

## “What Works”: iNetwork Innovation Awards 2015

<b>Title</b>	<b>Fostering Transformation Project</b>
<b>Organisation(s)</b>	<b>Cheshire East Council</b>
Author	David Upton
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Service area <sup>1</sup>	159. Fostering
Tags	ESR2

### Description of project

The Fostering service is responsible for recruiting foster carers to look after our most vulnerable children, often at short notice and at times of crisis. They are a highly dedicated group of people many of whom have worked with the authority for years and who have dedicated their lives to care and nurture children in need to help them through to a better place in their lives.

Unfortunately, demand for carers far exceeds the number of carers available at any one time meaning that placements could be delayed for long periods or children were placed through private fostering agencies which are double the cost of in-house placements.



The Business Improvement team were commissioned in 2014 by the Director of Children’s Services to lead a transformational review to address the capacity and demand issues, reduce customer lead times and release cashable savings.

Actions undertaken within the review:

- The team deployed technical Lean Six Sigma techniques usually deployed in manufacturing settings to analyse the Fostering system. This was ground-breaking in a people-based service setting. The project has been recognised as Black belt standard by a British Quality Foundation accredited provider.

### What makes this initiative remarkable?

- The project significantly increased the capacity of foster carers enabling many more children in need to be cared for in a loving home.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the Local Government Service List.  
<http://standards.esd.org.uk/?uri=list%2FenglishAndWelshServices&tab=downloads>

- Improved quality and cost benefits highlighted in the next section.
- A concerted effort was made to bring all the different stakeholders along with the change, including foster carer, staff and supporting agencies. A number of focus groups were held to guide and involve them through the project. The outputs from these sessions formed the customer specification.
- The use of the technical aspects of the Lean Six Sigma approach in a people focussed environment was highly innovative opening up many other possible deployments of these techniques in the public sector. For example. IMR charts/Failure modes analysis/Hypothesis testing.
- The project used benchmarking techniques with public and private sector agencies to compare practice and drew upon practice from both sectors.
- The project delivered a number of key changes to the whole system. For example: Refreshed website/Digital solutions for tracking cases/Standard operating systems/Controls to ensure compliance with the new system/Visual Management boards (pics to follow)/Improved marketing including a brand new 'front.

### **What has the project achieved?**

- The main achievement relates to the impact for children by increasing the pool of foster carers.
- Recruitment lead times reduced from 433 to 225 days (Av. Pre/post changes).
- £350 cashable savings agreed in the Council's budget book (2015/16).
- The conversion rate of successful applicants was improved fourfold. From 1:40 to 1:10.
- £40k administrative efficiencies were achieved.

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Video case study:	<a href="#">Click here to view video</a>
Links:	
For more information please contact:	Catherine O'Neil catherine.oneill@tameside.gov.uk

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<http://i-network.org.uk/case-studies/>