



Centre for excellence
for Children's Care and Protection

The Permanence and Care Excellence (PACE) programme

Improvement in practice: leading positive change for
children's services

December 2020



building brighter futures

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Setting up PACE: Building an organisational approach to improvement..... | 7 |
| Key learning..... | 13 |
| Strengthening the workforce | 14 |
| Key learning..... | 18 |
| The place for Data in Quality Improvement | 19 |
| Key learning..... | 30 |
| Making change happen: practice, impact and outcomes | 31 |
| Glossary of terms | 37 |

Introduction

About this report

This report provides an insight into the Permanence and Care Excellence ('PACE') programme – a Quality Improvement programme underway from 2014-2020 which engaged with local authority partnerships in 27 of the 32 Scottish local authority areas. The programme was aimed at supporting local authority partnerships across Scotland to reduce permanence planning timescales for looked after infants, children and young people using a Quality Improvement framework.

This report sets out the fundamental ways in which the PACE programme focused on leading and sustaining improvement, including how and why it was set up, and analysis on key parts of the programme: from the requirement to gain leadership buy in and engage with key people, to the importance of data in analysing successes. It also provides information on key practice changes that were tested and implemented, the milestones achieved at each stage, challenges that were overcome, and the overall impact on the lives of the infants, children, young people and families whom we all strive to support.

Each section details the key learning from each stage of the programme, which can be applied to Quality Improvement programmes within a variety of settings.

Who should read this report?

This report would be of interest to everyone beginning, currently undertaking, or wishing to learn from a national Quality Improvement programme that effected systemic change by working alongside a number of multi-agency partners. It will be of particular interest to practitioners and leaders in the health and social care sector, however what has been learned from PACE can be applied to a range of Quality Improvement programmes within a variety of settings.

Many of the challenges that were addressed through the PACE programme also correlate with the findings of Scotland's Independent Care Review¹, published in February 2020. Consequently, this report and its insight into how these challenges were met through PACE will be of interest to leaders and practitioners taking forward the implementation of The Promise following the Independent Care Review.

¹ Scotland's Independent Care Review (2020) [The Promise](#). Scotland's Independent Care Review

What is Permanence?

In policy, 'permanence' is defined by the Scottish Government as 'providing children with a stable, secure, nurturing relationship and home, where possible within a family setting, which continues into adulthood'². There are four different routes to achieving permanence and the most appropriate route will depend on the needs and circumstances of a child and their family. These include:

- Returning or remaining at home where family functioning is improved. This may require ongoing support for a child, parents and the family as a whole.
- A permanence order for a child who is living in kinship care, foster care or residential care.
- A kinship care order for a child (or 'section 11 order') living with kinship carers.
- A child living within an adoptive family.

Background to the PACE programme

When a child cannot live with their birth family there is rarely initial agreement that the separation will be permanent; often, this can lead to a period of uncertainty until a decision is made about their future care. Such uncertainty can be prolonged. Research undertaken by the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)³ found that many children were experiencing long periods of waiting for a decision to be made and, for the majority of those studied, it took more than two years from their first involvement with services to when they achieved permanence via a legal order. In this time, children often move through a series of temporary placements with different carers, or may be reunited with their parents before returning into care. The research is clear that the impact of this can have a profound effect on the development and wellbeing of those children:

'Delays and uncertainty in attaining a stable and caring home have significant consequences for a child's development and ability to form attachments to others.'

It also noted that:

'It is therefore important to know how such decisions are made to consider how they can be improved.'

Research⁴ clearly shows that delays in decision making can mean poorer outcomes for children, which have the potential to seriously impact on the rest of their lives. Many children experience multiple placements – be it kinship, foster or residential care – and are often denied the emotional, physical and legal security they have a right to.

² Scottish Government (2015) [Getting It Right For Looked After Children and Young People. Early engagement, early permanence and improving the quality of care.](#) (pp18)

³ Henderson, G., Hanson, L., & Whitehead, I. (2011) [Care and Permanence Planning for Looked After Children in Scotland.](#) Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

⁴ Henderson, G., Hanson, L., Kurlus, I., Hunt, M. and Laing, A. (2015) [Permanence Planning and Decision Making for Looked After Children in Scotland: Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007.](#) Scottish Children's Reporter Administration.

