

# FAMILY ESSENTIAL LIFESTYLE PLANS

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## Introduction

Person centred planning is evolving. Over the last twenty years, practitioners have created powerful, colourful and thoughtful plans with individuals who have learning disabilities. Our belief - that person centred planning is for everyone - is gradually being put into practice, as people who have mental health issues, people who misuse drugs, and older people are beginning to see the potential of person centred planning. We also hear stories of people using person centred planning as some would use life coaching – simply as an opportunity to think about their life and plan change.

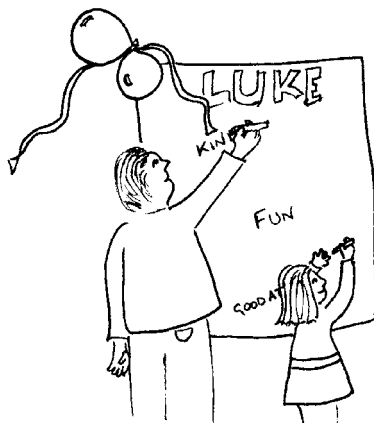
A further development in person centred planning is a shift in focus from individuals to families, as we explore the contribution of Family Essential Lifestyle Plans.

## Background

The Department of Health defines person centred planning as: *“a process of continual listening and learning, focussed on what is important to someone now, and for the future; and acting upon this in alliance with their family and friends. Put simply, it is a way of helping people work out what they want, what support they require and then helping them work out how to get it.”* (1)

There are different styles of planning, and the one that we focus on in this paper is called Essential Lifestyle Planning (2).

Person centred planning with individuals has created change for people, their families, and the organisations that serve them. However, we have also found that the focus on the individual can have sometimes have unintended negative consequences.



*Luke's Mum, Della, had been working with Luke on his essential lifestyle plan. They decided to have an 'information gathering party', with other members of his family and friends. On a sunny August evening, the house was decked with balloons, streamers and large pieces of paper on the walls for people to fill with their knowledge of Luke. There was a joyous, party atmosphere as friends and family used coloured markers to record what they liked and admired about Luke, what they thought his best and worst days were, and what support they thought he needed.*



*Luke and Della thought the evening was a great success, until after everyone had gone, Luke's older brother, Tim, burst into tears. The evening had emphasised for him the inequality that he felt with his disabled sibling.*

Learning from planning with people from minority ethnic communities reminds us that the focus on the individual can be seen as westernised ideology, which does not resonate with all families.

Skilful planning with a disabled family member will always consider the person within the context of their family. However, Family Essential Lifestyle Plans takes this a step further, and appreciates what is important to each family member, and the support that the family needs, with the disabled family member naturally part of this.

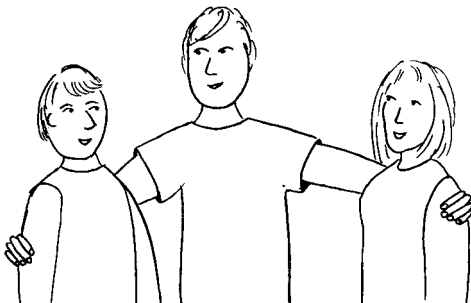
### **What does a Family ELP look like?**

A Family ELP uses the same structure and headings as any ELP, but includes issues from each family member and the family as a whole.

We have been planning with our own families, to explore these ideas, and are beginning to introduce them within Sure Start Waterbridge. Sharon Carter, a mother, foster mother and chair of the Management Board of Sure Start Waterbridge, also shares her family plan. The plan begins with what family members like and admire about each other.

### ***What we like and admire about each other***

The plan begins with a section where we record what each member of the family likes and admires about each other.



