

CELCIS REACH: Graeme Simpson | Small changes reduce delay in permanence decisions by over 12 weeks

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Graeme Simpson of Aberdeen City Council explains how small tests of change added up to cutting three months of the time it takes to make decisions for children in their care. Working with the Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme, they've implemented a Child's Plan to reduce time taken to produce reports to the Children's Panel, and looked closely at what the data tells them at all stages of the child's journey.

One of the major changes we have implemented which has been very successful and is now adopted as standard practice is the use of the child's plan as the principal report that is presented to our adoption and permanence panel, as opposed to social workers having to write from scratch the Form E - the traditional sort of vehicle by which the outline of their history and their needs were presented to that panel. That has meant that social workers are not having to start afresh, they're having to simply adapt an existing report to enable them to present the information about the child to our panel. That's certainly been very welcomed and is hugely beneficial to social workers, but has also seen no reduction in the quality of information being presented to our Adoption and Permanence Panel. So, that's been very successful. When we started out on the journey I suppose we had a sense - what our gut was telling us where other challenges actually lay. Did they lie in terms of time taken to get to panel or did they lay in terms of time taken from panel to place child in their final placement? And I suppose whilst our gut told us one thing the data perhaps gave a much clearer picture of where the sense of our practice was. I think that the time taken for presenting a child to our panel was greater than I anticipated. The time taken to place a child in their final placement was maybe not quite as significant a sense of drift and delay as I had perhaps anticipated, but nonetheless using the data, small changes, measuring them, we've been able to reduce drift and delay for children. Thus, the average length of time it now takes for a child to be presented to our Adoption and Permanence Panel has reduced by in excess of 12 weeks. The children's panel members have bought into it in a strong way. They have understood their responsibility to make

timely decisions for children and actually not always just put it off. Delaying a decision is not always in the child's interests. We also have worked with SCRA (Scottish Children's Reporters Administration) in terms of advice to court hearings. Previously the practice was for invitations to advice to court hearings to be sent out by a recorded delivery, but for families where there's a level of chaos and dysfunctionality for them to actually go to the post office to collect the recorded delivery was something they found very challenging and often didn't do. So as a result what SCRA have done is they now send out invitations to invite to all hearings my first class post, thus ensuring that panel members can be confident that parents have received the invitation to come to hearing. So, therefore if a parent doesn't turn up then the hearing can often proceed in the absence of the parent. Where however the panel want to give a further opportunity for a parent to appear at a hearing, we have agreed with our partners at SCRA for our rescheduled hearing to be scheduled within 15 days of the original hearing again, cutting that down from three or four weeks to a much shorter time frame and again, all these little steps contribute to a much bigger picture of reducing drift and delay for children.

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