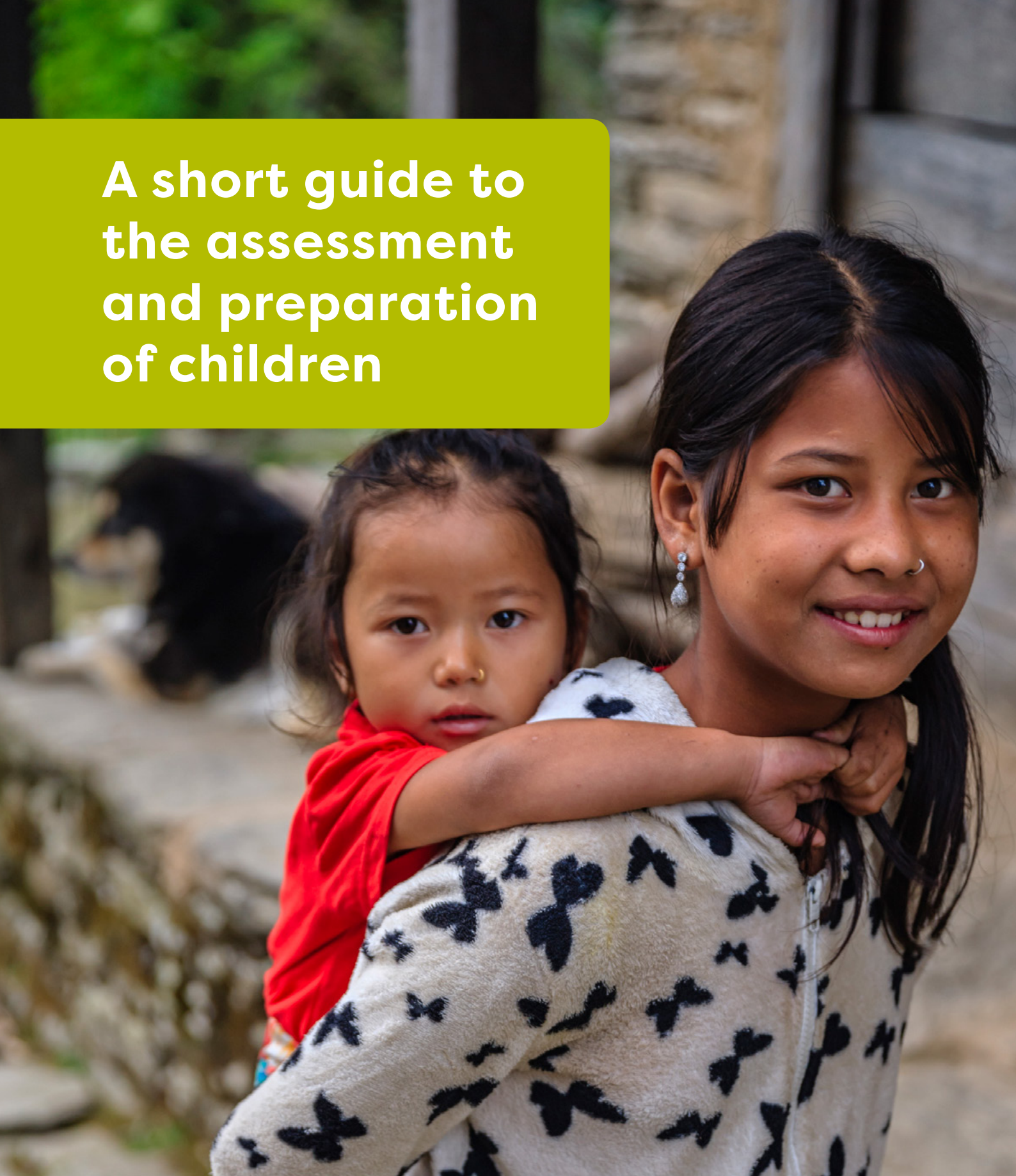




Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.

# A short guide to the assessment and preparation of children



## The importance of assessment and care planning

The assessment and preparation of children is one of the most important parts of a deinstitutionalisation (DI) programme. Supporting and enabling the child to return home to their family, if safe and practical, should be the primary consideration. However, we recognise that it is not always possible or safe for all children to live with their families. For a small number of children, alternative family care will be needed. This handout includes information for preparing children to return home or to move to alternative family-based care services.