*"Dad is helpful, intelligent, practical, trustworthy and loving."*

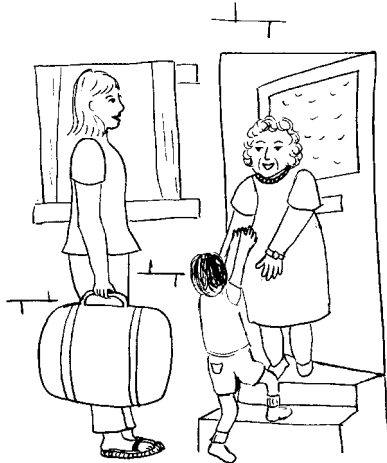
*"Milena is very determined, very clever, funny, and confident."*

*"Robert is very brave, has a go-get-it attitude, tries really hard, and is determined."*

### **What is important to us as a family?**

This section of the plan describes what is important to the family. It could have a number of sections, as we illustrate here with examples from our plans:

- a) It may include what is important about family relationships with others, for example:



*“Keeping in touch with our ‘big’ family:*

*To see Granny Carolyn, Granny Sylvia and Grandpa Mike every couple of weeks. Granny Sylvia and Grandpa Mike come after school on alternate Thursdays.”*

*“To see Paul every week, to have him stay over when he wants to (usually every week) and to go on holiday with him for a week every year.”*

*“To go and see Sharon’s sister in Scotland as a family 2-3 times per year.”*

example;

- b) It may include family activities or possessions, for



*“During the week we have breakfast together at 7.30am at the kitchen table. Breakfast options are ‘healthy’ (Cheerios, Weetabix, toast and fruit). At the weekends the girls can have their breakfast in front of the TV (and have chocolate spread if they want it).”*

*“In the evening, we all watch Cbeebies together and sing the ‘night night’ song. At 7pm, Milena has her milk, gets ready for bed and listens to a story before going to sleep. Oscar has his last feed and is in bed by 9pm.”*

*“About staying safe as a family...*

*Each of us needs to tell each other where we are going, who with and when we will be back. We all need to keep a close eye on Robert to make sure he is safe at all times.”*



- c) This section could include what is important to the family about the rhythm or pace of life, for example:

*“Sunday is our family day. We usually go out together (cinema, walk, bowling).”*

*“Dad goes to the football on a Saturday, and Mum trains (run, bike, swim) on a Sunday.”*

*“It is important to have structure and organisation to weekdays; that is, everyone up at 6am and ready to go at 8.15am.”*

d) It could cover important routines or family rituals, for example;



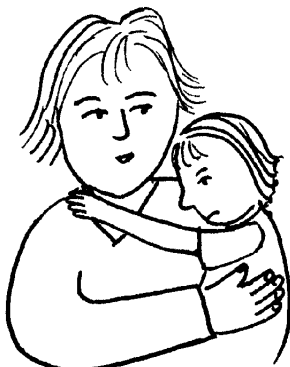
*“Christmas preparations start early for us. The tree goes up on the first weekend in December. Each girl buys a new tree decoration each year. Dad puts lights at the front of the house.”*

*with a party. birthday is on which means she her friends being now celebrate with friends in date of her ceremony. birthday falls on doubt he will themed birthdays come. We also Paul’s birthday loves a party, include dancing.”*



*“We celebrate our birthdays Milena’s Boxing Day, misses out on with her. We her birthday June, on the naming Oscar’s Halloween; no have many for years to like to share with him; Paul which must*

e) Finally, it could cover what the family values, for example:



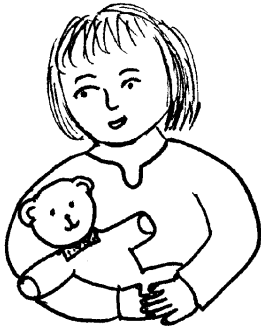
*“It is important to us to be honest with each other.”*

*“We agree that we should not hit, kick or hurt each other.”*

*“Loads of cuddles every day – just generally, and particularly when someone is having a bad day.”*

## What is important to us individually?

The next section of the family essential lifestyle plan describes what is also important to the family as individuals. Each family member therefore has a heading that describes what is important to him or her, from their perspective, regardless of whether other family members agree with it! For example:

