.84).

The above definitions are general in nature, so a review of the goals may be useful in identifying important dimensions and aspects of life story 'work'.

The New South Wales, Department of Community Services (2008, p.1) suggests life story work can help children and young people to:

- Develop a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem through learning about and accepting their past
- Gain an accurate record of family background, culture and history
- Make sense of their past, and gain a balanced understanding of the present
- Feel connected to significant people and places in their past, their family of origin, culture and heritage
- Understand the reasons for their entry into out-of-home care and any later moves to new placements
- Piece together fragments of their lives about which they may have limited information

Betts & Ahmad (2003, p.6) identify a range of therapeutic goals. These are to:

- Identify connections between the past, present and future
- Facilitate attunement
- Increase trust of adults
- Help the child recognise and resolve strong emotions related to past events
- Separate reality from fantasy or magical thinking

While there are some excellent life story work innovations in the sector, practitioners have called for a clearer understanding and a more consistent application of the concept. Some suggestions follow.

A new practice framework: The Life Story Work Pyramid?

Nicholls (2005, p.33) claims traditional life story work is failing. In response, he calls for the development of a new model that will ensure:
- A structural framework, guiding when to start, when to do what and when to end
- A deeper focus on the process of life story work, rather than a task-centred lifebook approach
- Anecdotal aspects of a child's memories are captured and recorded
- Records are produced even for children who are unwilling or unable to participate
- A planned, team-based approach that does not rely on a sole worker
- The needs of children in a range of situations are addressed, not solely those moving to permanency

These comments will be explored further in part two. As a starting point, it is suggested that the life story work pyramid (figure 1) may provide a structured space upon which life story work tools and application principles can be debated and developed. This development is planned to occur through the *Who Am I?* Current Practice Workshop 2 (26 June 09) combined with further stakeholder consultation including interviews with care leavers.

Figure 1. The Life Story Work Pyramid
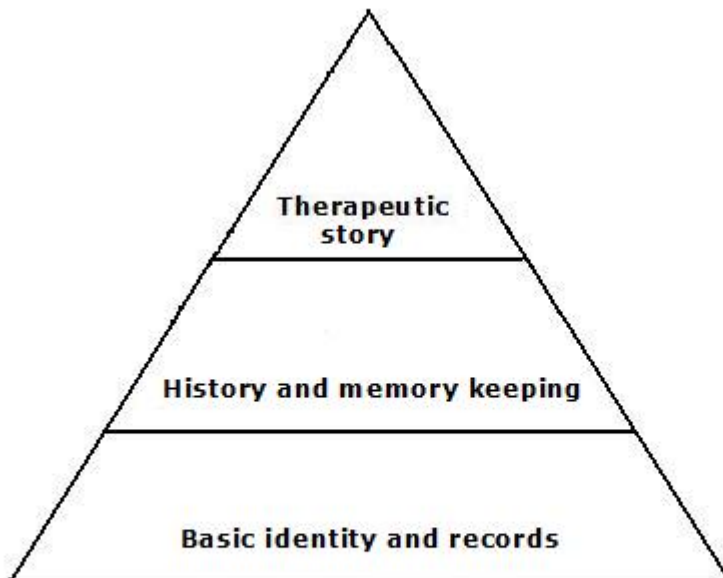
This pyramid was conceived as a way of depicting the multi-layered foci discussed in the above review of the literature[2]. In this way, the life story work archive can also serve as the child's personal file. In a closer look at each level of the pyramid, we've included a few suggestions from partner organisations below:

Basic identity and records:
Need to have basic documents and information to be able to support the child's sense of identity. Partner organisations have made some suggestions for inclusion.
- Essential information: birth certificate, genealogy (genogram/family tree), addresses of family members and grandparents, court orders etc.
- 100 points of identification, including: birth certificate, Medicare card, health care card, passport, citizenship papers etc.
- Medical History, including: family history, genetic disorders and immunization history.
- Index of child's broader records, including: cultural plan, educational plan, LAC plan, statutory case plan.
- **What else might be included in this layer?**

History and memory keeping

> *'Knowing simple things about their past – where they used to live, who looked after them, what they and their former carer(s) looked like – helps children and young people shape a history necessary for the development of a sense of identity'* (Scott & Cameron, 2004, p.59).

