

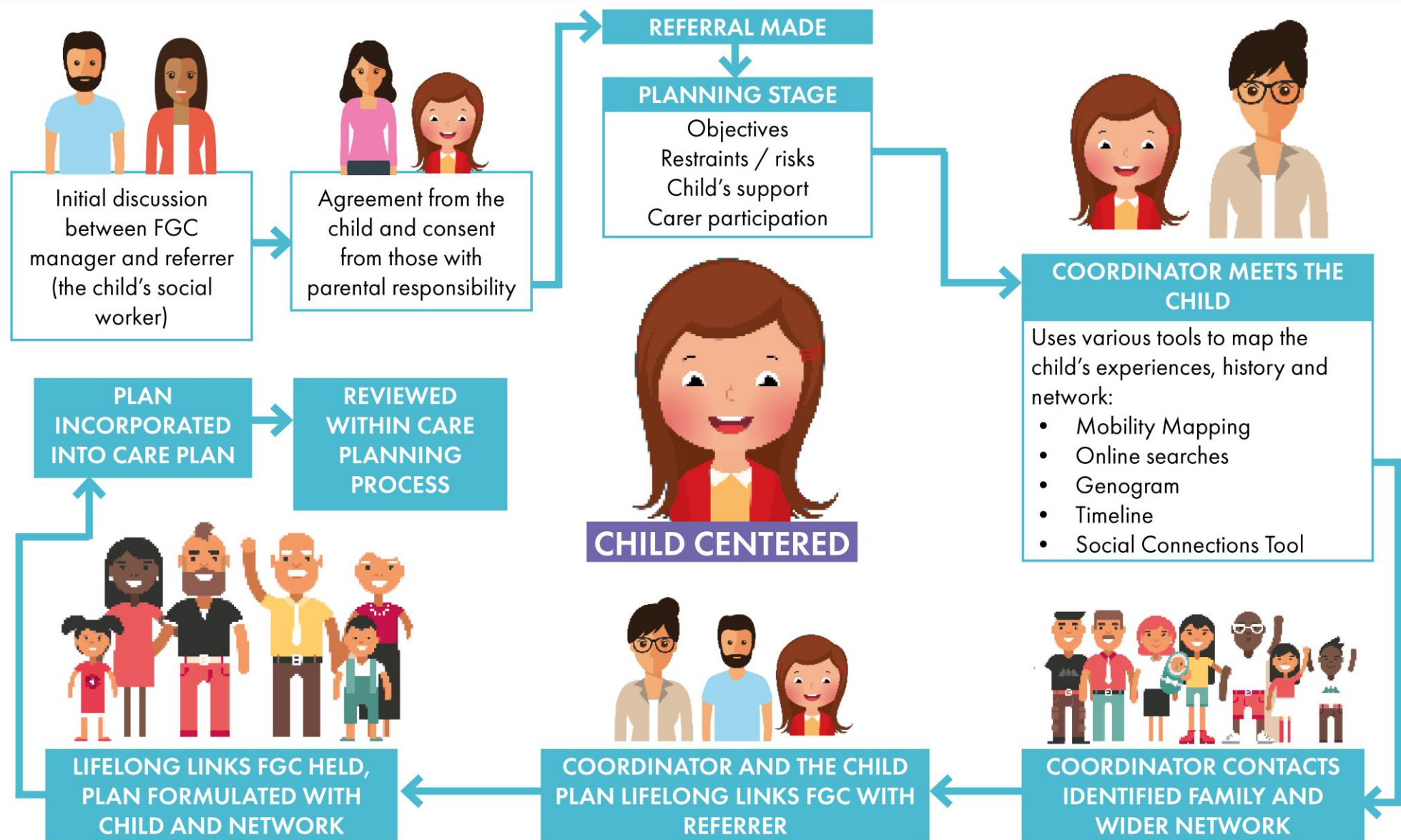


## National IRO Managers Partnership Event

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## Lifelong Links





# Young person's perspective

**Eathan and his Lifelong  
Links coordinator Becky  
Healy,  
Lifelong Links  
coordinator, Birmingham  
Children's Trust**





# Lifelong Links Embedding Practice

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**Dr Shirley Lewis**

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## **What was the purpose of the evaluation extension?**

To explore how Lifelong Links is embedded into practice.

- How are Lifelong Links plans followed up when the Lifelong Links coordinator was no longer involved?
- How are Lifelong Links plans embedded into the child's care plan?
- What impact does Lifelong Links have on the culture within the LA?

# Method

## Semi-structured interviews

- Four local authorities that have been involved with Lifelong Links for different amounts of time.
- Local authorities spread throughout England, a range of shire, unitary and metropolitan boroughs
- Managers and service leads, Lifelong Links team leaders and co-ordinators, Independent Reviewing Officers and social workers.

## Preliminary Findings

Local authorities used a range of structures to embed the Lifelong Links plan into practice:

- Care plan and Child Looked After review
- Social worker supervision
- Audits
- Foster carer reviews

## Dealing with complexity

*“I’ve had reviews where... planning for children’s contact with their families is so complex I’ve said, ‘well ask Lifelong Links because they might be able to find a way through where you can’t’.... Where contact with families has been lost with proceedings and we’re a few years down the line then to try and pick that up is a really good thing to do and even if its not successful... for a young adult... to know that you’ve made those efforts is really important when they look back.”*

(Independent Reviewing Officer)



## Reassurance

*“Through [Lifelong Links] there was able to come a letter from mum and a letter from dad, no more than that but just to say ... ‘hope you’re doing well,’ those kind of things, but also to clearly underline they weren’t in a position to do any more than that.... For him that was really helpful. It gave him enough of a sense of they were interested enough to write he wasn’t expecting anything off them but they were ok, and he was really content with that .... From the Lifelong Links he had a clear sense of the family tree ... there wasn’t questions anymore.”*

(Independent Reviewing Officer)

## Support

*“[The young person’s] mum died about 18 months after doing that work ... it is devastating that she’s dead but to be in this position where we have her family around her, whereas if we hadn’t done that work she’d have been entirely on her own .... Because mum didn’t like those people ... I don’t know if subsequently she would have chosen to go against her mum after death to do that... its been amazing for her.”*

(Independent Reviewing Officer)

## Organisational Culture

*“I think that the very attitude of every social worker which is about building those relationships right through the system, I think it is not just the children going through Lifelong Links but every child. I think when you have such a change in culture where people just have a different attitude regarding relationships it makes a lot of difference.”*

(Principal Social Worker and Quality Assurance)

## Implications for Practice

- The role of the IRO is important for identifying children and young people to refer and in ensuring the child's Lifelong Links plan is embedded into their care plan.
- Participants felt that taking part in Lifelong Links had made a positive difference to the lives of children and young people within their local authority.

## Further Information

DfE Lifelong Links evaluation report:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/955953/Lifelong\\_Links\\_evaluation\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/955953/Lifelong_Links_evaluation_report.pdf)



# Lifelong Links & the role of the IRO

**Anne Baxter, Service Manager  
Leeds Integrated Safeguarding Unit**

**[Anne.Baxter@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Anne.Baxter@leeds.gov.uk)**





# Setting & Context in Leeds



- **Parents feedback/sharing PR/ Dads**
- **Close working between IRO service and Children in Care Council / Childrens Rights Service**
- **Restorative practice**
- **Utility of family /friends/professionals**
- **FGC & family-led decision making**



# Leeds IROs



- Low staff turnover
- Keepers of the child's story
- Promote Identity –life story work etc
- Offer Care Leaver reviews for 18 & 19 year olds



# Legal duty



## UN Convention on Rights of the Child

- **ARTICLE 8 (identity)** Every child has the right to their identity – including their nationality, name and family relationships. Where a child is deprived of one or more elements of their identity, the state will act to re-establish them.
- **ARTICLE 9 (separation from parents)** No child should be separated from his or her parents against their will unless it is in the child's best interests. Children whose parents have separated have the right to contact, and a relationship with both parents, unless not in the child's best interests



# Legal Duty cont'd



## Section 34(1) Children Act 1989:

The Local Authority (i.e. Children's Services) must allow the child reasonable contact with:  
his parents;  
any guardian;  
any person who held a Residence Order or Child Arrangements Order immediately before the Care Order was made;  
and

***Children's Services has a general duty to promote contact with wider family members such as grandparents and siblings.***

***This is the default position in the absence of any court orders.***



## IRO's duty

- **IRO statutory role includes promoting and protecting the child's Human Rights and ensuring LA fulfils its responsibilities as a corporate parent**
- **At every review, IRO should determine whether the current contact plan is meeting the needs of the child or whether anything needs to change. This is discussed and recorded in the IRO report.**





## **IRO's regularly encounter :**

- **Young people who leave care with only professionals for support**
- **Children and young people who return to family est. 80/90%?**
- **Children and young people whose sense of identity/self is incomplete, or who are disconnected from their family / ethnic/ cultural backgrounds**
- **Children and young people using social media to search for themselves**





# Start as we mean to go on...



- **Record keeping- family / placements/ life story books**
- **Genograms / family / friends**
- **Ask the child at every review consultation and record it.**
- **Contact plans – where are the wider family and friends ?**
- **Look at Dads – where is the contact with paternal family ?**
- **Look at pathway plans – who will be there to support ? If just professionals – refer to LLL.**



# Leeds IRO's - key messages



**"The best thing about LLL is finding people we didn't know about, even when you don't set out to find them! "**

**LLL plans should be shared and discussed at every review.**

**LLL makes young people feel connected in a way they haven't been before-it reinforces young people's sense of identity beyond the care system "I am in care but I am also a member of this family..."**



# Leeds IRO's - key messages



**LLL workers have the time to get involved, do the work and write the plans in a way that SWs wouldn't be able to. They are very proactive.**

**LLL is more "organic" and less pressured than when in proceedings and looking to identify possible carers for the child.**

**LLL seen as "neutral" by families who may have had negative experiences with Local Authority**

**Covid and the use of remote / video contacts has helped to promote the value of wider, less frequent contact, with extended family and friends.**



## Case example

Sally (16) has been looked after for 8 years. At the point she became looked after, Sally's Mum was effectively estranged from all members of her own family, and had been for many years. Sally doesn't know who her father is and her Mum has always refused to disclose this. As a result, during her time in care, Sally has had contact only with Mum, usually four times per year. Sally told her IRO at a consultation visit that she wanted to know more about her origins, and wanted a chance to get to know her wider birth family. Sally's Mum then sadly died in 2020.

The IRO asked the SW to refer to LLL, who traced birth family members via social media. Sally was put in contact with a number of maternal family members both in the UK and overseas. LLL found a number of aunts, uncles and cousins still living in Leeds. Family members had not known Sally was in care, as Mum never told them. These family members have been helping Sally piece together her back story, including helping identify her birth father. Sally has been invited to have a holiday with family living overseas, when travel rules permit.



# HERTFORDSHIRE'S LIFELONG LINKS JOURNEY

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TENDAI MUROWE, HEAD OF QUALITY ASSURANCE AND PRACTICE





# WHY LLL

- We were one of the first LA to implement LLL
- We were attracted by the idea that children and young will have emotional stability from having more relationships and support.
- aims to ensure that a child in care has a positive support network around them to help them during their time in care and into adulthood.
- Young people were gravitating back home in an unsafe and unplanned way.
- Practice wisdom was that when children enter care, reducing their contact with their family was necessary for stability.
- Care leavers lost relationships and were unsupported.
- Children and young people who had left care had their children over represented in Child Protection Plans.
- Relationship based practice
- Professionals who had wanted to remain in contact with YP had been prevented by a risk averse culture.



# IMPLEMENTING LLL IN HERTS

- Creation of the young people group, to co-design how it would look in our LA
- Creation of Parents group to co-design.
- Support from our members, the DCS
- A steering group with YP, foster carer, parents, senior members in department.
- A practice development group with practitioners – challenging practice wisdom.
- Own it, make it work for your organisation
- A strong FGC service, with well trained coodinators.

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## CHALLENGES OVERCOME

Views of social workers that young people were not in a position to start the work.

Myths that it would unsettle placements.

Worries about foster carers working with birth family.

Worries that we would introduce children to their abusers.

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# WINS

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Placement stability

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Partnership working between foster carers and birth family.

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Some children return home.

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Built connections for children

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Changed practice in the Authority

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Life story work

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LLL plans automatically feeding into Care plans



# STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

- Introduction of extended family attending CP conferences
- Use of genograms in all cases at assessment.
- CLA team working with parents following proceedings as a matter of course.
- Support to Care Leavers who are parents to address over representation in CP/CLA.
- Now consciousness of the role of working with family and promoting this in
  - Addressing increasing numbers of CLA
  - Reunification
  - Placement FGC

# Foster carer's perspective

**Rachel Wills, Foster  
Carer, Kent Children's  
Services**

**with Andrew Rist, FGC  
and Lifelong Links  
Practice Adviser, Family  
Rights Group**



# **Family Rights Group's support in implementing Lifelong Links**

**Pam Ledward**





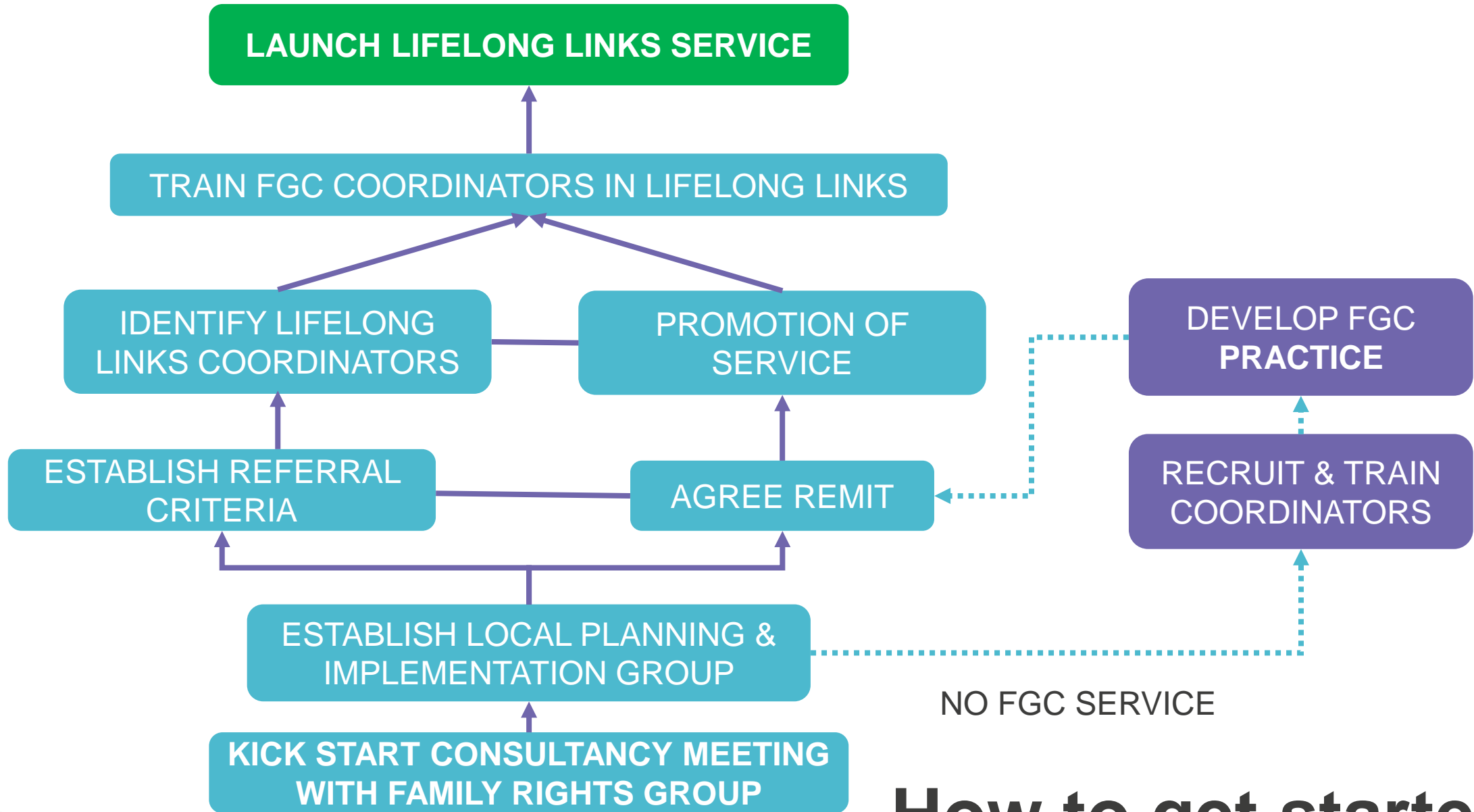
# The role of Family Rights Group

## What can we offer?

Family Rights Group is the leading authority on Lifelong Links and has been at the forefront of the development and introduction of family group conferences in the United Kingdom.

Our training & consultancy package is bespoke to each local authority.

- 1 Consultancy days
- 2 Coordinator training
- 3 Access to resources & guidance
- 4 Social connections tool
- 5 Peer support
- 6 Service accreditation



# How to get started?

**Q&A**





Family Rights Group, Second Floor, The Print House, 18 Ashwin Street, London, E8 3DL



**Free Advice Line 0808 801 0366**  
(Monday to Friday 9.30am to 3pm)



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Admin Tel 020 7923 2628 Email [office@frg.org.uk](mailto:office@frg.org.uk)

(We cannot provide advice by email or on the Admin telephone line)

**Helping Families Helping Children**