To ensure that the new placements are based on the best interests of children, a comprehensive assessment of the child and their family will be needed.

## The aim of assessment and care planning

The purpose of an assessment of children and their family is to understand the ability of the family or other carers to meet the child's needs and to make a plan to meet the child's needs. This involves gathering information which identifies the development, protection and welfare needs of a child and considering the social, environmental and cultural aspects and context of the child's life. A plan can then be made which is appropriate for the child.

## The assessment process

The assessment is a process. It includes gathering information, analysing, making judgements and developing a plan. An assessment should be a joint process involving the child, their family and the practitioners working with the family. It should include social and environmental factors to give a detailed understanding of the child's life and needs.

Assessments should be child-centred so that the focus is always on the individual child. Assessments must involve direct work with children and their families. They should be collaborative, involving the child and family as well as all relevant practitioners from any government agencies or NGOs providing services to the child. They should also build on strengths as well as identify difficulties, be grounded in evidence-based knowledge and ensure equality of opportunity and diversity.

Assessments will benefit from many different sources of information and different methods. The most frequently used methods are interviews and one-to-one work, but other methods include observation, tools such as genograms or family trees and ecomaps, and standardised tests and questionnaires. Sources of information will always include the child and their family or carers, but should also include other people who know the child well. This could be extended family members as well as teachers, health professionals, social workers or other practitioners who work with the family.

Visits to the child's family home are needed to see the home environment and meet the family members and observe family interactions. This will give the assessment team a better understanding of the family situation and the reason why the child was initially placed in care, if these problems are still ongoing and the challenges to the child returning home.

The process will also need to include an assessment of the local community where the home is located to identify if children can access the local services they need like health care, schools and transport. Any risks to the child will also need to be identified, for example war or areas prone to natural disasters.

The analysis of an assessment consists of making sense of events and statements and arriving at an overall picture and an understanding of how the situation has developed. The analysis includes looking at research and theory to see what it tells us about the information gathered and considering if there are any gaps in the information.

## Planning and review

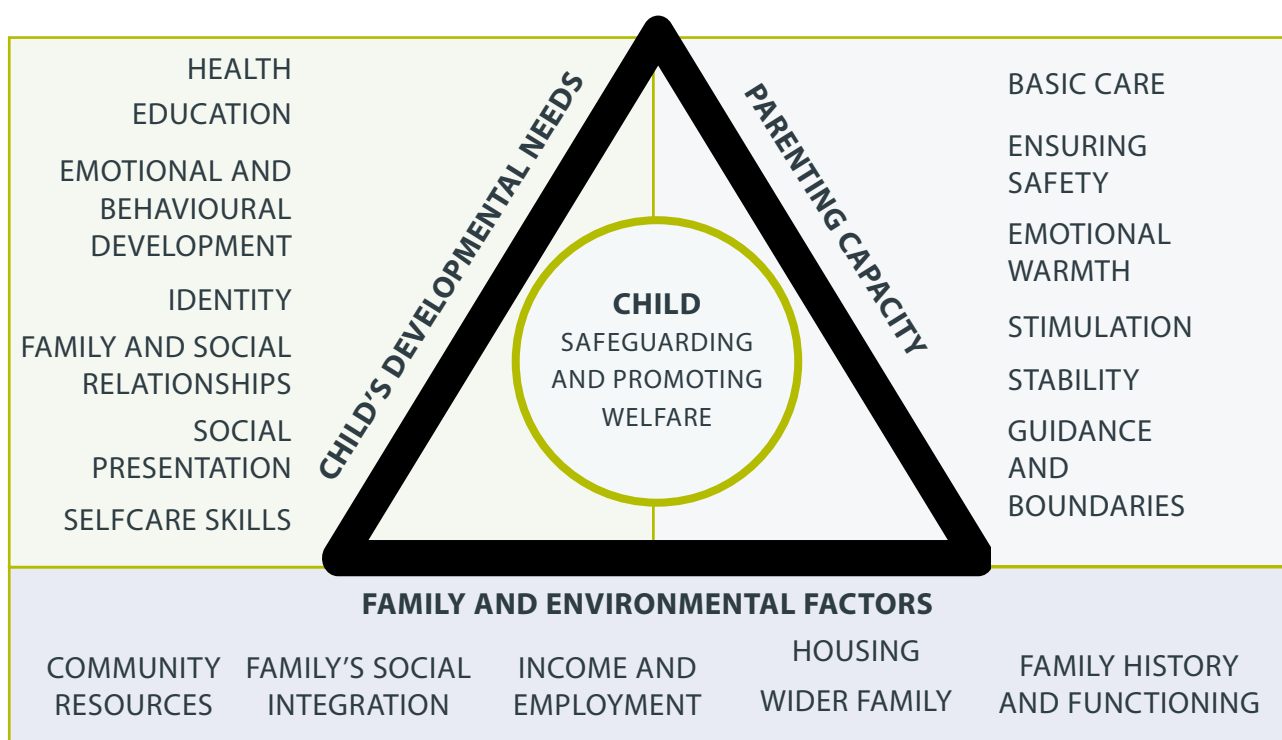
The plan is the outcome of the assessment; putting the analysis, judgments and decisions into effect. The plan should include a set of actions which aim to meet the child's needs, comply with the child's wishes and feelings and reduce or remove any risks identified in the assessment. Each action should be recorded along with expectations of who will do what, a timescale for completion of the action and arrangements for the action to be monitored and reviewed.