It is suggested that this work involve the child, child's carer(s), key worker, birth family and other important people and might include:
- Connecting to family, culture, religion, school and community history
- Educational History
- Recording history of placements and carers, including entry into 'care'
- Activities and achievements, practice example: Westcare 'Creating Dreams' program
- Recording and storing anecdotes, stories, cards and letters
- **What else might be included in this layer? What types of information are important?**

Therapeutic story: Connecting the past, present and future.
Consider context and 'untold stories' (Baynes, 2008). Emphasis is on process rather than product (Ryan & Walker, 2007). Work at this level may or may not be recorded, depending on the child's wishes. Some possible inclusions follow:

- Lifebooks, with a focus on connecting the past, present and future
- Child-devised ways of recording their co-constructed understanding of their own story
- Practice examples: 'As eye see it'
- Planning for leaving 'care'
- **What else might be included in this layer?**

The life story work pyramid is an attempt to provide a framework to support practice. It seeks to structure in important layers drawn from the literature and practice wisdom. At the same time flexibility is maintained, as children and their care-teams need to select appropriate and relevant models, tools and methods to build the archive. The 'work' itself needs to be guided by application principles discussed in part two of this paper.

Questions:
- **Does your organisation currently follow any guidelines for doing life story work? (name the guideline document used)**
- **Where do your life story work practices fit on the pyramid?**
- **What parts do you do well (give examples)? At what point in the child's 'care' career do you do particular work, for what purpose?**

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[2] It is interesting to note that a range of authors (Baynes, 2008; Betts & Ahmad, 2003; Fahlberg, 1991; Nicholls, 2003; Rose & Philpot, 2005) present similar iterations of this model in their work.

- **Where are the gaps?**
- **Are there some elements of the story within the life story pyramid that essentially are the responsibility of particular people (eg. The child protection worker, parent or carer)?**

PART TWO – A Consideration of Life Story Work Models, Application Principles and Sector Consolidation

Models, methods, tools and resources

A range of life story work models, methods and tools have been creatively used with children and young people. Some examples follow.

Life Story Books/Proformas

Lifebooks are the most widespread form of life story work and are available in a range of forms: as published books, proforma documents and digital CD-ROMs. In addition to this, organisations are adapting, restyling and creating a range of proformas of their own.

Published examples include:
- *My Book about Me* (Fostering Network, 1992)
- *My Life and Me* (Camis, 2001)
- *My Life Story Book* (NSW, DoCS, 2006)
- *My Life Story CD-ROM* (Betts & Ahmad, 2003)
- VACCA's Life Story Resource
- *The Aboriginal Life Story Book* (Liz Tongerie, in press)

Life story books typically feature a range of information tools including:

Where I was born	*Schools attended*
My family tree (tree diagram, genogram etc)	*Friends*
Connection to culture	*Holidays*
Lifemap/Ecomap	*Life graph/Timeline*
Anecdotes & stories	*History of carers/placements: What happened to me*
and why?	

The value of lifebooks in capturing and recording important parts of the child's life is supported by a substantial literature base (Fahlberg, 1991; Glare, et al. 2003; Henry, 2005; Nicholls, 2003; Rose & Philpot, 2005; Ryan & Walker, 2007; Scott & Cameron, 2004). They have been widely used as the base from which to connect the past with the present and co-construct the child's life story. A range of benefits have been mentioned, including: resolving losses through opportunities for grief work as well as helping children understand their feelings and learn to cope with them in new ways (Rose & Philpot, 2005; Scott & Cameron, 2004).

The critical point emphasised in the literature is that the therapeutic value of the lifebook lies in the quality of the relationship developed with the child. It is considered that the important part is the child's 'internalisation' (Rose & Philpot, 2005) or 'how the story becomes part of the child' (J. Glare, p.comm, 29th April '09).

Perhaps for these reasons, concerns have been raised around the use of standardised proformas and a task-centred approach. Other concerns have centred on the risk of simplifying and sanitising children's life stories through 'rose-coloured glasses' (Baynes, 2008; Fahlberg, 1991; Rose & Philpot, 2005).

- **How has your organisation made creative use of lifebooks? Describe any relevant innovations/experiences?**

Multi-media/ Digital technologies

In many ways, young people are building identity and life stories on their own through the widespread use of digital technology. However, children and young people in 'care' don't always have the same level of access to these technologies as do their peers.

- **Does your organisation have any examples of the innovative use of multi-media in preserving memories and stories for children & young people?**

Creative arts

Art, play and narrative therapy have been described as effective tools, particularly in communicating with very young children (Moss, 2009). Albums and decorated scrapbooks have been widely used for keeping photographs. Several organisations have provided innovative scrapbooking classes for carers.