The aims of PACE

The PACE programme was born out of a need to address these concerns. In 2014, the Scottish Government commissioned CELCIS to develop a whole systems change programme to be delivered in partnership with local authority areas, which evolved to support multi-agency partners.

The aim was to reduce what was identified as drift and delay in permanence planning and prevent the long periods of waiting and uncertainty that so many children experience. At the heart of this objective was that, with minimum disruption, every looked after child in Scotland will ultimately be provided with a safe, stable, secure and nurturing home to grow up in – whether that be remaining with or returning to their parents; or an alternative home with kinship carers (family members or close family friends), long-term foster carers, residential care, or in an adoptive home.

To help achieve this aim, the second programme outcome was to increase local authority area capacity to embed Quality Improvement into local working practices in order to undertake and sustain these improvements to permanence decision-making.

National PACE Aims

National PACE Aims were developed as the programme progressed in order to ensure that the improvement efforts in local authority areas were focused on all looked after children, regardless of where they were living. These aims also addressed delays in decision making throughout the entirety of the permanence planning process.

In the early stages of PACE, each local authority area developed one or two aims and worked on these for the duration of the programme. However, as the programme developed, the CELCIS team realised that it would be more beneficial to have aims that covered all parts of the permanence planning process and all looked after children. In addition, having aims that all local authority areas involved in PACE worked towards gave a degree of consistency across Scotland. Consequently, the four national PACE aims were developed.

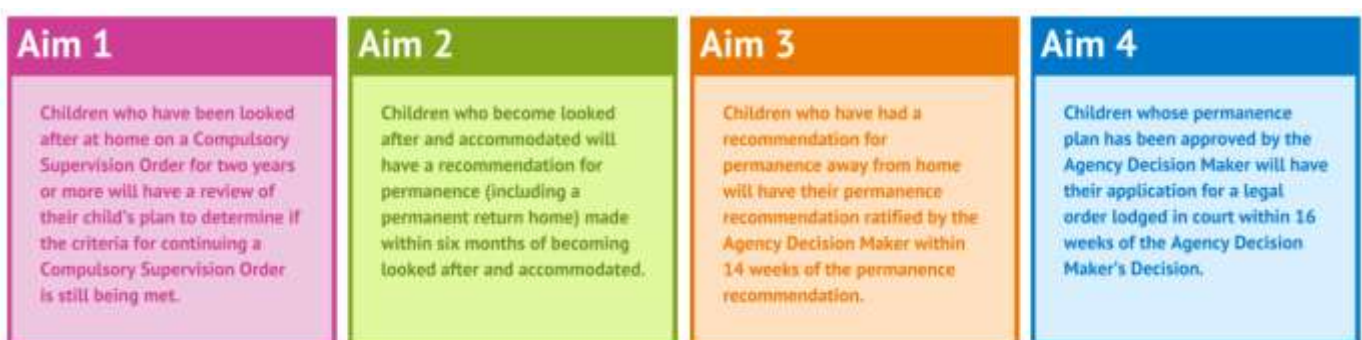


Figure 1: the four national PACE aims

The PACE Collaborative

In the 2017/2018 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government set out the ambition for PACE to be offered to all 32 local authorities in Scotland. In 2019, in addition to the 22 local authority areas that had already engaged with the PACE programme, five more local authority areas accepted the offer to use PACE to help drive their improvements for looked after children before the programme completed.

As a result, a new year-long PACE Collaborative programme was born. It brought together these five local authority areas to experience a three-day intensive residential to equip them with the skills and knowledge needed to progress their improvement journey aligned to the main aims of PACE. In addition to harnessing support from each other, the teams in these local authority areas also benefitted from their own allocated permanence consultant and data analyst from CELCIS.

Why Quality Improvement?

Quality Improvement methodology has been proven to effect real and positive change in a number of different public services in Scotland, for example, including the [Scottish Patient Safety Programme](#), the Early Years Collaborative, and Raising Attainment for All (now known as the [Children and Young People Improvement Collaborative](#)). Consequently, the Scottish Government selected Quality Improvement to be used as the framework for the PACE programme.

The principles of Quality Improvement support multi-agency and collaborative work as it focuses on leadership at all levels – from frontline practitioners to senior leaders. It empowers the people who work in services daily to test new ways of working to address challenges and to amplify positive practice. Quality Improvement also focuses on building up evidence from small scale ‘tests of change’ (testing new ways of working) in a variety of settings before implementing the new way of working in daily practice. In this way, changes are only introduced once there is evidence that they are improvements.

