



Transforming Foster Care creates Better Outcomes at Reduced Costs in Children's Services

“One of the key things that I have learnt from this experience is to never underestimate the capacity of people to change.”

Mike Gregory, Fostering Team Manager, SMBC.

SUMMARY

Focus

Children's Services.

Challenge

To increase number of placements with foster carers within the Local Authority, as opposed to utilising the private sector.

Process

EQLean™.

Benefits

- Over 200% increase in the number of foster cares
- 50% reduction in the time taken to process foster care applications.
- *Positive impact on the lives of children experiencing foster care* due to (1) reduced placement waiting time, (2) less disruption as a result of local placements and (3) increased Social Worker contact time.

The Background



In 2004 and 2005, Solihull MBC faced a major challenge in its foster care service. Many

children were having to be placed in private care due to a lack of foster carers within the borough.

This situation was not sustainable as the use of the private sector was hugely expensive – the budget for children placements was estimated to be overspent by £1 million for 2006/7.

It became critical to achieve a higher proportion of children being placed into the local authority fostering arrangements rather than through the private sector – both from a Council budget perspective but



also importantly from the standpoint of the children's well being. To achieve this, Solihull needed to increase their number of foster carers, requiring improvements in the process and timescales involved for taking potential foster carers, from their enquiry to achieving approval.

The process had become a problem and Solihull's Children's Services searched for help that would not only facilitate change but would partner them to implement it. That help came from LT Consulting

Realising the Untapped Contribution of Solihull's Staff

LT's emotionally intelligent (EQ) approach to applying Lean principles deeply considers each individual and the team as a whole, fully recognising that you can't sustainably develop a process without developing the people and vice versa.

Pam was surprised by how enthusiastic she felt

When asked how she felt before the Lean activity, Pam Huggins, Assistant Team Manager, described feeling resistant as she remembered wondering how the Lean activity could work with "living people" rather than the more traditional Lean applications.

Derek Walker felt that people were initially defensive as they were putting themselves "under the spotlight and open to criticism." He felt LT's openness and willingness to learn from the Foster Care Team won the group's support and engagement.

Pam was surprised by how enthusiastic she felt as she was helped to see how things could practically be changed. The EQLean™ approach ensures significant contribution by both the individual and the team, concentrating on motivation and behaviour to ensure a positive experience for all.

Lean Techniques

The team worked on a number of initiatives but central to the whole project was mapping out the foster care approval process. This map included all the activities, the people involved, the timescales and the customer requirements at each stage in the process.

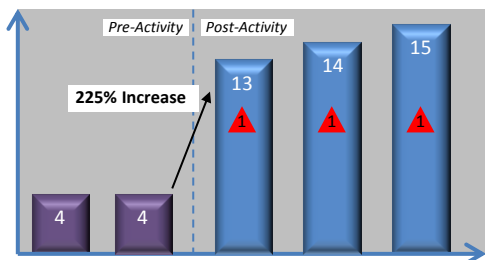
... environment was shaped around efficiently serving foster carers.

Visualising the data in this way was something that the Foster Care Team really appreciated. It allowed them to easily spot where time was being wasted which enabled them to decide on improvements.

One particularly memorable event, despite their busy schedules saw staff from all levels – including senior managers – roll up their sleeves to clear and reorganise the office so that their physical environment was shaped around efficiently serving foster carers.

The Results

No. of Children Placed in In-house Foster Care



▲ Results achieved with two less social workers

- Over 200% increase in the number of local foster carers.
- 50% reduction in the time taken to process foster carer applications.
- Savings of over £500,000 a year - equivalent to a return on investment of 13.5 times a year on the sum invested.
- 52% reduction in care placements through the private sector.
- Enabling valuable freed up resource to be diverted into other areas of the Children's Trust Plan.

The Children

Ultimately, this work was about ensuring better outcomes for children living through a very difficult time in their lives.

The quality of service for these children has improved dramatically – they experience *less placement waiting and less disruption to their lives as the children are placed closer to their loved ones and familiar surroundings.*



The increase in the number of local foster parents also meant the Social Workers spent less time travelling *as more of the work was based in the immediate local area.* This time saving was dedicated to increasing the 'face to face' contact with the foster care children and their support network.

Sustainable Change

The results have continually improved year upon year and in times of mounting challenges and shrinking budgets Solihull MBC is an example of what can be achieved with the EQLean™ approach and a committed partnership.

Reflecting on what benefits this partnership has had on children, Anne Plumber, Director for Education and Children's Services, said

"Stuart Fisher and his team worked alongside our Fostering Team giving them techniques and confidence to not only improve, but sustain their valuable service to the community."

Solihull is very proud that it can further enhance the safe and caring service to the children in our care."

If you are interested in this case study, other examples of our work or EQLean™ please do contact us.

Katherine Kerswell
(former CEO of SMBC)

"When LT did the initial work the relationship they created with the fostering and adoption team was really positive. It was also very challenging to the fundamental way the service was delivered. I particularly remember, at the feedback meeting, people were really keen and enthusiastic over what had been jointly produced."

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