



Cheshire and Merseyside
Assessment Hub

Quality • Timely • Independent.

Good Practice Event
Becky Brown – Service Manager
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Overview and purpose of the trailblazer

- Department for Education (DfE) funded pilot
- 1 of 5 areas in the UK awarded funding as part of the Designated Family Judge (DFJ) trailblazer project with the aim of:
- Reducing delays in court proceedings
- Improving Quality of Practice
- In Cheshire & Merseyside, audit activity and collaborative solution finding sessions identified the need to tackle challenges in availability; timeliness and quality of external independent assessments, as well as late presentation of family members



Role of the C&M Assessment hub



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Independent social workers released from the Local Authorities (LA). Assessors maintain independence by not completing assessments for their own LA

Completion of **good quality and timely** Independent Fostering Assessments

Completion of **good quality and timely** Parenting Assessments using the ParentAssess model

Timescales

Parenting Assessment

- 8 weeks (from point of receiving Letter of Instruction and Court Bundle)
- This includes Addendum assessments

Fostering

- 2 weeks for viabilities
- 10 weeks for full fostering (checks permitting)

Quality Assurance

- Inclusive of these timescales
- Completed by Service Manager



Referral Process



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Eligibility criteria met and agreed by Judge



Letter of Instruction (LOI) completed on the Hub's template
*Contact service manager in the Hub to discuss timescales



LOI and court bundle emailed to Service Manager



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What we have achieved

**447 places
attended/booked on
training**

**12 Independent
Assessments
completed**



**Collaboration with
Kinship: Support offer to
all kinship carers with
15 referrals to the Kinship
Reach programme**

**Filming completed for 2
co produced videos**

**Knowledge Exchange Event taken
place with 22 representatives
from 7 authorities**

**Making Research Count
subscription for all LA's (68
webinars attended so far)**

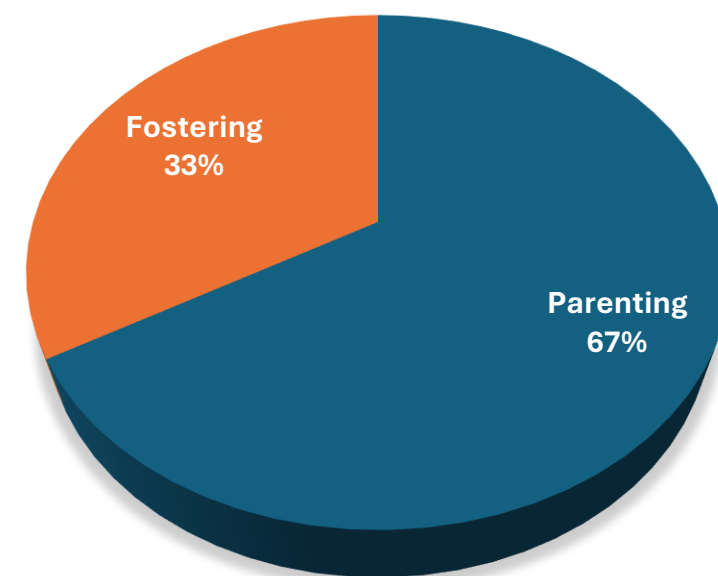


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Referrals received

- 12 assessments accepted into the Hub (between 5th December and 6th March).
- Referrals have been received from 5 separate Local Authorities
- 8 were parenting assessments (filed within 8 weeks of LOI) , 4 were for fostering (2 viability, 2 joint fostering/SGO)
- Reasons for referral focused on disagreements between parties, quality of previous assessments and not agreeing with previous outcome of fostering assessment

Type of assessment



Good quality assessments
received (IRO)

In this case, the parent has been
listened to, and areas of support
has been carefully considered
(guardian)



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Really good communication
and thorough work
(solicitor)

Positive impact
(IRO & solicitor)

Service has been very good I have to
say....detailed assessment that filled the gaps
(IRO & guardian)



Excellent communication
with the parties and all
professionals, good
analysis, good use of
research,
trauma informed practice
(IRO)

Assessments of the family was positive,
and the L.A. has changed its proposed
plan of removal (IRO)

Family member feedback



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100%

- Felt respected
- Listened to
- Felt they were able to say what they wanted to say during the assessment
- Found the sessions helpful
- Felt included in the assessment process
- The outcome of the assessment was clearly explained

It's helped me
grow as a parent
and a person
(father)

She made me feel at ease and
comfortable. She understood
me and listened to everything I
told her for once I felt
listened & understood
(mother)

B was amazing throughout my
assessment, understanding,
kind & professional, thank you
so much (carer)

IMPACT



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The assessment was very detailed and addressed all the issues raised, and the impact of delay on the child was minimised due to the Hub being able to assist with the assessment.
(solicitor)

The good communication with the Hub staff and the timescale being met and the level of detail in the assessment

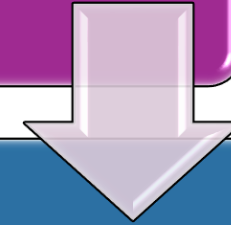
“Has allowed case to conclude within 26 Weeks. The LA had specified 4-6 weeks to complete which would have meant re-timetabling, however Hub completing it within 2 prevented this”

Key themes

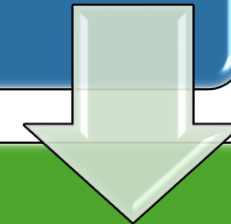


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Medical assessments and DBS checks lead to delay for Kinship assessments



Young parents and the need to use ParentAssess earlier in the system



Courts requesting more than 1 assessment of kinship carer despite outcomes being negative – is this lack of confidence in the LA or the pressure of a lack of resources?

Points to consider to strengthen practice



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- Therapy for children as soon as they enter into care
- Provide Panel dates to courts
- Is there enough challenge when requesting repeat Kinship assessments when there have been negative outcomes?
- Family Network Meetings for carers to prevent instability and breakdowns
- DBS update service for fostering teams
- Consultant GP's for medical assessments
- Utilise Born into Care and pre birth change project resources and findings (some LA's changing referral policy to include 1st trimester)
- The need to utilise DadPad for new fathers
- Consider utilising the 'Safe and Together model' to support work with Domestic Abuse
- Post separation support for parents if they can no longer live with their child – list of who can help in what way



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