- **Describe any experience your organisation has with the use of creative arts (include any training for carers)**
- **Are there any other life story tools that aren't mentioned here?**

Shared experiences & achievements

Positive experiences and connections can be powerful in supporting identity, a sense of belonging and self esteem.

- **How has your organisation facilitated children's important connections and promoted shared experiences?**
- **How does your organisation recognise and honour children's achievements?**

The child's life story is complex, layered, multidimensional, socially and historically contextualised and continually changing. Accordingly, the literature emphasises the idea that multiple methods may be necessary for preserving memories, scaffolding the child's identity and facilitating their journey over time. This is not an exhaustive list; there may be a range of other tools useful for capturing parts of the child's life. Next we examine ways of implementing these tools into practice.

Planning a manageable, principled application of life story work

Organisations have raised concerns over time pressures on workers, restricting their opportunity for direct work with children and young people. The time required for life story work sits uncomfortably in the current 'managerial' context of practice. With these pressures in mind, we draw on the pyramid and tools above, and aim to map out a manageable, relevant and principled space for life story work in out-of-home 'care'.

Timing & purpose of life story Work

Life story work can be used flexibly and address a range of purposes. Possibilities include using life story work to handle transitions or when child might not be able to cope with therapy, explore difficult events, express feelings and contribute to decision-making (Baynes, 2008).

- **When should life story work begin?**
- **What has life story work most often helped you achieve in working with children and young people?**

Placement pathways: How can the life story archive capture and reflect the child's 'care' career?

Concerns have been raised about the loss of children's histories and personal memorabilia. Given children's multiple placements and varying 'care' pathways, it might be helpful to consider when additions to the life story archive could take place.

- **Does your organisation currently follow any guidelines for doing life story work?**
- **At what points could particular parts of life story work be done? E.g. entry into placement, points of transition etc**
- **What methods/tools could be undertaken during different placement types? E.g. temporary/voluntary/statutory/permanent**

Planning & preparation

Undertaking life story work is a skilled role that needs to be supported by training, supervision and a collaborative team approach, including consultation with the child's therapist. This approach should consider the child's important relationships, including: parents, siblings, other family, carers, workers, teachers, specialist therapists, such as CASA workers. The strength of this approach is in the creation of a 'multi-faceted, composite view of the child' (Ryan & Walker, 2007, p.11). Planning should consider who does what, when and where.

- **Which settings could support life story work planning for children in foster and residential 'care'? E.g. family case conference, care review meetings, residential team meetings**

- **Based on the above, what major differences might apply to life story work in different 'care' settings? E.g. Residential, foster, kinship.**
- **What supervision is needed, and from whom, for the various parties who might help the child or young person with life story work: e.g. child protection worker, care case manager, foster carer, residential carer?**

Effective involvement of birth parents

Organisations observed that life story work is most effective when birth parents are involved. Existing tensions with caseworkers were noted as barriers to effective work. In this context, the use of a separate or dedicated life story worker was found to be a successful approach. Other suggestions included using life story work as a focus for structuring visits with parents; in some instances life story work has even been undertaken with parents.

- **Describe any practice wisdom gained on establishing effective life story work with parents**

Conditions for effective work with children and young people

The quality of life story work with the child depends on whether the right conditions are in place to support it. Key concerns include: selecting the 'right person'; preparing the child for the work; using age and stage-appropriate methods and tools; taking guidance from the child; tailoring the work to the child's strengths and interests; communication and therapeutic skills.

- **In the current 'managerial' context of work, who is likely to be the 'right' person?**
- **In your experience, what's been most important in supporting effective work with children and young people?**
- **Give examples of different methods used with children and young people of different ages**
- **What could help prepare a child for life story work?**

What is collaborative work with children and young people?

Cook-Cottone & Beck (2007) consider the collaboration continuum in developing children's life stories. They suggest that children are completely relationship-dependent prior to age 3, require the co-construction of memories and stories until adolescence, whereupon young people can begin to establish autobiographical narrative. Of particular emphasis is the importance of developing self-esteem in middle childhood to support the young person in adolescence (Glare, et al. 2003; Scott & Cameron, 2004).

While children and young people are encouraged to understand and develop their own life stories, those who don't wish to participate shouldn't be excluded (Nicholls, 2003). In these cases, it is suggested that workers and carers record memories and information on children's behalf in keeping the first two layers of the pyramid.

- **Has your organisation formulated any processes for working on life stories with children of different age ranges and developmental stages?**

Trauma and therapeutic life story work

Therapeutic life story work aims to help the child develop a full and accurate, as well as a positive understanding of their life. Rose & Philpot (2005) have identified this as an important process to help children grieve, understand how their beliefs may have been distorted, consolidate extremely positive aspects of their identity and raise self-esteem.