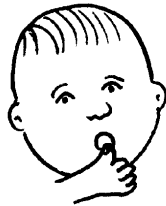


*“What is important to Elisabeth?”*

- *Having my soft toys (particularly my teddy Sunny, donkey Eleanor, and moose, Lucy).*
- *Practicing skipping in the hall and at school every day.”*

*“What is important to*

- *To be with people Milena, Paul,*
- *To have his thumb*



*Oscar?”*

*that he recognises: Mum, Dad, grandparents, close family friends. available to suck.*

*“What is important to Simon?”*

*About relationships...*

- *To be listened to – you need to stop what you are doing, sit down with me and have a chat with me on my own.*
- *Going to see my aunt, uncle and cousins in Scotland 2-3 times a year.*

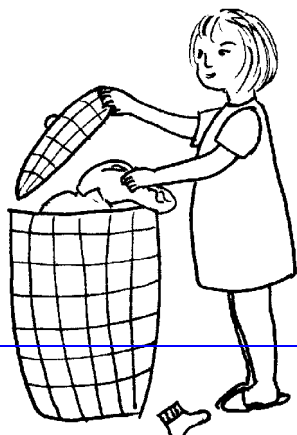
## What support do we need as a family?

We all need support, at different times, and in different ways. We rarely acknowledge that family collectively need support. This may include:

a) The support the family needs from each other, for example:

*“For the girls to share responsibility for chores. At the moment they:*

- *Clear their plates/bowls from the breakfast table and put them in the dishwasher.*
- *Put their clothes in the dirty linen before bed.*
- *The girls take it in turns to clean the rats out every week. (Mum ensures that this happens.)”*



*“To share the responsibility of caring for the children physically and emotionally.”*

*“To share the responsibility of dropping off and collecting Milena and Oscar from their childminder.”*

b) The support the family needs from other family members, or friends, for example:



*“Granny Carolyn helping out – for example having Rosemary for occasional Friday mornings if Mummy has to work.”*

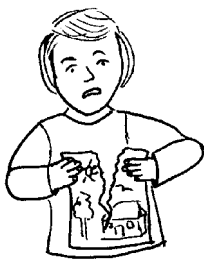
*“Grandparents (Samuels) to baby sit/have the children overnight to ensure Mum and Dad are able to spend some quality time together. (There is no regular pattern to this.)”*

c) And support from services, for example,

*“Julie (childminder) to look after Milena and Oscar four days a week.”*

## **What support do we need individually?**

As well as describing the general support the family needs, there are separate sections for the individual support that each family member needs. For example:



*“If Clare gets frustrated and upset that her picture, writing etc is not up to her high standard, comfort her and get her to try again when she feels calmer (this may be later that day).”*

*asthma.”*

*“Oscar needs to have a bottle and solid foods every 3 hours during the day. We need to be very careful with Oscar’s food: he has a special diet to support his eczema and*

*“You need to know that if Thomas is going upstairs he needs to hold your hand.”*

## **Questions we are working on**

In most families there are frustrations, and unanswered questions. This part of the plan is a place to record these questions, which are then addressed in the final section, 'What we have decided to do'. For example:

*"How can we make sure that we each eat five pieces of fruit or veg a day, because we are only eating about two a day at the moment?"*



*"How are Mum and Dad going to encourage family and friends to baby-sit, allowing them to go out together once or twice a month?"*

*"What can we do to make mornings less stressful?"*

### ***What is working and not working for each of us***

For most of us there are aspects of our lives that are working, and some that are not! This section of the plan is the place to record this, individually from each family member's perspective.

