

## The successful implementation of the Foster Care Training, Support and Development Standards at Oxfordshire County Council

This case study describes how the Family Placement Team at Oxfordshire County Council used online assessments to support the implementation of the Foster Care Training, Support and Development Standards. Supervising Social Workers found that the assessments supported them to carry out the assessment process that the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) describe, i.e. asking questions and using observation to evidence knowledge.

### Highlights

- Enabled Supervising Social Workers to be confident that they have the evidence required to sign Foster Carers off against the CWDC Standards.
- Foster Carers said that they found the assessments easy to use, including those Carers whose first language is not English.
- The workshops were a great success, including a drop in session held on a Saturday morning
- This has made the process of developing and maintaining each Foster Carers Personal Development Plan much more straightforward.

### Background

Oxfordshire County Council employs over 20,000 people and each year the council manages £845 million of public money to provide services on behalf of Oxfordshire's 615,000 people.

This includes the education of 81,000 children and young people including 312 Foster Carers and 414 looked after children. (March 2009 figures)

## Foster Care Training, Support and Development Standards

In 2007 the Foster Care Training, Support and Development Standards were launched by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) as part of a program to both professionalise Foster Care and also support Foster Carers' personal development.

**The Family Placement Service realised quickly that how Foster Carers were supported through the process of evidencing their knowledge would be a critical part of a successful implementation.**

**In addition, Supervising Social Workers raised concerns about how they would be supported through the assessment process outlined in the CWDC "Guide for Managers, Supervising Social Workers and Trainers".**

In Oxfordshire we have a range of Foster Carers from different ethnic backgrounds including those who care for unaccompanied asylum seeking children, many Carers with lots of experience and a number who have completed NVQ's.

With almost 400 Foster Carers (including Kinship and Short Break Carers) we needed a flexible way to support all of the Carers to demonstrate their knowledge linked to the CWDC Standards.



## The Plan

Early in 2008, CIS Assessment launched assessments based on the Foster Care, Training, Support and Development Standards and got in touch with Sarah Clayson, the (then) Service Manager for Family Placement. Sarah invited CIS Assessment to demonstrate the assessments to a group of Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers in order to gather feedback on whether they thought it would be a useful tool to support the implementation of the CWDC Standards.

**The Supervising Social Workers were able to see immediately that the assessments would be a great way to support them to assess Foster Carers' knowledge against the CWDC Standards.** However, some concerns were raised by Foster Carers needing to access a PC and whether or not an online system would suit all Foster Carers.

**So, as part of the implementation plan, it was agreed that a series of workshops, co-hosted by CIS Assessment and Oxfordshire County Council would be run to give Foster Carers (and Supervising Social Workers) the opportunity to "have a go" at the assessments in a supported environment.**

**The workshops were a great success, including a drop in session held on a Saturday morning which enabled Carers to see just how easy the assessments are to use** and how quickly Carers can develop an evidence portfolio in partnership with their Supervising Social Worker. The workshops also gave impetus to the fostering teams to hold other events for Foster Carers exploring the Standards and working with the assessments. Some modules were presented by Foster Carers, showing other Carers that they already had the skills, they just needed to understand how to use the assessments to evidence their learning.

## The Results

Throughout 2008 and 2009, Supervising Social Workers and Foster Carers have been using the online assessments from CIS Assessment to support the workbooks and in particular where work had already been completed, the assessments proved to be a great way to supplement the evidence and support the Supervising Social Worker to check knowledge on an on-going basis.

**Foster Carers said that they found the assessments easy to use, including those Carers whose first language is not English.** Despite initial concerns around the use of computers, because each assessment only takes on average of 8 to 10 minutes to complete, Foster Carers quickly got used to how the assessments work and were able to fit assessments into their busy schedules when it was convenient for them, rather than spending hours completing the workbook. Foster Carers who have already completed NVQs have quickly and easily evidenced that their knowledge and skills meet the standards, by using the assessments to map everything across to the CWDC Standards.

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## Continued..... The Results

Supervising Social Workers found that 8 to 10 minutes for each assessment meant that they were able to **incorporate the assessments into Supervision** and effectively used the assessments to **facilitate discussions** around specific outcomes in the Standards and as result record lots of additional evidence in the “Supporting Evidence” area on each set of results. **Furthermore, this has made the process of developing and maintaining each Foster Carers Personal Development Plan much more straightforward.**

The key benefit that Supervising Social Workers have found is that the assessments support them to carry out the assessment process that the CWDC describe, i.e. asking questions and using observation to evidence knowledge. **This has enabled Supervising Social Workers to be confident that they have the evidence required to sign Foster Carers off against the CWDC Standards and be able to answers the questions on the Certificate of Successful Completion.**

Teresa Rogers, the new Service Manager for Fostering, commented that with 2011 drawing ever closer we are working towards all of our Foster Carers being signed off against the Standards by next year.

## And Finally.....

CIS Assessment and Oxfordshire County Council are now working together to launch the Short Break Standards to support the Short Break Carers to use the online assessments to build their evidence portfolios.

**In the future we plan to use the assessments to support workforce development to understand when Foster Carers need to attend refresher training and evidence how successful the training has been afterwards. In addition we hope to use the assessments to support the use of alternative training methods to fulfil specific needs, such as mentoring and coaching instead of traditional training courses to make the best use of resources.**

The assessments will also be used as part of the Annual Foster Care review and will be made available to panel.

### **To contact Oxfordshire Council about this Case Study:**

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### **To find out how online assessments can save you money and increase your evidence of workers' competence:**

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