The ‘Model for Improvement’ (see Figure 2 below) gives a framework for these principles. It asks three key questions: what specifically we are trying to achieve; how will we measure our changes so that we can tell if the changes are improvements; and what new ways of working will we test to see if they achieve our aim. It also provides a ‘PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) cycle’ as a framework for testing new ways of working in an iterative way, ensuring that each change idea undergoes multiple cycles of testing, scrutiny and variation before a decision is made on whether to adapt, abandon, or ultimately implement it⁵.

⁵ Langley, G., Moen, R., Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Normal, C., and Provost, L., (2009) *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p23-25

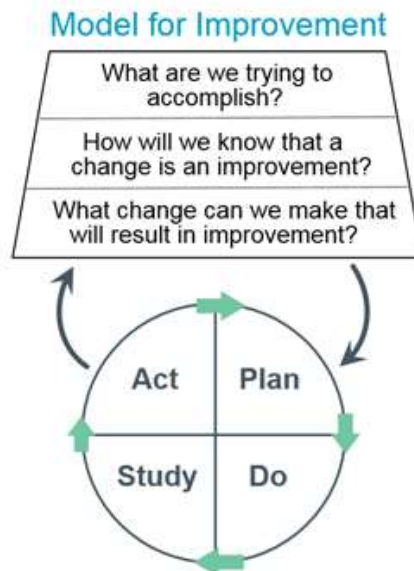


Figure 2: the Model for Improvement and 'Plan- Do-Study-Act' cycle

The CELCIS team provided initial Quality Improvement training to local authority areas, followed by on-going support and guidance to local authority areas undertaking tests of change. By sharing potential change ideas and approaches from other local authority areas, it ensured that the people involved understood both the importance of testing and how to do so, including the importance of recording qualitative and quantitative data from each test.

Quality Improvement also considers how to effect organisational change successfully, focusing on Dr. John P. Kotter's '8 step process for leading change'⁶. It also looks to W. Edwards Deming's 'Lens of profound knowledge' which comprises of four 'lenses' to attend to when embarking on any improvement project and which can be used to support a greater understanding of the relevant system. The CELCIS team brought all this knowledge to their support of each PACE area.

⁶ Kotter, J. P. (1996) *Leading Change*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Setting up PACE: Building an organisational approach to improvement

Building the groundwork

Before beginning the PACE programme, it was essential to put in place the skillset required from CELCIS. This ensured that our team was well-equipped to work alongside and support the people who have a role to play in permanence decision-making. The CELCIS team comprised of permanence consultants, data analysts and a research associate. The consultants were trained Quality Improvement advisors who facilitated and provided leadership for the programme, together with teaching and supporting local authority areas to implement Quality Improvement methodology. The data analysts supported the collection of local data, and analysed the data to help local authority areas understand how children were moving through the system and to evidence the improvements made over time. The research associate supported ongoing evaluation of the impact of the PACE programme, including through engagement with local authority areas, to improve its continued development.

Once this was in place, it was important to start building the groundwork and link in with the entire team of professionals supporting permanence planning. Following the advice provided in *The Improvement Guide*⁷, in understanding any 'system' and to drive improvement in a way that enables real change, we need to first focus on the people at its heart. In the case of the PACE programme, this involved linking in with the people who determine who is best placed to create a continuous, nurturing and safe home environment for the child, namely frontline practitioners and those who have a role to play in making key permanence decisions for looked after children.

The CELCIS team first liaised with senior social work leaders in local authority areas to discuss which roles and organisations were crucial to involve in the programme, while supporting team leads within local authority areas to strengthen their relationships with the agencies involved in permanence. Whilst the responsibility of progressing plans for children predominantly rests with social work services, PACE has always aspired to be a multi-agency programme. It was recognised that engaging with all the agencies that surround a child's life at the beginning of the programme was essential, and that this approach would be the most beneficial in identifying all the necessary services that were required to progress plans for children.

A range of departments were approached in every local authority area involved in PACE, including social work, education, health, and legal; together with colleagues from the Children's Hearings System and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration. Depending on the needs of individual children, services such as adult community care and drug and alcohol services may also be involved taking into account the entire team around the child. This meant the entire permanence planning journey for a child was represented and ideas for improvements to the system were identified by frontline practitioners.

⁷ Langley, G., Moen, R., Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Normal, C., and Provost, L., (2009) *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organisational Performance*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p77.

A common purpose between all agencies involved is that they are known as Corporate Parents, i.e. they are public bodies that have parenting duties for infants, children, and young people who are looked after⁸. Often, some of these agencies were already working collaboratively, both on local authority partnerships, and on day to day activity.

Gaining senior leadership buy-in and commitment to PACE

In any change or Quality Improvement programme it is important to gain commitment for the programme at an early stage, particularly from the senior leaders of the agencies involved. The CELCIS team worked to support people to help them progress and achieve their own change, so our initial approach was to work directly with the senior leaders of the organisations involved to help them understand why change was necessary and to create a sense of urgency.

It was firstly important to analyse the legislative and research context. This helped us to communicate why improving timescales for children was both an urgent and a multi-agency responsibility, and how local multi-agency work aligns with the legislative duty on public bodies that link into a child's life. In doing this, senior leaders were able to better understand how collaborating together was part of the legislative duty as set out in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, *'where they consider that doing so would safeguard or promote the wellbeing of children or young people'*⁹.

Further, the Scottish Government's strategy document, Getting it Right for Looked after Children and Young People¹⁰, published in 2015, sets out the blueprint for what is needed to achieve early permanence and why. With priority on 'early engagement, early permanence, and improving the quality of care', this strengthened the role of the PACE programme to communicate the compelling reasons for earlier permanence decisions. The strategy referenced the PACE programme as a Scottish Government commitment to its priorities and reinforced the programme's understanding of permanence as including a return to parental care and no longer looked after by the local authority, kinship care, permanent foster care, or adoption¹¹.

In this context, CELCIS data analysts were able to use local authority areas' own data to explain how their system was currently operating. This baseline data was then compared to statutory timescales and guidance which showed how long the permanence planning journey ought to take. Setting out this comparison helped to show the ways in which using Quality Improvement as a framework for systemic change could improve permanence timescales. Over time, the CELCIS team was also able to share information about improvements that had been made in other local authority areas and the positive impact this had for children, families, carers and practitioners. In this way, the CELCIS team worked with local authorities to highlight where the changes might be and provided a mechanism to work through achieving such changes. By using a local authority area's own data, it helped to continuously keep in mind the key goal of driving improvement in permanence planning.

⁸ Scottish Government (2014) [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), Schedule 4: Corporate Parents

⁹ Scottish Government (2014) [Children and Young People \(Scotland\) Act 2014](#), Part 9, section 58

¹⁰ Scottish Government (2015) [Getting it Right for Looked After Children and Young People. Early engagement, early permanence and improving the quality of care](#). Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

¹¹ Scottish Government (2015) [Getting it Right for Looked After Children and Young People. Early engagement, early permanence and improving the quality of care](#), Page 18. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

However, gaining senior leadership buy in is not a 'one off' event. It was important to regularly update senior leaders of all partner agencies on the progress of PACE and to ask them to address any barriers to progress or to agree to implement successful change ideas as new day-to-day practice. This was done through a governance process to involve senior leaders which was agreed upon in the early stages of working with an area. Some local authority areas incorporated PACE governance into existing governance structures, such as corporate parenting boards, and others set up their own PACE governance processes. This was led by whatever route worked best for each individual local authority area.

Experiences within the first few local authority areas quickly highlighted the benefits of feeding in to existing governance structures (or the creation of clear accountability structures where they did not already exist) as a precondition of programme support and engagement. This ensured that the programme did not commence without central, multi-agency, strategic insight, or without a clear mechanism for ensuring that senior leaders continued to support the PACE work as the programme developed.

Learning along the way

1. Introducing PACE to wider teams

Having secured buy-in from senior management of the different agencies involved, the CELCIS team then delivered a local learning event to introduce PACE to a wide range of practitioners from each agency. These events were typically two days in length, and gathered together between ten people in smaller local authority areas and up to 60 people in larger local authority areas. Bringing together a number of people from key agencies provided an opportunity for practitioners from all parts of the system that supported permanence planning to collaborate in the creation of shared goals. This helped to reiterate the opportunity they had to improve the system by working together.

During these learning events, the CELCIS team introduced people to the principles and tools of Quality Improvement (such as understanding their current processes, testing changes, measurement plans, recording and reviewing data) and how these were applied to support the programme, and coached them through discussions to review existing data. Once this setting was established, the CELCIS team facilitated the refinement of aims and exploration of potential change ideas.

One of the key tasks at the learning events was to set local aims agreed upon by all present in relation to each of the four national aims. This introduced tools and techniques common in improvement methodology and programmes. For example, driver diagrams, which are used to visually display a team's 'theory of change', or strategy, were created to show how these aims could be achieved. This process helped to highlight the high-level improvements in decision making timescales which were hoped to be achieved for infants, children, and young people. It also promoted a sense of ownership of the project among the people present, facilitating constructive engagement with future improvement activity.

'I think maybe one of the things is that there has been a better understanding that permanence is not just social work's business. So that health do have a role, and that schools have a role in this. And just having that understanding about what we're trying to do with kids'

- Senior Manager

2. Creating Champions' or Leads' Groups to lead the improvement work

As the PACE learning event brought so many people from the local authority and partner agencies together, it also became an opportunity to identify which people from which agencies were best placed to help drive the improvement work. Known as 'Champions' Groups' or 'Leads' Groups', these people volunteered from across the professional services involved to help build enthusiasm and momentum for PACE within the agencies involved. Typically, the groups were led by a social work manager ('PACE Lead') who was supported by a Data Lead and an Administrative Lead, as well as a data analyst from CELCIS. The groups comprised of social work managers and frontline practitioners, a local authority solicitor, representatives from health and education, the locality reporter from the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, and Children's Hearings Panel Members. In the early stages of their PACE work, the groups met fortnightly, before changing to approximately every four weeks. The groups met regularly throughout their involvement with CELCIS and were strongly encouraged to continue this once CELCIS' involvement came to an end.

In the early stages of the PACE programme, the CELCIS Permanence Consultant chaired and planned Champions' Groups meetings, together with the local PACE lead, and supported the group to gain a greater understanding of the system in which they were working and to identify barriers to progress and good practice. The Permanence Consultant and Data Analyst then supported the Champions' Groups to develop, test and measure the success of change ideas.

Having team leaders in addition to frontline practitioners on the Champions' Groups provided an opportunity for greater peer to peer learning. For example, team leaders were able to learn even more about the day to day difficulties from frontline practitioners. This also meant that team leaders could give immediate support for change ideas to be tested and other resources, capacity and time to be freed up to help with such testing.

Feedback from the local authority areas highlighted that working in this multi-agency way through the PACE programme led to stronger professional relationships across agencies, and to a greater understanding of different professionals' roles and responsibilities. For example, Children's Hearings Panel Members often reported that they had a greater understanding of the scrutiny local authorities gave children's permanence plans as a result of being involved in PACE Champions' Groups.

The Champions' Group also led on developing a communications strategy to better inform colleagues in their agencies about the work of PACE, and to learn from other practitioners about what improvements PACE could address. Many groups connected with groups in other local authority areas to learn from each other, including through an annual national event, Gathering PACE, which was an opportunity to share progress and learn about successful changes that had been made.

As the formal PACE programme drew to a close, the CELCIS team worked with Champions' Groups to focus on self-sufficiency planning to ensure that they were fully equipped to continue their improvement work without the support of the CELCIS team.

This included:

- Further Quality Improvement training
- Support with data analysis
- Supporting senior leaders to ensure agencies continued to see the difference that PACE and related improvement work was having
- Support with the implementation of successful change ideas in to day to day practice

3. Forming individual aim groups

Over the course of the programme, CELCIS consultants and analysts noticed that Champions' Groups often chose to prioritise one programme aim before progressing to the next. While this approach seems logical, working sequentially through the different aims can take a long time. Additionally, focusing on just one aim often meant that some agencies felt that they had no role in the programme, as their only point of influence might be in relation to a different aim.

In response, the CELCIS team supported local authority areas to set up specific aims groups for each of the four national aims, working on all aims concurrently. Each group was led by a person whose workload linked to a lead responsibility for that aim area, and involved professionals able to test changes within their roles across the permanence process. Aims' group leads then reported on progress at each Champions' Group meeting. As a result of this change, aims' groups developed change theories and tested specific changes more quickly due to the in depth knowledge of those involved in the group. They were also able to maintain commitment of group members when their expertise was applied directly to the changes being considered.

