

## Staffordshire County Council Lowers Costs and Saves Time through Efficient Online Training Courses for its Busy Social Workers

### The Challenges

Every Local Authority is now obliged to record their child cases digitally and most have purchased ICS (Integrated Children's Systems) software to use as a framework for computer-based case recording. However, many social workers and other Local Authority staff involved in the care of children are only just getting used to the idea of using computers instead of paperwork for their core business processes. Staffordshire therefore decided to provide additional training to teach its workforce how to correctly record the information onto their new case management system from SAP and explain the scheme's aim, which is important in achieving buy-in and ensuring new working practices are followed by every user. However, Staffordshire County Council covers a wide geography and was faced with training large numbers of staff, which creates challenges in delivering effective centralised, classroom-based training.

Nicola Gibson, ICS Project Manager of Staffordshire Council, stated: *"The logistics of scheduling classroom-based training sessions for over 700 staff that would have to travel from all over the county would prove costly and time-consuming, so we decided to consider online training options, which would enable our staff to take the training in their own time, at their own pace and without having to travel and waste time that would be better spent concentrating on their core job role – to protect children and young people."*

Staffordshire's introduction of ICS software to a broad workforce forms part of its wider Project Pisces, which aims to follow the latest guidelines laid out by the Government's DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme, aimed at improving the outcome for children with additional needs and preventing tragedies such as the Baby P case through more integrated working between staff and regions. Following these guidelines, Project Pisces is about delivering a modern, integrated system using SAP Customer Relationship Management, Records Management, electronic forms and workflow to transform and streamline processes across children's services.

### Choosing the Right Training

Staffordshire staff had mainly used classroom-based training or one-to-one training in the past, so online training was a new concept to the team, but made sense as a more flexible way of learning that would fit into the busy working patterns of staff.

Gibson commented: *"We were approached by Me Learning in early 2008 before we had even decided to use online training, but their demonstration showed us the high quality of their training material and their in-depth knowledge of social work. The Me Learning courses are very intuitive and simple to use for non computer-savvy professionals, and the interactivity engages the user, which is a rare quality in training materials. The courses also take a holistic view of the subject matter, ensuring the user understands everything that underpins ICS from an overall children's services perspective. I was pleasantly surprised at the relatively low associated costs, considering what is included in the courseware and the highly involved level of support from Me Learning."*

As well as covering how to follow ICS processes and protocols, the courses delve into best practice and legal requirements, and provide information about all of the available tools for social workers to carry out comprehensive assessments.

Nick Richards, Head of Business Development, Me Learning, said: *"Staffordshire has paved the way as the first Local Authority to use online training for ICS as part of a structured programme of training. Staffordshire recognised that in order to ensure a consistent understanding and standard practice of their new ICS software across the county and iron out regional variations would require consistent training, which is much more achievable with an online learning programme, where all users can receive the same training material and methodology, and at the same time."*

Staffordshire signed a three-year contract worth £35,000 with Me Learning in March 2008 to provide tailored and branded online training courses, a learning management system and ongoing consultation and support.

## A Phased Approach

After close consultation with Staffordshire, Me Learning split its 33 online learning modules into seven learning programme certifications for the County, tailoring the courses along the way to the needs of every course user. After passing a course, the trainee is awarded an ICS online learning certificate that can be added to their portfolio of evidence, which they are required to develop over the course of two years so they can be re-registered as social workers.

The training courses in the ICS processes needed to be tailored not just for trained social workers, but also for other relevant support staff in Staffordshire who are employed within children's services yet require different levels of training, such as senior managers, policy writers, family support workers, occupational therapists and the Emergency Duty Service. Specific 'teams' also require partial training as they will need to have a basic understanding of the ICS processes to appreciate the work of other staff members, such as foster care and adoption recruitment team and Foster Care Support Teams.

The training was rolled out in a phased approach, starting in August 2008. By November 2008, over 700 social workers had been introduced to the Me Learning courses via email, which included user ID, login information and access instructions.

But Me Learning didn't just leave Staffordshire to manage its own online training programme. It is a time-consuming task managing the training of over 700 staff who all have different courses and modules to take, so Me Learning deployed its Silver LMS (Learning Management System), enabling managers to monitor training levels and to provide Staffordshire with evidence that its social care professionals are receiving the necessary training and support that is vital for them to continue delivering front line services at the levels set by the Government.

Me Learning sends a report on a weekly basis to management within the Council's Headquarters, which is fed down to the Head of Service. Despite the complexity of different staff having different courses to take, Silver LMS tracks this information for every member of staff, ensuring a simple and time-saving monitoring system for busy managers.

## The Results

Gibson concluded: *"The results have been astounding so far in terms of the speed of the roll-out to such a large dispersed workforce and the high uptake level. Despite a lack of physical requirement to attend a training session, over 75% of social workers who were emailed the training information took the Me Learning online courses, which I am extremely happy with. I am able to track who hasn't yet taken the courses, so simple reminder emails can be sent to those people, which is a very effective way of managing a complex training programme. Choosing online instead of classroom-based training has reduced our costs significantly in terms of time saved and negated travel."*

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## About Me Learning

Me Learning provides Local Authorities with online training tools to ensure all professionals involved in social care are fully informed, working together and following the latest national guidelines, protocols and legislation. Me Learning's government-compliant and engaging computer-based courses cut through the ever-changing red tape, providing an all encompassing future-proof resource to help social care professionals continue to carry out their roles effectively and cooperatively.

The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of life for both children and adults with additional needs. Lord Laming conducted the Climbié inquiry in 2003 to investigate the circumstances leading to the death of Victoria Climbié and to recommend action to prevent such a tragedy happening again. However, in April 2008 Lord Laming commented: "I have yet to be convinced there is uniformly good practice across the country." Furthermore, government regulator the General Social Care Council (GSCC) has suggested social workers need further training post-qualification to deal with an increasing number of "complex and risky" cases such as Baby P, for which they needed greater expertise.

Me Learning provides both off-the-shelf and tailored courses covering key elements of the Government's 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme run by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). It is the only provider of online training courses for two of the leading ICS (Integrated Children's System) software suppliers: OLM and Liquidlogic. 12% of the UK's Local Authorities are already using Me Learning's cost-efficient courses, ranging from Essex County Council's purchase of the MePROTOCOL ICS suite for its own ICS roll-out to over 1,200 staff, to Manchester City Council's purchase of Me Learning's Information Sharing and ContactPoint courses to train 3000 people on the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme. More information can be found at [www.melearning.co.uk](http://www.melearning.co.uk) or by calling us on 01273 455 194.

### Course Options

The Me Learning courses are split into two types: those for training social care workers in the use of their Local Authority's social care systems; and those that support the key elements of the Government's Every Child Matters: Change for Children programme by providing the latest national guidelines, protocols and legislation, which all people involved in social care need to be aware of.

#### For Social Care Workers:

**Integrated Children's System (ICS) Training:** ICS is designed to be supported by an electronic case record system which provides a complete view of children in their care and forms the basis of every social care practitioner's working processes. Typically, although staff may receive training on the operation of a new system, they are not always fully conversant with the ICS process itself. Me Learning has therefore developed a comprehensive suite of online training courses to both educate social care workers and relevant support staff in the ICS processes and show how to correctly record information in the case record system.

**Adult Care Training:** Me Learning provides training to support OLM's CareFirst and Liquidlogic's PROTOCOL IAS adults software.

#### For all agencies involved in social care including social care workers:

**Every Child Matters Training:** The courses for all professionals involved in social care are based on key elements of the Government's 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme, which aims to encourage integrated working among agencies and enable early intervention and improvement for children with additional needs. There are also plans for a national database, ContactPoint, with the aim of aiding integrated working. Ensuring relevant staff are fully conversant with the process, policies and legislation will ultimately help towards preventing the current spate of deaths from known child abuse cases. Me Learning's Every Child Matters (Me ECM) courses ensure all agencies understand the processes and legislation that shape social care in the UK and how they personally fit into the integrated working process. Courses include: Information Sharing, ContactPoint, Lead Professional and CAF (Common Assessment Framework).

### About Staffordshire County Council

Staffordshire County Council is the largest employer in Staffordshire with more than 30,000 staff. Employees range from teachers to engineers, scientists to social workers, all of whom work to provide Staffordshire's 800,000 residents with services.

The services the council provides include:

- the local education service, with responsibility for around 400 schools
- libraries
- social services, including fostering and adoption and services for older people
- trading standards

- highways, with responsibility for maintaining the county's road system and street lighting
- planning
- waste disposal and many more.

Politically there are 62 councillors who are elected every four years.

More information about the Council can be found at [www.staffordshire.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk).