

Who Cares for the Carers of gifted children?

**NAGC Research Report
October 2009.**



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Cheney Payne
Researcher
NAGC

About NAGC

NAGC is the only national charity that supports the social, emotional and intellectual needs of gifted and talented children and provides their families with the skills and confidence to support their gifted child.

NAGC was established in 1967 and currently supports about 10,000 people around the country in a variety of ways including an information and advice service, magazines for families and children, an advocacy service for parents and carers , training and family events and a network of branches and Explorer Clubs around the country. NAGC also runs the national “It’s Alright to be Bright!” campaign each year which seeks to raise awareness of the needs of gifted and talented children and to promote their wider acceptance.

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Executive Summary

NAGC is the only national organisation that exists to support the social, emotional and learning needs of gifted and talented children by supporting their parents and carers. As an organisation determined to fulfil the claims it makes for itself, NAGC is eager to ensure that it offers carers the same personalised and directly relevant support as it offers parents.

There is a common misconception that life for a gifted and talented child is easy; many believe that they excel in school, complete work easily and also do well in out of school activities and hobbies. However, this is not the case, and a gifted child may become frustrated and confused as their intellectual abilities develop far more rapidly than their communication and motor skills.

If gifted children are disadvantaged, a child in care may be doubly disadvantaged. Not only do they often face emotional and social difficulties, but they can face these from a background that offers little or no security, an educational career that often offers little stability, and with no clear guidance figure. The role of the carer is therefore absolutely paramount in ensuring the gifts and talents of these children are encouraged and nurtured, and their emotional and social needs are supported.

While caring for any child who has perhaps come from a background of trauma and abuse is challenging in itself; caring for a gifted child, with advanced cognitive abilities, who is always on the go and who looks at the world in a different way can be both difficult and distressing.

Not only this, but the carer of a gifted child is given a great and difficult responsibility. It is down to the carer to support a gifted child, to nurture their talents, to help them learn to live with them and to play a part in ensuring their gifts and talents benefit and are enjoyed by the child. It is therefore vital that these carers are given the best support possible to help them fulfil this difficult role.

In order to support carers, NAGC felt it was significant to understand carers want and the support they need from external bodies such as schools, Social Services and third sector bodies such as NAGC.

Given the resources available, it was decided to conduct a small-scale qualitative study, interviewing carers, social workers and heads of local authority fostering departments to try and find out what support the carers of gifted children are given and by whom, and what other support they feel they need. This was done through a combination of postal questionnaires and telephone interviews. Eastern England was the focus for this work. This reason was chosen for several reasons including the involvement it had with NAGC in the past and the specialist work it was already doing with gifted children in care.

In total, the people participating in this work represented 1354 children in the care system.

As well as interviewing carers and social workers, desk research was also carried out by the researcher, as NAGC felt it was important to have a clear understanding of how the British care system works before it could begin to make any recommendations for carers.

Above anything else, NAGC found that the worlds of foster care and the worlds of Gifted and Talented education very rarely mix. Children in care are not expected to be gifted, and gifted children are not expected to be in care. Consequently, the foster care world is largely unaware of the presence of gifted and talented, and the world of gifted and talented is only gradually becoming aware that children in care fall within its remit.

Gifted children in care have to deal with both the difficult experiences of being gifted and the difficult experiences of being in care, but the stigma that is attached to being in care leads to the giftedness of a child in care going unnoticed, or forgotten because the negative effects of traumatic experiences in the early years make children in care difficult to live with, hard to educate and create barriers to their learning.

NAGC's research has shown that this means that the carers of gifted children receive little help and support. In some cases, carers feel that catering for a gifted and talented child is above and beyond what they are prepared for, and is more than their role as a provider of a safe and secure home in which a child can develop, entails.

The way to improve this situation is through liaison and collaboration, to ensure the responsibility for ensuring gifted children in care receive the best possible provision is not left to the carers alone.

Carers are often unprepared for the way a gifted child can change their lives, and are expected to learn to adapt to this themselves, and learn how to care for the specific needs of a gifted child themselves.

It is therefore necessary for schools, social workers, local authorities and organisations like NAGC to take prime responsibility for ensuring carers are informed about gifted and talented education and the issues connected to it.

Above all, there needs to be an awareness, amongst all parties, of Gifted and Talented, and a realisation that children in care can be, and are, gifted and talented. Gifted and Talented should feature in all of the structures which prescribe what a looked after child's life is to be. A child's gifts and talents are a fundamental part of who they are now and who they will be in the future, and so should be considered in all care planning decisions to ensure that being in care does not mean that these vital aspects of a child's life are lost or forgotten.

Summary of Recommendations

1. The designated teacher of a school should liaise closely with the lead teacher for gifted and talented, and be fully informed about all issues connected to gifted and talented identification. The designated teacher and lead teacher for gifted and talented children should work in conjunction to ensure that children in care are to be included in the school's gifted and talented register, and that they subsequently receive the same support as all other gifted and talented children.
2. All school teachers should receive training from the school's designated teacher in how to work with a traumatised child, and the best ways to help them learn. The designated teachers themselves should receive comprehensive training in this area, and both train and assist class teachers in ensuring the looked after children they teach benefit from this supportive teaching style as much as possible.
3. Schools should use the Essex target tracker software to track how a child in care progresses academically. If a child progresses at an above average rate, that is, exceeds the targets set for them, this is to be understood to be an indication that they are gifted and talented.
4. Social workers and key workers should inform the young people they are responsible for that they could attend university, and ensure they receive guidance and support throughout the application process.
5. Whenever possible, a child's social worker should inform the school of any gifts and talents a child may have before the child comes into the school, either when the child first comes into care or if they have to change schools as part of their care plan.
6. The social worker of a carer should be thoroughly aware of the needs of a gifted child, and inform the carer of these needs and how best to cater for them as soon as the child's giftedness is identified.
7. A child's gifts and talents should be included in the Personal Education Plan of every looked after child, and input from the carers, designated teacher, lead teacher for gifted and talented and social worker should be used to identify these talents.
8. Whenever possible, a child should be placed with carers whose own interests are compatible with and would encourage a child's particular gifts.
9. Standard 13 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards should include a requirement for carers and social workers to ensure that a child's gifts and

talents are encouraged by their care placement; both through prior preparation for a child's gifts and talents, if known, and through later provision from both social workers and carers.

- 10.** NAGC's education consultants should be trained in coping with the effects trauma may have had on a child, both emotionally and intellectually.
- 11.** NAGC should be resourced to enable it to provide a service to meet the needs of gifted and talented children and their foster families in the home environment such as magazines, education DVDs for carers and other materials
- 12.** NAGC should be resourced to offer an advocacy service to carers, to liaise on their behalf with schools on issues relating to gifted and talented education and to provide them with the support they need.
- 13.** NAGC carries out further research regarding the needs of the carers of gifted children.

1. Introduction

NAGC is the only national organisation that exists to support the social, emotional and learning needs of gifted and talented children by supporting their parents and carers. NAGC believes that the role the parent or carer of a gifted child plays in their development is vital in ensuring both their emotional well-being, and the growth of their gifts and talents.

While the work NAGC does to support a large number of parents is, according to its membership numbers, far-reaching and hopefully widely appreciated, a call from Suffolk County Council came as a sharp realisation, when NAGC was asked the question, “So, what do you do to support carers?” As an organisation determined to fulfil the claims it makes for itself, NAGC is eager to ensure that it offers carers the same personalised and directly relevant support as it offers to parents. In order to provide this support to carers, it was first necessary to find out what carers actually want, and this is what this report hopes to do.

There is a common misconception that life for a gifted and talented child is easy; many believe that they excel in school, complete work easily and also do well in out of school activities and hobbies. However, this is often not the case. Although gifted children develop their cognitive skills much more quickly than other children, their physical, emotional and social needs remain typical for their age group. It is difficult for a child with the brain of a nine-year old to reproduce their ideas with the motor and verbal skills of a 5 year old. This can lead to the child becoming frustrated, or to a gifted child being misdiagnosed as having special educational needs.

Gifted children are often perfectionists, and so a low school grade impacts severely on their self-esteem. Alongside this is the common stereotype amongst children that it is not ‘cool’ to be clever, to be the ‘swot’ or ‘teacher’s pet’, and so gifted children may suffer esteem-damaging bullying in school, and even try to hide their abilities to fit in with their peers. A gifted child is active, always thinking, always questioning and often bored by repetitive school work or exercises¹. And through all of this, it is the role of the parent of the gifted child to offer the support and stimuli needed to ensure the child does not try to hide their abilities and that their talents are not wasted through ineffective schooling, or not recognised at all.

If gifted children are disadvantaged, a child in care is doubly disadvantaged. Not only do they face emotional and social difficulties, but they face these from a background that offers little or no security, an educational career that often offers little stability, and with no clear

guidance figure. The role of the carer is therefore absolutely paramount in ensuring the gifts and talents of these children are encouraged and nurtured, and their emotional and social needs are supported.

Clearly this is no easy task. While caring for any child who has perhaps come from a background of trauma and abuse is challenging in itself; caring for a gifted child, with advanced cognitive abilities, who is always on the go and who looks at the world in a different way can be both difficult and distressing. Fostering a gifted child can affect the foster family's entire way of life while the child is with them. Not only this, but the carer of a gifted child is given a great and difficult responsibility. It is down to the carer to support a gifted child, to nurture their talents, to help them learn to live with them and to play a part in ensuring their gifts and talents benefit and are enjoyed by the child. It is therefore vital that these carers are given the best support possible to help them fulfil this difficult role.

In order to support carers, we need to know what carers want. The purpose of this project was to try and find out what support the carers of gifted children are given and by whom, and what other support they feel they need.

It appears that the world of the looked after child and the world of the gifted child rarely mix in terms of policy and care planning. This report aims to show that these two worlds can intertwine, to ensure that carers of gifted children are supported, so they in turn can support the gifted children they care for.

As a ten week study, this report only begins to scratch the surface of the matrix that is the British care system. In this report, NAGC intends to make some initial recommendations for how the carers of gifted children should be supported by NAGC, by schools, by individual social workers and by their local authorities. NAGC hopes that this report will be the platform for more extensive research into this area, to ensure the carers of gifted children are supported at every opportunity.

2. Methodology

In order for NAGC to support carers, it needs to know what carers want. Given the resources at its disposal, this is a small scale study which it is hoped will have wider implications throughout the system.

NAGC began its study by creating a questionnaire for carers and local authorities (see Appendix 1). NAGC chose to base its research within the East of England in this study, as this was both where the first request for support for carers came from through NAGC and where some work had already been done on gifted children in the care system. It was felt that this would be a good place to start.

Two questionnaires were created: one with questions for the carer of a gifted child (see Appendix 1a), and another for the head of the foster care department and individual social workers to complete in conjunction (see Appendix 1b). The questionnaire for carers was designed to try and ascertain what support the carers of gifted children receive and what extra support they feel they want, as well the carers' awareness of giftedness and the kind of giftedness they had encountered. The questionnaire for the heads of fostering and the social workers was intended to establish if there was any existing policy regarding gifted children that social workers were made aware of, and how social workers and the heads of fostering departments dealt with, or would deal with, cases of giftedness when they encountered it. As this was a qualitative rather than a quantitative study, the questionnaires were designed to find out how carers and social workers felt about their role in the life of a gifted child and so asked for opinions and emotions, rather than figures and statistics.

These questionnaires were emailed to the head of every fostering and adoption department in the Eastern region of Great Britain, and to the heads of the Looked After Children (LAC) in Care (or equivalent) teams in each region. The questionnaires were emailed to 40 representatives in 14 local authorities altogether, and subsequently forwarded by at least some heads of department to their carers and social workers. NAGC members were also made aware of this project and the existence of the questionnaires in the Chief Executive's monthly e-newsletter, and so there was potentially an opportunity for carers from all over the United Kingdom to contact us and share their views and experiences.

The results from these questionnaires were collated, and the respondents were given an opportunity, if they wished to, to be interviewed over the phone or face to face by the researcher. These interviews were intended to establish a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the needs and experiences of the carers and social workers than was possible through a brief questionnaire. Each interview lasted roughly 30 minutes, and each interviewee was asked five main questions (see Appendix 2).

Whilst answering each of these questions, the carers were probed to give further, more specific details if they did not naturally volunteer them. For a full copy of the questions asked in the interviews, see Appendix 3.

All information and personal details from these questionnaires were treated with the strictest confidentiality. The respondents to the research are not mentioned by name in this report, and any quotations are anonymous and at the will of the respondent.

As well as interviewing carers and social workers, desk research was also carried out by the researcher, as NAGC felt it was important to have a clear understanding of how the British care system works before it could begin to make any recommendations for carers. Using all available resources, particularly the DCSF website and relevant literature, including

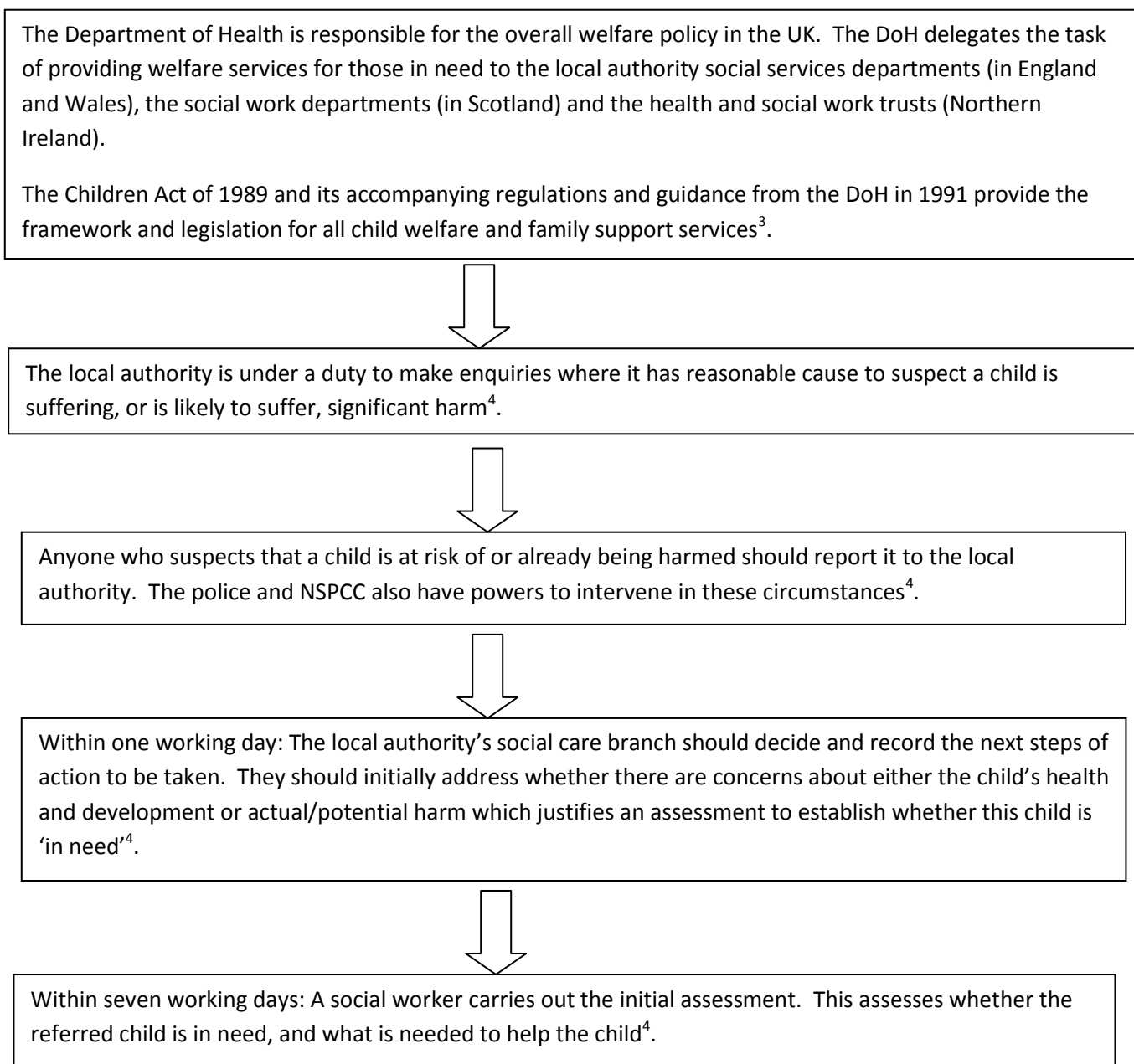
publications from NAGC and the DCSF, the researcher mapped the process of a child in care and a child identified as gifted. The researcher also looked for any existing research or policy concerning gifted children in the care system.

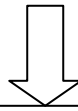
3. A Child in Care

Definitions

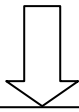
A 'child in care' is a child who is looked after by the local authority. The term refers to children who are in public care, who are placed with foster carers, in residential homes, or with other relatives².

The Process

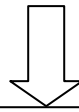




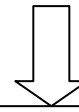
The local authority decides on the next course of action.



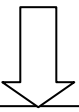
Child found to be in need, but has not received any significant harm and is not likely to be harmed: more in-depth assessment to be carried out to establish what services need providing⁴.



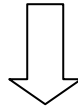
Child is in need and has received or is likely to receive significant harm: the local authority is required to make enquiries to enable it to decide whether it should take any action to promote or safeguard the welfare of the child⁴.



Risk to the life of the child, or the child is likely to be immediately and seriously harmed: an agency with statutory child protection powers should act quickly to ensure the immediate safety of the child⁴.



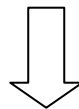
If it is necessary to remove a child from their home, the local authority should apply for an emergency protection order⁴.



After these measures have been taken, if the child is judged to still be at risk of harm, or the parents are not in a suitable state of health, mentally or physically, to ensure the child's safety and development, the local authority may place the child in care.

If the parents agree to the child being taken into care, then the child can come into care voluntarily.

If the parents oppose the child being taken into care, they must be taken into care through a court order⁴.



The local authority should first make efforts to help parents care for their child properly, through parenting classes, help with finances or ways of caring for their children.

A child may be placed in any of the following forms of care:

Traditional Foster Care – A child/a few children stay with a family or single foster parent for a matter of months or years. This may also be for a short time, from a few days to a month.

Emergency Foster Homes – Available 24 hours a day to take children in until the social services system can find a longer term solution, e.g. if child's parents were arrested.

Respite Foster Care Families – Take children in for a few days at a time, to give their families a periodic break.

Children's Home – Some foster children live in a group home, often due to a shortage of foster carers. Provide both residential and respite care.

Independent Fostering Agencies – Are permitted to recruit and prepare foster carers, but they can only be approved in relation to a particular child by that child's local authority. They are usually asked to provide a foster placement for children that the local social services can't place with their own foster carers. IFA placements are usually short-term, as local authorities eventually want to place these children with their own foster carers.

Private Fostering – A private arrangement is made for a child under 16 (or 18 if disabled) to be cared for, for a period of more than 28 days. This does not include children who are being looked after by the local authority. Private fostering is an arrangement made between the parent and the foster family, and may be organised for example if the parents have to work overseas or the child has to study overseas. The local authority should be informed of this.

Family and Friends Fostering – Relatives, particularly grandparents, will often care for a child. Friends and family carers receive a fostering allowance once they have been assessed and approved by the local authority.

The Children Act states that social services departments should explore the possibility of placement with the child's relatives or friends before turning to mainstream foster care.

(Remand Fostering – Placing young people with foster carers for the period between court appearances. It is an alternative to the use of secure accommodation or a remand in prison custody. Remand carers have a 24 hour emergency helpline, and are paid.)⁵

Social workers are trained by the local authority, mostly using the National Foster Care Association's training package, "Choosing to Foster: The Challenge to Care" (1994). Each carer has a 'support worker' who they can turn to for advice and support, and every looked after child has a social worker to support them and the carers.

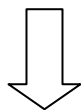
Within ten days of a child becoming looked after: their Care Plan should be written by the local authority. This lays out what the local authority is going to do to support the child's health, education, religion, culture and hobbies, and how contact with families and friends can be enabled⁴.

The Care Plan includes a Personal Education Plan for each child. Since 2005, this has been part of the official school record for children in care. The child, the child's school, the social worker and the carers write this in conjunction.

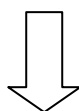
The Personal Education Plan should:

- Recognise, record and celebrate gifts and talents
- Identify academic and developmental needs
- Set personal and academic targets which are challenging and practical
- Articulate short, medium and long-term aspirations and plans
- Agree specific time scales and responsibilities
- Explore and identify appropriate teaching and learning
- Identify strategies for the school to implement
- Be regularly reviewed and updated⁷

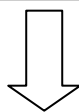
Each school has a Designated Teacher for children in care. The Designated Teacher should lead work to improve the attainment of children in care in their school, mainly through input into the Personal Education Plan. The Designated Teacher will be a member of the school's senior leadership team and will normally be a qualified teacher⁷.



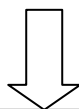
The government provides £500 a year for each child in care who is at risk of not reaching the expected standards of attainment to support their educational and developmental needs. This should be used by local authorities to provide support for additional activities that support the educational development of the child. The resource will be used to support the aims set out in the child's Personal Education Plan⁸.



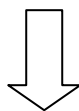
Every child in care will also be a member of a Virtual school; essentially a list of the looked after children in each local authority. Each Virtual school has a Virtual head, who oversees the education of the children in each care in each area on a strategic level, liaising with the local authority and the school, and passing on up to date knowledge of schemes or policies regarding the education of children in care.



The eventual goal of foster care is for a child to return to living with their parents, however, if this is not possible, the child can remain in foster care until the age of 18.



Local authorities must provide financial and personal support until the age of 24 for young people formerly in care who are in full-time education⁹.



Formerly looked after children who apply to university may also receive additional financial and emotional support from the university itself. In 2006, the Frank Buttle Quality Mark was set up. The Quality Mark is awarded to Higher Education institutions who give particular attention to supporting students who have been in care¹⁰.

4. Supporting a Gifted and Talented Child

Definitions

“If we say that all people look at the world through a lens, with some lenses cloudy or distorted, some clear, and some magnified, we might say that gifted individuals view the world through a microscope lens and the highly gifted view it through an electron microscope. They see ordinary things in very different ways and often see what others simply cannot see.” Linda Silverman¹¹.

It is difficult to precisely define what makes a child gifted, as each child is an individual and has individual abilities. However, there are some general characteristics which research has shown that gifted children share.

As the quotation from Silverman explains, a gifted individual is one who looks at the world with great intensity or from a unique perspective, and with advanced cognitive abilities. Gifted is used to refer to a child who has well above average abilities in school curriculum subjects, such as English, Maths or Science, and talented refers to a child who has particular abilities in creative arts, such as music, dance and sport. Gifted children learn at a much faster pace to other children, process material to a much greater depth and have great energy, sensitivity and intellectual abilities which are not typical in the general population. While they may or may not have high ability in all curriculum areas, what gifted children have in common is that they look at the world in different unique and interesting ways: what may be a simple nursery rhyme to an average child (or indeed, average adult), can reveal a whole realm of meaning and questions for a gifted child. In terms of IQ, gifted children generally score above 135 in IQ tests.

Some children are “highly gifted”. These children have an IQ in excess of 170, and have prodigious abilities in specific areas or subjects¹¹.

The advanced cognitive abilities and heightened intensity of a gifted child means that their cognitive abilities develop much more quickly than their physical, emotional and social abilities. This is known as asynchronous development. The advanced cognition often makes gifted children aware of information they are not yet emotionally ready to handle, especially emotional and ethical issues. Gifted children are often misdiagnosed as having special educational needs, because of this uneven development. For example, their handwriting and communicative abilities may lack behind their cognitive abilities, so they find it hard to express their views and opinions¹².

The Process

Giftedness can be noticed by anyone who regularly spends time with a child, but most often it is identified by parents/carers or the child's school.

A parent may identify a child as gifted by observing how quickly they complete their school work, and observing their general behaviour. The parent should inform the schools' Leading Teacher that they suspect their child may be gifted.

Schools are advised to identify the top 10% of their pupils in each year group as gifted. A school may identify that a child is gifted through IQ tests, SATs, CATS scores and communication from parents.

The school lists the child as gifted on the annual School Census.

The information on the schools census helps to form the National Register of gifted and talented children. Until March 2010, this is coordinated by CfBT through its Young Gifted and Talented (YG+T) programme.

The National Register means that the progress of gifted and talented learners can be tracked by those working at local, regional and national levels¹³.

Schools have the responsibility to meet the educational needs of all their pupils. For gifted and talented pupils, this includes providing greater challenges in classes and opportunities for children to develop their potential gifts and talents.

Recent approaches in schools to cater for the needs of gifted and talented children include:

- Individual enrichment classes
- "Gifted" classes
- Extension and enrichment in the mixed ability classroom¹².

From 2007, it has been school policy to have a Leading Teacher for gifted and talented education (this can be in an individual school, or one Leading Teacher can serve a cluster of schools). The Leading Teacher oversees implementation of the schools gifted and talented policy, and works with the head teacher and senior managers to improve the school/cluster of schools' gifted and talented provision. The Leading Teacher also works with the teaching staff in the school to ensure the day to day teaching is sufficiently challenging to meet the needs of gifted and talented children.

5. A Gifted Child in Care

The 2007 *Care Matters* White Paper stated that the government would set out guidance on the role of the designated teacher, which would include how they should consider gifted and talented provision and work with the leading teacher for gifted and talented pupils.

Since 2007, there has been a stronger focus on those who have potential they are not realising due to disadvantage, including children in care. There is an Excellence Hub in each region to provide additional opportunities in school holidays and outside school hours.

Identified gifted and talented learners automatically become members of the Gifted and Talented Learner Academy, and children of secondary school age will remain a member of this even when they move schools⁸.

The 2007 National Strategies document, *Gifted and Talented Education Guidance on preventing underachievement: a focus on children and young people in care*⁷ from the DCSF also intends to raise awareness of the issues relating to children in care who are gifted and talented. This document states that, ***“in order to prevent gifted and talented children in care from under achieving, educational and care provision must be holistic, dynamic, urgent and practical”***⁷. The document also stresses that in order to provide effectively for gifted and talented children in care, the whole school has to have a clear understanding of how being in care could affect a child’s education, and know which children are in care and how their circumstances could affect their education. The National Strategies also calls for liaison between the pupil, the carer, the designated teacher for children in care, the leading teacher for gifted and talented and any senior people in the local authority who have responsibility for promoting the educational achievement of children in care.

It became very evident to NAGC that not only is provision for gifted and talented children in care on a statutory level at a minimum, but it is also not at all specific. While the Department for Children, Schools and Families legislates that there should be liaison between gifted and talented representatives and children in care representatives within schools, exactly in what form this liaison should take place and in which areas is rarely made clear. Equally, an awareness that children in care can be gifted and talented is called for, but very few practices or legislation is put in place to ensure that this awareness is raised in practice.

Equally important to this study is that there appears to be very little information or guidance in existence to support the carers themselves. NAGC’s research revealed that while a potential carer may be informed that a child is bright or good at reading for example, they are rarely informed that a child could be gifted and talented. There also appears to be very little policy in place regarding the support which social workers and

schools should give to carers of gifted and talented children. This is often left to the judgement and awareness of the local authority LAC teams.

6. Findings of Research and Recommendations

The School

School has the main responsibility for the education of all the children who attend, and the role a school plays in the education of a gifted and talented child is absolutely paramount to the development of their intellectual and social skills. In the case of a looked after child, the school is also a corporate parent, and so the role of a school in a looked after child's education is even more vital.

NAGC's research suggests that it is often the responsibility of the school to identify that a looked after child is gifted and talented. While a looked after child may be moved between care placements, the 2007 *Care Matters* White Paper legislated to introduce a requirement that a local authority must ensure that a child's education is not disrupted by them constantly having to move care placements as part of their care plan. This included a requirement that children in care must not move schools in years 10 and 11, apart from in exceptional circumstances. At least in theory, a looked after child's school is one of the most permanent structures in a child's life, and therefore is very likely to have a better knowledge of a child's educational abilities and needs than a carer with whom a child lives only temporarily.

NAGC's interviews with the Heads of Fostering departments suggested very strongly that the rapid influx of children into the care system in the last six months, alongside a static shortage of social workers, means that social workers are very hard-pressed to spend enough time with a particular child to recognise that they are gifted, and to ensure this is recognised by the school. They therefore felt that gifted and talented identification often had to fall to the school, specifically the designated teacher, who has responsibility for all looked after children in the school. Compounding this, NAGC's discussions with the local authority LAC teams highlighted the fact that some carers, particularly those who provide short-term respite care for many different children, only have so much time and energy to give to each child they care for, and intervening at the school level is, for some, above and beyond the care for the child's safety which they are primarily paid to provide. It therefore falls to the school to identify that a looked after child is gifted and talented.

Recommendation 1

The designated teacher of a school should liaise closely with the leading teacher for the gifted and talented, and should be fully informed about all issues connected to gifted and talented identification. These teachers should work in conjunction to ensure that children in care are to be included in the school's gifted and talented quota, and that they subsequently receive the same support and access to the same programmes and activities as all other gifted and talented children.

NAGC has become aware, through its research, that the past experiences of a child who has come into care can often mean that their development is hindered and they find it difficult to pay attention in school. A child who has been traumatised from an early age often remains constantly alert to any possible threats around them, even when they are in a safe environment. This means they find it hard to concentrate in school, as they tune out from tasks which are not threatening and are constantly scanning the environment for threats rather than concentrating on the work in front of them.

They may also find it difficult to remember things; because in some cases a child may constantly relive the experiences they have been through, sinking into a daydream. This results in a reduced oxygen supply to areas of the brain, particularly the Broca's area, which means the short-term memory is disturbed because the brain is unable to form the links it needs to¹⁴. This of course means that a child who has suffered such trauma will struggle to be prepared for the school day, forgetting their timetable and equipment, and also find it very hard to retain facts in the short-term memory, making learning in a classroom situation difficult. Certain events, smells or sensations may also remind a child very strongly of their past experiences, and may lead them to try and avoid these triggers. This is sometimes the reason why a looked after child refuses to go to school: because something in the classroom or the school day reminds them of the painful experiences in their past.

Gifted children in care are therefore at risk of their giftedness not being identified because the format of the everyday curriculum is very difficult for them to follow and keep up with, and because the way their brains have developed means it is very difficult for them to sit and concentrate for an hour long class, or even attend school at all. Children in care who misbehave or turn up at school without the right equipment are often misinterpreted as being naughty or negligent, but in fact it is the result of the trauma they have experienced which means they behave like this. It is often the class teachers who directly experience this difficult behaviour, and are responsible for educating a child regardless of this. While it is for the child's carer to ensure they attend school, the school itself can make this easier by ensuring the school day is as pleasant and non-threatening for the child as possible, so they will not be afraid to attend.

To support the teacher in this care role, NAGC recommends that:

Recommendation 2

All school teachers should receive training from the school's designated teacher in how to work with a traumatised child, and the best ways to help them learn. The designated teachers themselves should receive comprehensive training in this area, and both train and assist class teachers in ensuring the looked after children they teach benefit from appropriate teaching style as much as possible.

As a result of this trauma, it is not surprising that looked after children do not achieve as well at school compared to children who are not in care. However, NAGC believes that just because a child in care does not excel above all other children academically, it does not mean they are not gifted. In the words of one of the carers interviewed by NAGC; ***“a child in care is gifted simply for having survived¹⁵.”***

In order to identify that a child in care is gifted, schools should not be looking purely at grades attained, but at how much a child has developed or value added. Even if a child in care is only attaining the average for their year group by the end of their GCSE's, if they missed a great deal of school in the early years of their life or have improved rapidly from a very low achieving beginning due to the difficult experiences they were undergoing, this could indicate that they are gifted.

The Essex target tracker is a piece of software produced by Essex county council, but is now used by schools in many areas. The software enables teachers to see the progress their pupils have made in a graph format, and sets targets for the pupils to achieve based on their progression so far. NAGC believes that this form of charting progress rather than just attainment is necessary to ensure that the giftedness of children in care is identified, even if they are achieving below, or the average, for their age group.

Recommendation 3

Schools should use the Essex target tracker software to track how a child in care progresses academically. If a child progresses at an above average rate, that is, exceeds the targets set for them, this is to be understood to be an indication that they are gifted and talented.

Social Workers and Key Workers

The social workers of both carers and looked after children, and a child's key worker in a care home, are the people who know the carer and child's needs most accurately through their regular contact with them, but are also the official figures who are responsible for ensuring that a looked after child develops as fully as possible while they are in care, and fulfil their potential.

NAGC's research found that:

- Approximately 6 in 100 children in care continue into Higher Education¹⁶, compared to government targets that 50% of school leavers attend university.
- Those most likely to apply for university were those who had attended schools where most other students went on to university as well.

- Those who were cared for by families with other children at university - and who encouraged them to see it as a natural progression⁹ were most likely to go to university.

Many gifted, or indeed bright young people in care could be missing out on the chance to attend university as an effect of them being in care.

While local authorities now have a statutory duty to keep in touch with young people who have left care and to provide support for those in education or training until the age of 24, it is left to the carer to encourage the child in their care to attend university and, with the school, to help them with the application process.

For many carers, particularly those who have not attended university themselves, this can be a daunting prospect. For a child in a children's home, there may be no guidance figure present who understands the university application system, and thus no one to guide the young person through the application procedure.

NAGC believes that, alongside the child's school, the social worker or key worker of a child in care should take responsibility for ensuring the child is aware that it is possible for them to attend university, and to help them through the application process if the carers do not feel able to, or do not want to do this. By doing so, they would ensure that a child in care does not miss out on the chance of going to university through lack of support from a guidance figure that can advise and help them through the process.

Recommendation 4

Social workers and key workers should inform the young people they are responsible for that they could attend university, and ensure they receive guidance and support throughout the application process.

NAGC's interviews with fostering departments revealed that although some children are taken into care in emergency situations and so little about them is known to the local authority, in many cases a child will have had a social worker who will have worked with them and their parents before the decision is made that the child must be taken into public care. In these cases, a social worker will have some knowledge of a child, and this knowledge may include knowledge of a child's gifts and talents.

Although the government has legislated that a care plan should disrupt a child's education as little as possible, between one-third and half of children in 2005 changed school when they moved from their homes into foster care¹⁷. In these cases, although school records will follow a child to their new school, a child's social worker may be aware of gifts and talents a child may have before the school is. In these cases, NAGC believes that the social worker should inform the designated teacher in the school of the child's gifts and talents, rather

than wait for the meeting with the school to write the Personal Education Plan, which could be at any point within the first 14 days after a child is taken into care. This would ensure that the school can prepare for the arrival of a child who is gifted in a particular area, and immediately begin to offer the child educational provision that encourages their talents without the carers themselves needing to contact the school once they became aware that the child they are caring for is gifted.

Recommendation 5

Whenever possible, a child's social worker should inform the school of any gifts and talents a child may have before the child comes into the school, either when the child first comes into care or if they have to change schools as part of their care plan.

The responses to NAGC's questionnaires revealed that most carers are not aware of the concept of a gifted and talented child. None of the carers who completed the postal questionnaires were aware that the characteristics the child they cared for was exhibiting could indicate that they were gifted and talented, despite the fact that the carers clearly recognised that the child was bright in some way. Therefore, to best support a gifted child, a carer needs to be aware of how best to cater for their gifts and talents, and how to deal with the uneven development which may manifest itself in an individual whose intellectual capacity is far above their age.

As it is the carers' social worker who is responsible for helping a carer care for their child and cope with any difficulties they may have, NAGC feels that it is the carers' social worker who is best placed to inform them that a child in their care could be gifted and talented, and how best to deal with and cater for this child.

Recommendation 6

The social worker of a carer should be thoroughly aware of the needs of a gifted child, and inform the carer of these needs and how best to cater for them as soon as the child's giftedness is identified.

The Care System

NAGC's research revealed that being in the right placement is very important for a looked after child's development. As part of a potential foster carers' assessment process, a social worker will visit their home several times and speak to all members of the family, so they can build up a comprehensive profile of the parents and the parenting environment they can provide and determine the type of children whose needs they will best meet.

The Personal Education Plan of a looked after child lists the child's development and educational needs and their long terms plans and educational aspirations¹⁸. The exact

layout of the Personal Education Plan differs in each local authority, and at least one local authority includes a section which refers to any areas in which the child shows particular giftedness.

NAGC believes that a section on gifted and talented issues should be included in the Personal Education Plan of every authority, for the awareness of both the school and carers, but also so that future care placements can be made with the child's gifts and interests in mind. This would ensure that a more complete profile of the child's educational capabilities is created, which includes their non-academic talents. This profile could then be used to help placing a child with future carers. A child is naturally going to be happiest when being looked after by a carer with similar interests to their own, and both carer and child would develop from having a common interest: the child's giftedness would be encouraged, and a carer would find it easier to immediately relate to the child and include them in the everyday lives of their family.

Recommendation 7

A child's gifts and talents should be included in the Personal Education Plan of every looked after child, and input from the carers, designated teacher and social worker should be used to identify these talents.

Recommendation 8

Whenever possible, a child should be placed with carers whose own interests are compatible with and would encourage a child's particular gifts.

NAGC's interviews with the local authority fostering departments suggested that many departments have a low awareness of issues connected to gifted and talented children, and it is for the individual social worker to make a carer aware of gifted and talented issues and how to cater for them. Only two of the heads of department NAGC spoke to were aware that at least one child on their care role was on the gifted and talented register, but they did not know how many exactly. The carers who completed NAGC's questionnaires also revealed that there appears to be little evidence of gifted and talented education in the information given to potential foster carers and carers are therefore often not prepared for the effect caring for a gifted child may have on their lives.

According to NAGC's research, carers would, if enough information was known about a child, be told that they were, for example, a good reader, but they were not made aware that this could mean that the child was gifted and talented, and they would need to cater for this in some way.

On a legislative level, very little reference is made to gifted and talented education. The National Minimum Standards for Foster Care states that the fostering service gives “high priority”¹⁹ to the educational needs of each child in foster care, and to ensuring they are encouraged to attain their full potential. However, the National Minimum Standards do not refer in any way to ensuring the gifts and talents of children in care are identified and encouraged by their carers’ and the fostering service. NAGC believes that a child’s gifts and talents are an essential element of their overall education and future prospects, and are, more importantly, a vital aspect of who a child is which a carer needs to be aware of, and needs to cater for to ensure the child’s overall development and happiness.

Recommendation 9

Standard 13 of the Fostering Services National Minimum Standards should be added to, to include a requirement for carers and social workers to ensure that a child’s gifts and talents are encouraged by their care placement; both through prior preparation for a child’s gifts and talents, if known, and through later provision from both social workers and carers.

External agencies eg NAGC

After researching the effects a traumatic childhood can have on a child’s education and on their behaviour, NAGC felt that an understanding of this was essential to helping it advise carers in how best to encourage and nurture the gifts and talents of a looked after child. A looked after child may well have different educational needs to a child who has not been in care, and has not had to face the traumatic experiences which many children in care have.

In order to help carers support gifted children fully, NAGC felt it was necessary for external agencies working with carers to be able to give carers advice on dealing with the effects trauma may have had on their child, and how to overcome the barriers to education this often creates.

Recommendation 10

Staff working at the front line in external agencies eg NAGC’s Education Consultants should be trained in coping with the effects trauma may have had on a child, both emotionally and intellectually so that they can support carers who contact them.

From the interviews held with professionals, many carers often do not want to, or do not have the time or money to, take a gifted child in their care to events or places which would encourage and nurture their interests and talents. Events put on locally for children in care and their families are often poorly attended, and despite some of the amenities offering

financial incentives to carers (for example, free theatre tickets for their child), these opportunities were only taken up by a small number of carers.

Caring for a child whilst looking after other children and working is of course difficult, and so carers may struggle to find the time to take the child they care for to such events, and may feel it is beyond the care they are paid to provide.

NAGC therefore feels that the best way to reach gifted children in care could be at home. Rather than relying on carers to bring their child to events, a more effective strategy could be to distribute resources and provide support to carers and children directly and with minimal disruption to family life.

Recommendation 11

NAGC should provide support and resources aimed at gifted and talented children and their carers in the homes of those children identified as gifted and talented or with the potential to be. Examples of such materials could be DVD based support sessions, webinars via the computer, magazines and other sources of support and information.

NAGC's interviews with some carers of gifted children revealed that many carers feel they are not adequately qualified to approach a school to intervene on behalf of the child they care for. While all formal carers have the legal position of a parent in relation to the child, and kinship carers are, in almost all cases, given this position by the school, it appears that many carers do not feel they have sufficient grounds to ask a child's school to take notice of a child's ability. According to the carers interviewed, many carers also feel that if they do not have good school qualifications themselves, they are not in a position to address the school and ask for a change in the way their child is educated.

Providing information to carers to support them when they go into school and advocating on their behalf would be a useful service and something that NAGC could provide specifically for carers with gifted and talented children in their care.

Recommendation 12

NAGC should offer an advocacy service to carers, to liaise on their behalf with schools on issues relating to gifted and talented education.

The care system is very complex, and children in care and their carers all have very different needs. NAGC therefore intends to continue to look further into the needs of different types of carers, and also the needs of gifted children in care themselves to see what help and support should be offered to the carers of gifted children.

Recommendation 13

NAGC should carry out further research regarding the needs of the carers of gifted children.

7. Conclusion

If this report conveys nothing else, it shows that the world of foster care and the world of gifted and talented education rarely mix. While in isolation a child in care and a gifted child have many support networks in place to ensure they fulfil their potential and develop to the full, a child who crosses the boundaries between these two worlds is, more often than not, simply not catered for. Even amongst those who work with children in care every day, being in care still has a stigma attached to it. Children in care are not expected to be gifted and gifted children are not expected to be in care. Consequently, the foster care world is largely unaware of the presence of the gifted and talented child, and the world of gifted and talented children is only gradually becoming aware that children in care fall within its remit.

Gifted children in care are doubly disadvantaged. Not only do they have to deal with the difficult experiences of being gifted and the difficult experiences of being in care, but the stigma that is attached to being in care leads to the giftedness of a child in care going unnoticed, or forgotten because the negative effects of often traumatic experiences in the early years can make children in care difficult to live with, hard to educate and can create barriers to their learning.

NAGC's research has shown that this means that the carers of gifted children receive little help and support. In some cases, carers feel that catering for a gifted and talented child is above and beyond what they are prepared for, and beyond what they, as carers, are paid or supported to do: provide a safe and secure home in which a child can develop.

The way to improve this situation is through liaison and collaboration, to ensure the responsibility for ensuring gifted children in care receive the best possible provision is not left to the carers alone. All too often, the onus is on the carers to intervene with the school to ensure the child's giftedness is recognised and they are properly catered for. Carers are often unprepared for the way a gifted child can change their lives, and are expected to learn to adapt to this, and learn how to care for the specific needs of a gifted child themselves.

It is therefore necessary for schools, social workers, local authorities and organisations like NAGC to take prime responsibility for ensuring carers are informed about gifted and talented education and the issues connected to it. Schools and social workers in particular need to take a far more pro-active approach to gifted and talented children in care; ensuring children in care are included in their identification of the gifted and talented quota in the school, and their carers' are informed about what this may mean with regards to the child's behaviour, and are supported in catering for this.

Where carers feel unable or under qualified to help the child they care for to fulfil their potential, it is for the school, the social workers and organisations such as NAGC to provide

services to fulfil their role as corporate parents for looked after children, and take on these tasks themselves on behalf of the carers.

Above all, there needs to be a greater awareness, amongst all parties, of the needs of gifted and talented children, and a realisation that children in care can be, and are, gifted and talented. Gifted and talented issues should feature in all of the structures which prescribe what a looked after child's life is to be. A child's gifts and talents are a fundamental part of who they are now and who they will be in the future, and so should be considered in all care planning decisions to ensure that being in care does not mean that these vital aspects of a child's life are lost or forgotten.

Appendix 1a

To be answered by the care provider.

NAGC is a charity supporting the social, emotional and learning needs of bright children regardless of age, background or multiple exceptionalities (giftedness coupled with learning difficulties such as Aspergers, ADHD or dyslexia.)

Caring for an exceptionally bright child who approaches the world in a different way to yourself can be difficult and sometimes distressing. You may find yourself having to adapt your entire way of life to encourage the child's abilities and may find it difficult to keep them interested both in school subjects and extra-curricular activities. NAGC aims to support the needs of parents and carers of these bright or gifted children.

As part of a two month long research project, NAGC is focusing on gifted children in the foster care system and would like to gather research from foster carers and care providers so that in the future we can try to offer carers the support they need.

Please take a few moments to fill in the questionnaire below.

1. How many children have you cared for (both past and present)?

2. Below are some characteristics that the children you have cared for may have shown. How many children (if any), have shown these characteristics? Please put the number of children you have cared for who exhibited these characteristics in the box next to the relevant characteristic(s).
 - Perfectionism
 - Learning to read very early on
 - Frequent questioning of everyday things
 - Intense focus and a longer than usual attention span
 - Above average abilities in school subjects
 - Above average abilities in sports
 - Constantly active and always on the go
 - Particular creativity, for example in music, design or performing arts

3. Were you aware that these are all characteristics which could indicate that a child is gifted and talented?

Yes

No

4. To your knowledge, has anyone you have cared for been gifted?

Yes

No

5. How did you know they were gifted?

6. Before you began to foster/care for this child/children, were you given any information by your LA/Social Worker about their gifts and talents? If so, please briefly summarise what this was.

7. List three things you find challenging about the child's giftedness:

1.

2.

3.

8. Is there anything you do differently as a result of the child's giftedness?

9. Do you receive any support from other people/organisations to help you care for the child?

10. What other support do you feel would help you to meet their needs?

We would like to gather further information regarding your experiences of gifted children within the foster care system. If you would be happy to be interviewed as part of this research project, please tick here.

Please indicate your preference:

By telephone

Face to face

Appendix 1b

To be answered by the Head of the Fostering and Adoption Department.

NAGC is a charity supporting the social, emotional and learning needs of gifted children regardless of age, background or multiple exceptionalities (giftedness coupled with learning difficulties such as Aspergers, ADHD or dyslexia.)

Caring for a particularly bright or gifted child can be difficult, and the carers of such children may require additional support to help encourage their child's gifts and talents, and to engage them in school and extra-curricular activities. In order to help support these carers, NAGC is trying to establish what sort of support these carers need. Your thoughts and experience of working with such carers would be instrumental in helping us to establish this.

As part of a two month long research project, NAGC is focusing on gifted children in the foster care system and would like to gather research from foster carers and care providers. Please take a few moments to fill in the questionnaire below. If you are aware that any of the children on your care role are on the gifted and talented register, or their foster carers have suggested they may be gifted or particularly bright, please pass this questionnaire on to the relevant social worker to complete the bottom half.

1. How many carers are on the care role for your area (including care homes and private foster carers)?
2. What information do you give to a carer about a child they are potentially going to foster?
3. Are any of the children on your care role on the gifted and talented register?

4. How were you made aware that they are gifted and talented?

To be answered by the Social Worker.

5. Has it ever been brought to your attention that one of the foster carers in your area is caring for a gifted and talented child?

Yes

No

6. Have any of the carers in your area ever mentioned to you that they are caring for a child who exhibits any of the following characteristics?

Please tick which apply.

Above average abilities in school subjects, such as English, maths and science

Above average abilities in sports

Particularly creative, for example in music, design or performing arts

A particularly questioning mind which deals with problems in creative or imaginative ways

Any others, please list:

7. What kind of support and help did these carers ask for?

8. Do you have an existing policy or documentation you would implement if a carer identified a child as gifted and talented? If yes, please outline briefly what this consists of.

9. If not, how would you help support a carer with a gifted child if one approached you?

We would like to gather further information regarding your experiences of gifted children within the foster care system. If you would be happy to be interviewed as part of this research project, please tick here.

Please indicate your preference:

- By telephone Face to face

Appendix 2

a) How did you become aware the child was gifted, and how did you react to this realisation?

b) What information were you given about the child's giftedness before you began caring for them, and how useful was this? Was the child's Personal Education Plan helpful in this?

c) What support are you given to care for your child on a daily basis?

d) How does your child's giftedness affect your day to day life?

e) What other support, both financial and practical, would you find helpful?

Appendix 3

About the Child

a) How did you become aware the child was gifted, and how did you react to this realisation?

1. General about child – what they are like, moving on to how they are gifted.
2. How did you first become aware they were gifted?
3. What were your first reactions as the child's giftedness became apparent?

Support the carers were given

b) What information were you given about the child's giftedness before you began caring for them, and how useful was this? Was the child's Personal Education Plan helpful in this?

c) What support are you given to care for your child on a daily basis?

1. What information were you given about the child's talents and interests?
2. In what form did you receive this information – mentioned by social worker, Personal Education Plan, etc?
3. How useful was this information, particularly the Personal Education Plan, in preparing you for the child's giftedness and in later helping you to deal with it? Did you know what you would do to deal with the child's giftedness before you met them?
4. What support do you receive to care for the child, and how useful is it?
5. How supportive are the child's school? Do they suggest activities, after school clubs, etc?

6. What financial support do you receive to help encourage the child's giftedness?

What the carers do

d) How does your child's giftedness affect your day to day life?

1. What do you do directly as a result of the child's giftedness (that you would not do otherwise?)
2. How big a role have you played in ensuring the child's school are aware of their giftedness and encourage it?

Support they need

e) What other support, both financial and practical, would you find helpful?

1. Do you think you and the child you care for need more support?
2. What kind of support, and from whom?
3. Do you receive sufficient financial support to enable you to encourage the child's giftedness?
4. Do you know of any carers in a similar position to yourselves – would networking be helpful? Do you think sharing experiences would be useful?

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