The care plan needs to be reviewed at regular intervals to check that it is being implemented and to consider the impact it is having on the child, determine whether there is or has been any risk and to consider the child's experiences and situation.

## Tools and resources

The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families was developed by the Department of Health in the UK to provide a systematic way of analysing, understanding and recording what is happening to children and young people within their families and the wider context of the community in which they live.

This diagram shows the key themes included in the Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families.



The complete framework can be downloaded here: [bit.ly/frameworklumos](http://bit.ly/frameworklumos)



Lumos has written a book to prepare children and young people for moving out of institutions and back to their families or into family-type homes. The book has been adapted for use in Europe and Haiti. The aim of the book is to support children to understand the changes that will happen during the time the institution is closing and how this will affect them. There are activity sheets in the book, which encourage children to participate in planning for their move and to ask any questions they may have. There are also worksheets to help children prepare for the assessment process and think about the important things they want to share with the assessment team.

There are two versions of the book for different age groups here:



For young children:

A workbook for children to help them understand what will happen when the institution they are in closes down and they return to their families or enter small group homes. This book is aimed at children with early reading skills.

[wearelumos.org/knowledge-portal/moving-my-new-home/](http://wearelumos.org/knowledge-portal/moving-my-new-home/)



For children aged 8–16 years old:

A workbook for children to help them understand what will happen when the institution they are in closes down and they return to their families or enter small group homes. This book is aimed at children aged around 8-16 years.

[wearelumos.org/knowledge-portal/moving-mynew-home-ii/](http://wearelumos.org/knowledge-portal/moving-mynew-home-ii/)

Please note that Lumos holds copyright to the books, except for the illustrations which are copyright to CHANGE: [www.changepeople.org](http://www.changepeople.org)

## Ecomaps

An ecomap is a diagram that shows the social and personal relationships of an individual with their environment. Ecomaps were developed in 1975 by Dr Ann Hartman.

Ecomaps document the connections between family members and the outside world. They also provide a way of visualising the quality of those connections, either as positive and nurturing, or negative with conflict and stress.

Ecomaps can be used as part of the assessment to help the team get a better understanding of the child's world. The child can draw themselves in the middle and draw different lines which represent the relationship, for example strong, weak or stressful.

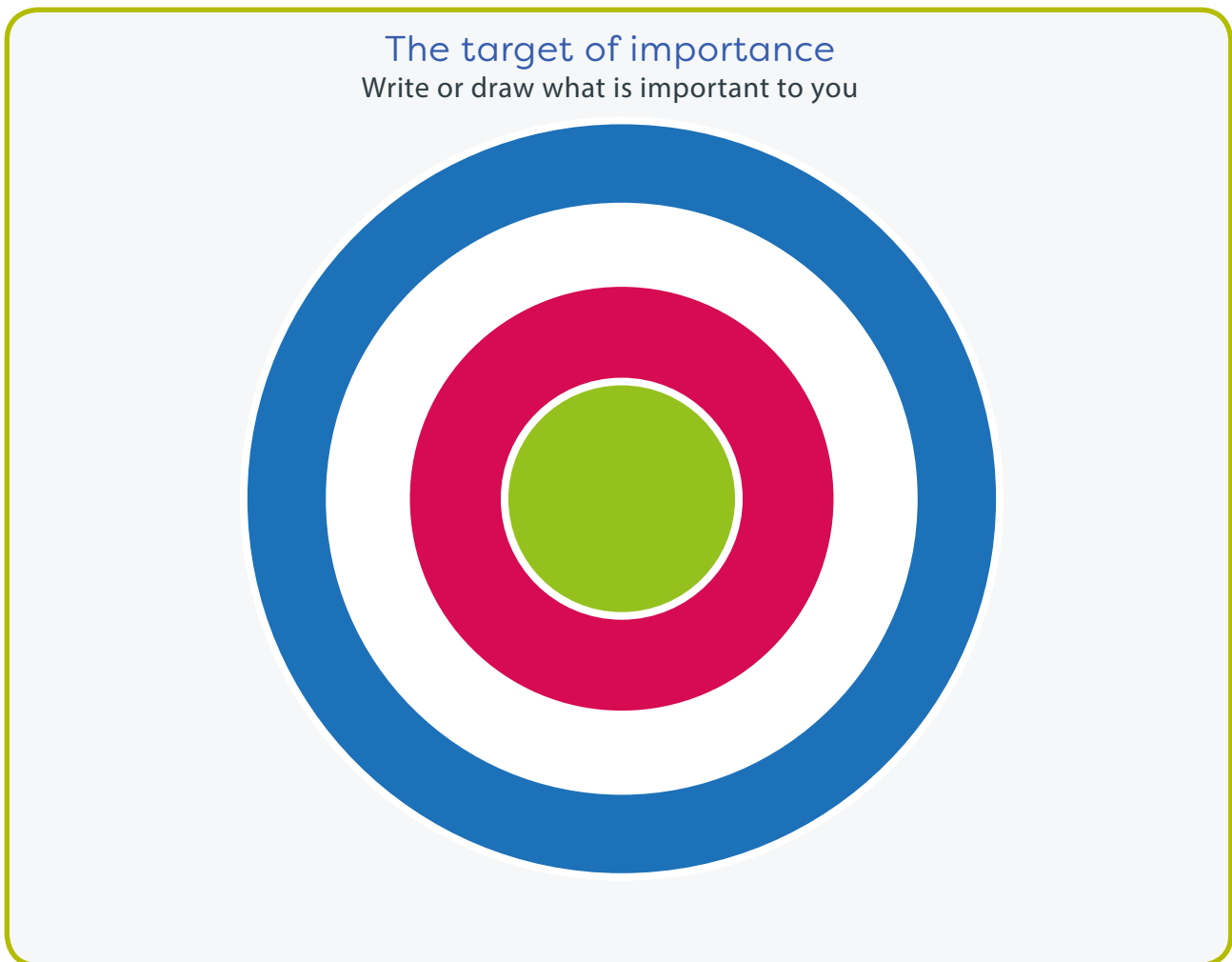
For more information about ecomaps, go to: [bit.ly/ecomapslumos](http://bit.ly/ecomapslumos)

This is a fictional example of an ecomap by a 10-year-old girl living in an institution. She wrote her name in the middle of the page and drew the important people and things in her life, placing the most important closest to her. She used different types of lines to indicate the nature of the link or relationship.



## Target of importance

Another method that can be used to show the most important personal and social relationships of a child is called the target of importance. Children can write or draw the people or things that are important to them in their lives and place them in the relevant space in the target.



## The importance of preparing children to move

Moves for children in care can be highly traumatic. Many of the children in institutions may have already moved several times and this can have negative effects on their self-confidence and self-esteem. Children will respond to moves in different ways, but bewilderment, fear and anxiety are common responses, particularly if they don't understand why or where they are moving to. These are also the main reasons for children demonstrating challenging behaviour.

When moves are necessary for the child, the right preparation can greatly reduce the impact on the child and help them settle into their new home.

## The aim of preparation programmes

Comprehensive preparation programmes help the child build a relationship with their family or new carers and say goodbye to friends and carers in the previous placement. They enable a child's wishes and feelings to be included in the planning of the move. A good preparation programme can help to build the confidence and self-esteem of a child and provide them with as much continuity as possible.

## Planning

Planning should begin as soon as families have been traced, or as soon as new prospective carers or an appropriate placement have been identified. This is to get a shared understanding about how relationships can be rebuilt or allowed to develop. At least two planning meetings will be needed. One to set a flexible timetable depending on the needs of the child, and another to consider progress just before the final move. If the child is old enough and wants to attend planning meetings, they should be invited. If they are going to have an ongoing role in the child's life, the child's parents should also be invited to the meeting. The planning process needs to include talking to the child about their new placement in a one-to-one situation, using language and communication tools appropriate to the child's age, level of understanding and their needs.







## Tools and resources

### Sharing information

It is important that the child's family or new carers receive as much information as possible about the child before moving so that they feel confident they can meet the child's needs. They should have access to the child's assessments and care plan. New carers can also share information about themselves with the child to help build new relationships. For example, foster carers may want to develop a book about their family life that includes photographs of their home and community, family members and pets. This will help to calm any fears and worries about the unknown.

Some children may want to draw a picture, write some information or design a poster as a way of sharing information about themselves. This could be for their family or new carers who will work in the new placement.

Here are some examples of template forms:















## Communication passports and one-page profiles

In some Lumos countries, our teams used one-page profiles or communication passports for children with disabilities. The children share them with any new people they meet. For more information about communication passports, go to [www.communicationpassports.org.uk/home/](http://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/home/)

For more information about one-page profiles and other downloadable resources to help with direct work with children, go to [www.sheffkids.co.uk](http://www.sheffkids.co.uk)

**Communication Passports**

Communication passports are small photograph albums that contain basic information about the child - accompanied by photographs. The text is written in the first person - the book belongs to the child and should be placed where it is accessible. The following is an example of a typical book.

 Hello - my name is Ira. I am 8 years old. My birthday is on August 10th.	 I live in ... with lots of other children	 I share a room with Dan, Miya, Izo, Ana and Hristo
 I like to be out of bed and in the play room or outside. I don't like to be in bed all day	 I like most food except rice. I can feed myself with a spoon if I am sitting at a table	 I love having my tummy tickled! I love to play pee-pee
 I hate having my face washed so please do it gently and talk to me while doing it	 I like cats but I am very frightened of dogs	 I like it when people talk to me when they are helping me to do something
 I cannot say any words yet - but I do make some sounds and I like it when someone listens	 This is my favourite toy. I like to have it in bed with me. If it disappears I get very upset	 I need objects to let me know what is happening next. My list of objects is above my bed

Although children at stage 1 will not necessarily understand the language or relate to the photographs, Communication Passports are useful for the following reasons:

- To inform people about the basic personality and needs of the child
- To give opportunities for 1:1 time with an adult
- To repetitively use words that are relevant to the child

For further information please see - <http://www.communicationpassports.org.uk/Home/>


## Having memories from the institution

It is important that children can have memories and collect mementoes from their current placement if they want to. There are lots of fun activities which you can do with children during the preparation process to help them record their special memories about their life in the institution and any special relationships that they have. These include making message boards, friendship bracelets, memory boxes, a memory t-shirt or a memory jar.

**Making a Memory Jar**

**You will need:**

- Empty clear jam jar or empty plastic bottle or container
- salt
- coloured chalks
- piece of card.



**Instructions:**

1. Write down 5 things you would like to remember about the institution such as friends, special events, favourite carers, etc.
2. Fill a jar with salt, then remove and divide into 5 piles.
3. Place each pile of salt on a piece of paper or card.
4. Colour the 5 piles of salt by rubbing them backwards and forwards with different coloured chalk
5. Place into the jar and fill in remaining space with plain salt to prevent colours from mixing.
6. On the worksheet, choose a different colour to represent each memory and put a dot of colour next to each memory.

There are more ideas in the book, *Moving to My New Home*, [as mentioned on page 4.](#)

## Example preparation programmes



### Reintegration

Eugene and his twin 10-year-old sister Natacha have lived in the institution since they were seven. They have no contact with their family now, but they remember their parents and their home.

There was no information about their family at the institution, so the team talked to the children very sensitively to find out if they could remember anything about the village where they had lived to help trace their family.

The assessment team spoke to community leaders and other families in the area where they thought the family had once lived. They were able to trace the family. The parents told the social worker that they had sent their children to the institution because of poverty and to ensure that they could receive an education and get health care.

Following an assessment and care conference meeting, it was decided that they could return home to their parents with some support. The social worker supported the family to apply for places in a free government educational programme. Unfortunately, the parents lived in a rural village without a local school. However, there was a school in a larger village where the children's aunt and uncle lived.

After further assessments, it was agreed that the children could stay with their aunt and uncle during the week to attend school and go home at weekends and holidays. The children were carefully prepared for the move and began to rebuild the relationship with their parents and extended family. The parents lived in a village quite far away and it was difficult to visit. This meant that they were only able to visit a couple of times, but they regularly spoke with the children on the phone before they moved back home permanently. All the family received training on positive parenting, child protection and the parents were trained on income generation. The parents were given a small grant to help them set up a business.

**After the children had returned home, the family continued to receive support and monitoring from the social worker and community leaders in the villages where the families lived.**



## Foster care

Fotia is eight years old and has lived in the institution for five years. She has no contact with her birth family. Following an assessment and case conference meeting, it was decided that she would move into foster care.

During the preparation process, Fotia worked with her social worker on her life story book which helped her understand more about her background and previous moves. This helped her feel more safe and secure about the future.

The first visits with her new foster carer were in a familiar and comfortable room in the institution. The foster carer brought toys from her own home for them to play with and brought photographs of her home and family. Fotia's carer supported these visits and gently encouraged Fotia to interact and build a secure relationship with the new carer.

Once Fotia was comfortable and confident with the new foster carer, she started to visit the foster carer in her own home. She enjoyed playing with the same toys that the foster carer had brought to the institution and spent time getting to know the new area where the foster carer lived. With the foster carer and social worker, Fotia visited the new school that she would be attending once she moved. Irina also had two overnight stays at the foster carer's house before she moved. After each visit, she met with her social worker to talk about how the visit went and how she was feeling about the move.

**On the day of the move, the foster carer came to the institution to help Irina pack before she and the social worker took her to her new home.**







## Small group home

Amir is 15 years old and has lived in the institution since he was a baby. His parents only visit him twice a year because the institution is a long way from their home. Amir has a profound and multiple learning disability and due to his complex physical needs, he spent most of his day isolated in his cot bed. The staff said that this was because there was no specialised seating equipment for him and they did not feel confident moving him. Therefore, he was only moved out of his cot bed for personal care and to attend hospital appointments.

Following an assessment and care conference meeting, it was decided that he would move into a small group home close to his birth family.

Amir needed a long preparation programme to allow time to gradually increase his independence and extend his experiences outside of his cot bed, room and the institution. The preparation team began by interacting and building a relationship with Amir while he was in his cot bed. They gradually increased the process of moving and handling him to help him understand that movement can be a positive and social activity.

An experienced physiotherapist and occupational therapist were needed to assess and implement a physical therapy programme and recommend a suitable wheelchair for him.

Amir did not have any personal belongings, so the preparation team provided Amir with some toys which were musical and vibrated. He kept these in his cot with him and took them with him when he moved. These toys were chosen after observing his preferences for colour, texture and sounds.

Other sensory messages were used, for example using the same music and scented hand creams during the preparation programme and then using them again in the new placement. Having familiar sensory experiences in the new home will help children feel safe and secure.

The team had to prepare him for the journey to the new home. Therefore, the team arranged short journeys in the bus to help him get used to travelling.

Amir was not able to visit the new home before the move as it was too far away. Instead, one of the new carers came to the institution a week before to spend time getting to know him.

**The institution carers supported her to gradually take over his personal care needs. The new carer then travelled with him to the new home on the day of the move.**



## Independent living

Jennifer is 17 years old and has been in and out of institutional care since she was a baby. She has moved placements several times and has a history of challenging behaviour. She has interrupted contact with her mother who has been in prison several times and is currently serving a five-year prison sentence. Her other family members could not be traced.

Following an assessment and case conference meeting, it was decided that Jennifer would be supported into independence with a careful and long preparation programme.

The social worker spent time building a relationship to get to know Jennifer better and gain a better understanding about what support she will need in the future. Jennifer found activities like life story work and time lines useful to help her think about the important events in her life, changes and transitions and how these made her feel. This helped her make links between her feelings and behaviour. Her social worker gave her a diary so that she could write down any questions she had about the move and write about her worries and anxieties. She was given a calendar so that she could map out the preparation process, which helped her feel more secure about the future and more in control of her life.

The social worker and carers organised activities which helped her to develop life skills such as learning to cook meals, doing laundry in the institution, and planning journeys on public transport. The social worker also organised voluntary work experience placements for her and some of the other young people at the institution in the local community. This helped them to develop employment skills and have responsibility.

The social worker also organised for some young people who had already left care to visit the institution to talk about their experiences. This gave Jennifer and others the opportunity to ask questions and share their worries and concerns. One of these care leavers later became Jennifer's mentor after she moved out.

The social worker developed a transition plan with Jennifer which outlined what support she would need once she left the institution. She decided she wanted to go to university, so she was supported to apply for the course and was successful in obtaining a scholarship through a government programme.

**The social worker continued to support Jennifer after she moved and she is now studying to be a nurse.**



## Further resource links



### Discharge Toolkit - CHANGE

This resource is a preparation toolkit for adults with disabilities and/or Autism who are living in hospital settings in the UK to support them to prepare to move into the community. Available at: [www.changepeople.org/projects/the-discharge-toolkit](http://www.changepeople.org/projects/the-discharge-toolkit)



### Family Care for Children with Disabilities - Practical Guidance for Frontline Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: USAID's Displaced Children and Orphan Fund (DCOF) and technical experts

The guidance was developed to help social services case management personnel to work effectively with children with disabilities and their families. It provides easy-to-read information and advice to frontline workers in low- and middle-income countries who may have little or no experience working with children with disabilities. Available at: [www.bettercarenetwork.org/library/particular-threats-to-childrens-care-and-protection/children-with-disabilities/family-care-for-children-with-disabilities-practical-guidance-for-frontline-workers-in-low-and](http://www.bettercarenetwork.org/library/particular-threats-to-childrens-care-and-protection/children-with-disabilities/family-care-for-children-with-disabilities-practical-guidance-for-frontline-workers-in-low-and)



### Guidelines on Children's Reintegration - Family for Every Child

These guidelines provide practical guidance for effective reintegration that can help organisations to design high-quality programmes, measure impact, train practitioners, and pursue national level systemic change in support of reintegration. Available at: [www.familyforeverychild.org/our-impact/guidelines-on-childrens-reintegration](http://www.familyforeverychild.org/our-impact/guidelines-on-childrens-reintegration)



### Transitioning to Family Care for Children: A Guidance Manual - Faith to Action

This toolkit provides practical guidance and tools for churches, faith-based organisations, donors and others who are transitioning care for children away from residential care to care within families. Available at: [www.faithtoaction.org/family-care-toolkit](http://www.faithtoaction.org/family-care-toolkit)



Protecting Children. Providing Solutions.

Lumos, an international non-profit organisation founded by J.K. Rowling, is dedicated to ending the institutionalisation of children – a practice that decades of research have shown is harmful to child development. Lumos is working with many others and at all levels to ensure the right of every child to family life and transform the lives of the millions of children currently living in institutions. Lumos helps countries transform education, health and social care systems for children and their families, and helps move children from institutions to family-based care.

By advocating at all levels, collaborating widely and running evidence-based demonstration projects that prove reform can work, Lumos is able to achieve maximum impact from our funding to benefit some of the most vulnerable children in the world.

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For more information, visit our website:  
[www.wearelumos.org](http://www.wearelumos.org)

Find us @Lumos on Twitter, /lumos.at.work on Facebook, @WeAreLumos on Instagram, or email us at [info@wearelumos.org](mailto:info@wearelumos.org)

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