

A Children's Reporter reflects on the impact of PACE

Transcript

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Our specific tests of change has been around children who are accommodated at birth effectively. So we've been working on taking information early, possibly pre-birth, where there's a decision that the child is unlikely to go home, and taking on that information and producing what we call grounds, which are the reasons for children being taken into the system at a very early stage. So that we're basically ready to accept a referral for a child as soon as they're born, which gives basically the whole process a head start.

That's cut down the time that it takes for us to get a child into a hearing. We still have to apply all our criteria, about whether or not it's appropriate for the child to be brought into the system. But if we make that decision, then the child has a head start within the system. We're managing to set Hearings very quickly, maybe within three weeks of a child's birth. The benefit for us, is it focuses us means that we don't have any drift and delay in our work, that we know that we're going to concentrate in getting that particular case in at an early stage. And also we've got usually very good, very current, information that we can work from.

We are working on a project to improve the quality of information, which Children's Hearings get about the contact that children have with their parents after they've been accommodated, or if they're not living with one or the other parent. And that's a very, very knotty and difficult issue that Children's Hearings, parents, social workers all struggle with. And we're looking at a project now to improve that quality of information. And that's going to make decision making, we hope, for Children's Hearings a lot more focused and a lot better.

The big difference in all of the PACE project is that the children are going to have good decisions, we hope, made for them early while they're still young enough or while they have been in the care system for a short enough time that the outcomes for them the longer term are going to be much better. There have been a lot of really, really good changes. Legal Services have definitely made very big changes in how quickly they turn around legal opinions for social work on the things which I think is going to help a lot. Social work are going to be looking very much at how they've produced the information,

how they focus the information, how they produce good information for all the forums that they have to provide information for – all the meetings, all the children's panels. And you know, the better the information, the better the evidence, the better decision making you're going to get.

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