It is important to note the sensitivity required for discussing traumatic events and their impact, not only for the child, but also for family members, carer networks and care organisations, if these groups contain people who have been responsible for the abuse or traumatic events.

In particular, practitioners concerns have focused on risks of re-traumatising children. This risk that needs to be managed with careful supervision. Yet, this concern also relates to the potential for workers to construct children as 'disturbed' rather than 'grieving' (Henry, 2005). In response, Fahlberg (1994; cited by Rose & Philpot, p.100) endorses the child's capability: 'whatever the past was, the child lived with it and survived so can live with the truth'.

As a guide for delicate therapeutic work, Rose & Philpot (2005) suggest Maslow's hierarchy of needs is used as a framework: children need to feel safe and secure, progressing gradually in stages. With the Best Interests framework also in mind, workers are to consider the benefit of what to cover at the child's age and stage. Rose & Philpot (2005)

further suggest that if information is considered too sensitive to share, details could be recorded separately and passed onto the safekeeping of carers until the child is ready. This also raises the idea of a public/private life story archive (covered further under confidentiality below).

- **Do you have any practice wisdom to share in relation to trauma and therapeutic life story work?**

The developing life story
The child's life story is complex, layered, evolving and contextualised. Organisations have noted that children's life stories are developed and added to in layers.

- **How can the life story archive capture and reflect the layers in the child's development?**
- **Where and how can context be captured, to enhance future interpretation? E.g. 'Care' policies as well as social, cultural and historical factors.**
- **How can children's understandings be enhanced by different lenses? E.g. gender, poverty, structural etc.**

In their 'parental functioning', the child's care team should consider including stories, positive comments, letters and anecdotes about the child. Case workers have been identified as significant in the lives of many young people.

- **How have organisations captured anecdotes and comments from case workers and significant others aimed at supporting and scaffolding the child's developing identity?**

Life story work with children and young people may occur in phases over time. Though the work may pause, the idea is that it never 'ends' and remains ready for the child to return to in times of crisis. Betts & Ahmad (2003, p.10) consider the ultimate aim is 'to enable a child to function positively and independently, so that as issues arise or re-surface in life they have the means to make sense of their lives and strength to work through things for themselves'.

Confidentiality
The child's wishes around privacy and confidentiality need to be obtained at the start of the work. Some children may wish to consider the possibility of separating a public/private archive. Data protection is a further consideration which will be returned to in the conclusion.

- **What procedures are in place for protecting the child's privacy and confidentiality of life story work?**

- **What confidentiality and data protection measures might be required for life story work using multi-media technologies?**

Mapping the sector: The life story continuum

Life story work sits uncomfortably within the current 'managerial' agenda and statutory focus. Observations from the literature and field suggest the practice has been pushed to the margins by rising procedural demands, with an accompanying loss of skills, training and practice wisdom (Baynes, 2008). Given the workload and compliance pressures on workers, organisations are concerned about the risk of approaching life story work as just 'another box to be ticked'.

Yet, in the literature, life story work is gaining recognition as a core task for children and young people in 'care'. Organisations are welcoming this re-emergence and calling for broader sector support. In order to explore these possibilities we take reference from the life story work continuum, where the priority of the child's life story can range from an add-on squeezed into practice right through to an integrated, informed and resourced part of the 'care' system.

Referring to figure 2 (see accompanying life story work preparation sheet)
- **What conditions are needed at each level to establish a valued place for life story work in policy and practice?**
- **Identify enablers and make suggestions for overcoming potential barriers.**

Conclusion: The life story archive and the record keeping continuum

Making, storing and accessing the record

This paper, so far, has focused on developing a coherent, manageable and principled practice framework for co-constructing the child's personal *life story archive*. This raises the need for organisations to develop systems for separating, compiling and storing the child's personal file and treasure box. Consideration needs to be given to the child's wishes for confidentiality and privacy generally and data protection where digital records are created. Further thought needs to be given to the preservation of the range of items in the archive, which might include digital files, paper files and personal memorabilia.

- **Reiterating the LAC question: How do we listen more effectively to children's views of what they need to know about and preserve in the record of their lives, both before and after their placement in 'care'?**
- **What issues arise in storing the child's archive?**
- **If children are to have access to their archive, how do we ensure important records and personal items are protected? E.g. Are we to make copies? How many? Who keeps the originals?**

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