Clare

#### ***What is working for me***

- *I enjoy school.*
- *I have my own bedroom.*
- *Seeing my friends.*

#### ***What is not working for me***

- *Rosemary playing with my stuff without asking me.*
- *Rosemary and Elisabeth going to my room without asking.*
- *My parents feel 'too organised' and want us to be a healthy family.*

Milena

#### ***What is working for me***

- *Being a sister.*
- *Having bedtime stories and funny animal books read to me.*
- *Going on trips to the beach with my bucket and spade.*

#### ***What is not working for me***

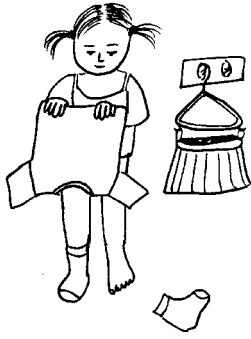
- *Not being the baby in the family.*
- *Going to bed when I'm having a good time.*
- *Mummy and Daddy interfering with my independence.*

### ***What we have decided to do***

The final section takes us from recording information and evaluating what is working and not working, to what the family chooses to do about this.

Sometimes, an increased understanding of each other's perspective is enough; often there are specific things we want to change, for example:

*"Talk to Elisabeth and Rosemary about Clare's room being private (and make sure that Clare respects their bedroom as private too!) If this is not enough, think about a lock on Clare's bedroom. Mum to make sure this happens within 3 weeks."*



*"Mummy and Daddy to remember to give Milena plenty of time to complete tasks such as getting dressed/undressed, tidying up, etc. Hurrying Milena up or completing tasks for her upsets her unnecessarily. Milena needs to be enabled to recognise that Mummy and Daddy need to make some decisions for her to keep her safe."*

## **What are we learning about the impact of Family Essential Lifestyle Plans?**

People could use a family essential lifestyle plan for many different reasons, and we are at the beginning of exploring why and how families may use this style of planning. However, we can share what family essential lifestyle plans have meant for the first three families to try them:

*"Doing our Family Essential Lifestyle Plan enabled me to listen differently to my daughters. Clare often moaned about her sisters going into her bedroom, and 'messing with her stuff', but I did not realise just how important an issue this was for Clare until we did our plan. This made me prioritise helping her to do something about it. The plan reaffirmed much of what I know about the girls, and had some surprises as well! It was lovely to listen to what they like and admire about each other, when usually the typical sibling bickering hides this. The girls proudly drew self-portraits for the plan, and asked for their individual sections on what is important to them to be printed out and put on the fridge. The other day I saw Elisabeth take a friend to read hers, and proudly point out the bit where her friend was mentioned."*

*"Sarah and I have experienced being part of an individual Essential Lifestyle Plan created for and with our friend Paul, a young man who is learning disabled. Paul and I have known each other for almost 30 years and he has always been a much cherished part of my life. Creating our family plan together with the children demonstrated to me how much of an integrated part of our family Paul is. Milena misses him when he isn't with us, and Sarah recognises that it is important for her to support my relationship with Paul because of his importance to me. Conversely, I have been able to see Paul's relationship with other family members from Sarah's perspective"*

*“I didn’t know what to expect when I began creating my family’s Essential Lifestyle Plan with support from my local Sure Start programme. I had seen individual plans and commented how wonderful it would be for my foster children to have their own individual plan. However, now we have our family plan, I believe it is really important not only that foster children own their own plan, but that all foster carers have plans to enable better matching and, where possible, for children placed to become a part of the foster family’s Essential Lifestyle Plan.”*

## **Conclusion**

Family essential lifestyle plans have evolved from years of using person centred planning with individuals, from what families have shared with us, and from our understanding of how to change systems. We think that they could be used with looked after children, long-term placements and adoption, and broadly within health and social services. Through Sure Start Waterbridge, in Colne, East Lancs, we are working to explore this potential.

## **References**

1. Department of Health (2002) Planning with People - Towards Person Centred Approaches. London. D.H. Download from [www.doh.gov.uk/learningdisabilities](http://www.doh.gov.uk/learningdisabilities)
2. Essential Lifestyle Planning (2001) Smull, M and Sanderson, H, Manchester : North West Training and Development Team.

To learn more about our work with Sure Start Waterbridge, in Colne, East Lancs, see [www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk](http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk)