



### Transcript:

#### Looked After Children

#### Working Together to Promote Independence

Narrator: The challenges facing the care system, if it is to give its children the best possible start in life, are widely recognised. Guidance issued by the Social Care Institute for Excellence, and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, highlight key challenges for both local authorities acting as corporate parents, and the many other agencies working alongside them.

This film will focus on just a few examples of how local practice is supporting care leavers and using nearby resources.

James Hicks: *How much are you getting at the moment Gemma?*

Gemma: *£51 a week.*

James Hicks: *£51 a week brilliant.*

Gemma: *Yeah.*

Narrator: In South Gloucestershire two schemes are helping young people experience the world of employment, and get a taste of living alone.

And in Enfield, on the outskirts of London, a multi-agency approach ensures young people are fully prepared for what lies ahead.

Male Speaker: *And you are able to budget, look after yourself? And you are currently looking for work aren't you?*

Male Speaker: *Yeah.*

Enid Hendry – Head of Strategy and Development, Looked after Children, NSPCC:

I think about twenty-seven per cent of children and young people leave care before they are eighteen. And given that their relationships may have broken up with their family and the neighbourhood, so they are often quite isolated. There is a lot of policy development in this area to try and improve outcomes and provide the support, but it is a very scary experience to be going into the big world without that back-up that most of us have, of parents and wider family to fall back on.

Narrator: Kingswood, on the outskirts of Bristol. Gemma, a looked after young person, receives tuition in food shopping and budgeting from Youth Housing Worker James Hicks. It is all part of a service to prepare Gemma for life beyond foster care.

James Hicks: How about food; how much are you roughly spending at the moment?

Gemma: *Between twenty and twenty-five pounds.*

James Hicks: *Twenty and twenty-five pounds, good.*

Narrator: As part of that preparation Gemma has spent several weeks in one of South Gloucestershire Council's trainer flats.

Gemma: This is my third stay; so you do three lots of three weeks. I go home on Friday. I have been managing my money, which is a really difficult thing for me, but it will really benefit me in the future. So I have been taught how to cook lots of different things; my favourite is cottage pie, I do a lot of cooking of cottage pie.

James Hicks: *Cottage pie, have you made cottage pie before?*

Gemma: *Yeah.*

James Hicks: *Yeah, brilliant.*

Lesley Raison – Corporate Parenting Manager, South Gloucestershire Council:

You have to work on the premise that every child deserves a good parent, and we try to be a good parent. And we have our statutory responsibilities, we have our targets to meet, but it is the added extra that we are always looking to be able to provide to children in care. And we like to be as innovative and as creative as we possibly can.

Stability for children in care is absolutely vital, and this needs to go on to stability when they are older as well, and we have found a number of young people were not sustaining their tenancy when they moved into their own flat. So we decided to offer them some periods – fixed periods – in a trainer flat. But generally it just them that idea of independence; they learn how to look after themselves and how to cook, they learn what it is like to be alone at night, because that is one thing that children never, ever experience.

Gemma: *This is my kitchen, diner and living room. This is my bedroom.*

My major issues before coming in the flat: one was being burgled, I was really scared of being burgled; keeping the flat really clean, because it is actually impossible for me to keep my bedroom clean, so that was one thing for me. Cooking as well I was a little unsure of, so yeah cooking, cleaning, being burgled, and just being alone by myself. Overcoming loneliness, which I think was a really big thing for me.

Enid Hendry: When children and young people are being prepared for living independently they need some really practical life skills. Providing an opportunity in semi-independent living, to develop their skills with somebody around you.

We work well with our house colleagues, and we have got a looked after nurse who is absolutely superb. And she doesn't just do the health assessment, she works really well with CAMHs as well, that's the Child and Adolescent Health Services, and they are able to offer appointments to young people who are in our care, following a referral. But our looked after nurse will actually refer them direct if she feels that there is a particular problem that is emerging.

Narrator: Looked after children and young people in South Gloucestershire don't just get help with the domestic side of independent living. Sixteen year old Chris is one of many who have taken up the Council's work experience scheme in one of its own garages.

Chris: If I hadn't done the work experience I wouldn't have come here. I think I get along with the people who work here, and hopefully I can get an apprenticeship here as well, because that would definitely help.

Curtis Porter: Yeah he's done a couple of weeks with me, he's doing alright, and he has taken it in, doing well. Yeah, he is a good lad.

Lynne Harris – Coordinator, Work Experience for Looked After Children, South Gloucestershire Council:

It was obviously a government initiative to help young people who are accommodated to aspire to careers, ventures they possibly thought they hadn't got the confidence, they hadn't got the skills and knowledge to achieve. And South Gloucestershire took this on very, very wholeheartedly, and in January 2006 we started the work experience scheme for young people we accommodate, to help that person gain in confidence and learn something about future jobs.

Lesley Raison : It has been embraced so well, people have taken it to their heart, and we always get offered more placements than we have young people to fill them.

It can't just be the council, because services aren't provided just purely by the council. Corporate parenting spreads across all the agencies and lots of voluntary organisations as well, so we have got a huge track record of being able to work really well with our partners, most of whom are represented on the Children's Trust arrangements, and contribute towards the children and young people's plans.

Children and young people coming into care, their history has been varied, and there has got to be an emotional effect. And I would say that the emotional support that we offer them runs through all of our services. We are not just taking these children

through to their eighteenth birthday and then we can say phew, that's our job over. We are looking at their care now and in the future. So we have to have aspirations for them, we take them forward and encourage them to think about university, encourage them to go to open days at local universities; and we had a huge turnout this year for young people interested to find out what university is like, and this is a big change.

Enid Hendry: At all levels the corporate parent, the local authority, needs to not settle for second best for these children. They are there instead of their parents, so the corporate parent must do what a good parent would do, and always have at the back of this mind, would this be good enough for my child? Would this be good enough for my grandchild? And to really be pushy and persuasive, and have expectations and have aspirations, and be proud of the young people who achieve as well as supporting those for whom it is much more difficult.

Narrator: The SCIE and NICE guidance highlights the links between a stable education and quality of life, and urges authorities, carers and education professionals to work together to ensure a successful school experience.

In Enfield Education Officer Paul James works to ensure all of the borough's three hundred or so looked after children and young people receive the education they deserve.

Paul James: My role specifically is to monitor the progress of looked after children, from the moment they come into care, and work with schools to ensure that we get the best educational outcomes for our looked after children.

*I you want to have a quick chat about a young man.*

Female Speaker: *Alright*

*How is he doing?*

Female Speaker: *I am not sure at the moment; I have said to him if he needs any support with that to let us know, because they do have equipment that he will need to buy. So at the moment I think ...*

Paul James: Last year I think it was roughly fifteen per cent of looked after children got five A\*-Cs and their peers were operating at sixty-five per cent. There is a huge need for the additional support that they get, there is a huge need for the education; the teachers that work with them, the social workers who work with them providing guidance to foster carers, providing guidance to governors of schools, just so that they aware of some of the challenges these young people face, and some of the support that they can put in place to help them achieve to their full potential.

Narrator: Paul is part of a wide network of professionals and agencies working across Enfield.

Paul James:

I work here as part of the Enfield Virtual School, but I am also a member of the HEART team – that's the Health, Education and Access to Resources Team – which is a multi-disciplinary team working with all our looked after children. So we are a very broad team, with a broad range of skills and a broad range of knowledge, and access to lots and lots of other people who can help our young people.

Very recently we had a young person who had just come to the end of year 10, he has actually missed the whole of year ten, for reasons which I won't go into, but entirely not his fault, and we have arranged with our special educational needs department to fund him re-sitting his entire year 10, and it couldn't have been done without that sort of interaction with our SEN department, and making sure they were aware of the particular problems. Because a file will only tell you so much information, sometimes you actually need to know the young person. SEN were very, very good, because they looked at the case very fairly, and I don't think they would have done so had they simply had a paper file.

Narrator:

As time in care comes to an end, the leaving care service helps young people make the next step. The monthly housing panel meets to decide if young people are ready to begin life in their own council accommodation.

Jonathan Manson – Leaving Care Manager, Ealing Council:

The housing panel is one aspect of what we do to make sure that the transition from being a child into adulthood happens. What nobody wants is to suddenly find, on a day before their eighteenth birthday, that they have a whole case to take over; so it is about the smoothness of that transition. So the housing panel was built on the concept that other agencies away from children's services need to be aware that young people are coming through the system. I want young people, or their cases, to come to the housing panel at seventeen and a half, the idea is then we have a good six months to actually look at their care planning, and what is needed to promote the child becoming independent at eighteen – and we all recognise that eighteen is a very early age.

Narrator:

Today twenty year old Anthony has come before the housing panel.

Jonathan Manson:

*Long time no see for you and me.*

Anthony:

*Yeah.*

Narrator:

Anthony is moving back to Enfield after several years living with his foster family in Somerset. He remains eligible for the housing panel support until the age of twenty-one.

Jonathan Manson:

*You understand the panel is looking at how you can live independently?*

Anthony: *I think I will be able to do it just fine, so ... I lived on my own for ...*

Narrator: If the panel agree he is likely to cope with living alone they will nominate him, and a number of support services will slot into place to help Anthony find and stay in his own flat.

Howard Campbell – Care Coordinator, Enfield Council:

Because he is leaving care they will look at his needs a little bit more. First year tenancy is introductory, so he can not afford to get in any rent arrears, any council tax, anything like that at all. And it is social behaviour, so that is the most important time for Anthony. After that it is not too bad, it doesn't mean that he doesn't pay his rent, but it's not too bad. So that he needs that support for the first year. If they okay it we can start and apply for a housing form, put that in and then submit that, and then in three to four weeks he will get his PIN number. And then once he gets his PIN number he is able to start bidding on property in Enfield.

Jonathan Manson: *The responsibility for rent will fall on you.*

Anthony: *Yeah.*

Jonathan Manson: *And if you are not working you can claim local housing allowance.*

What we have to make sure is that when I sign the form and nominate them to housing that they are going to represent us in the way that they are going to be good citizens that they are able to pay their rent, either because they are claiming local housing allowance or they are working, or that they are in further education or higher education. But they can maintain their probationary tenancy.

*Okay I am really glad you came down, saying that, it's nice to see you again.*

Anthony: *It's nice to see you too.*

Jonathan Manson: *Yeah? Take care.*

Anthony: *Thanks a lot.*

Female Speaker: *Thank you, bye.*

Howard Campbell: *Thank you Anthony.*

Jonathan Manson: *Bye.*

It is Enfield Inc., you could call it, in many ways what we are trying to establish is a firm team around the child. We are the child's corporate parents, and the idea is that we will promote the welfare of that child as much as we possibly can.

[End of Recording]