Aims' groups also increased leadership responsibility for the programme at a local level and ensured there was clear oversight for the improvement work being undertaken at all key points in the system. This helped local authority areas to better plan for self-sufficiency with the PACE work as the formal programme came to a close.

The emphasis on multi-agency working to improve professional collaboration, including learning events, Champions' Groups and individual aim groups, has led to improved interagency collaboration within local authority areas. Across the local authority areas, programme leads have reported how the development of a shared vision to reduce permanence planning timescales has led to more open dialogue, a greater understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities, and constructive challenge to achieve improvements for looked after infants, children, and young people. In addition, people in local authority areas indicated that personal relationships across agencies were improved or created as a result of the PACE programme.

'It's that bit about paying attention to the particular needs, and that role that each of those agencies and those parts of the system play in terms of the drift or the time delays occurring. So our collective responsibility, but also that ability to come together to kind of critically review it and learn and be able to amend and adapt, and you know, identify ways of improving. If you didn't have all the parts of that system, you would be more limited'
- Principal Social Worker

4. Cultivating communication

Throughout the PACE programme, CELCIS supported local authority areas to create an open and constructive environment in which professionals could discuss their roles, views, and how they thought they could influence permanence planning timescales. This led to a greater understanding between agencies of each other's responsibilities and the part they play in progressing permanence plans for looked after children. It also highlighted how frontline practitioners are leaders in their own fields – be this, for example, social work or health - and had the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to lead on the development and testing of new ways of working.

It was also important to build understanding and trust between different agencies. Discussing an agency's involvement in the permanence process during foundational governance meetings and wider multi-agency events and Champions' Groups illustrated each agency's value to the programme. The CELCIS team often coordinated specific group activities, such as focus groups to help support open communication (see: Cultivating Communication case study), delivering content drawn from their expertise in Quality Improvement, data, or experience working in children's services.

'It is down to how you actually forge personal relationships on a professional basis with these people...[I]t just makes it easier to raise some of the more challenging questions, and hopefully they've been able to raise with us and we with them. It's about actually just having that time and that space to think differently about what...we're actually doing and is there a way in which we could do this differently.'
- Lead Service Manager

Case study: Cultivating Communication

In one local authority area there were conflicting views between Children's Hearings Panel Members and social workers relating to the levels of contact being agreed for children in children's hearings. The CELCIS team facilitated two focus groups, one with social workers and one with Children's Hearings Panel Members. These discussions allowed each group to express their concerns candidly and openly.

Both focus groups raised examples of maintaining higher levels of contact for a child than they felt to be appropriate. Children's Hearings Panel Members said they felt inclined to defer to social work expertise even when they felt that contact was too frequent, while social workers were not requesting reductions to contact due to a concern that Children's Hearings Panel Members would not agree to the proposed changes.

The CELCIS team then brought the two groups together, highlighting that both aimed to make decisions in the best interests of the child and working openly and collaboratively within the Quality Improvement programme would help them come closer to achieving this for children in their local authority area.

Key learning

Focus on the impact of improvement: Maintaining a focus on the key aim of the Quality Improvement programme helps to maintain enthusiasm and momentum. Using case examples and local data to highlight why changes need to be made helps create a sense of urgency and encourages buy-in.

Gain commitment from all agencies: Gaining explicit commitment from all partner agencies results in two benefits; it creates a governance structure to maintain focus and accountability, and provides practitioners with the authority to make changes within their work. Equally important is the need to involve multiple levels of leadership from senior management through to frontline practitioners, to ensure that this commitment is ongoing for the duration of the programme.

Use existing governance structures: Embedding the programme governance within existing multi-agency governance structures (e.g. local authority area multi-agency partnerships), raises the profile of the work being done without creating additional time demands for new meetings.

Form individual aim groups: Forming individual aim groups in addition to Champions' Groups makes best use of relevant professional experience and ensures the active engagement of all relevant agencies in the programme.

Identify a need to bring in additional expertise: Harnessing support and leadership from those with both experience of Quality Improvement and the sectors and disciplines in which they are working helps maximise the opportunities for improvement.

Strengthening the workforce

Delivery of workforce support

In order to successfully implement a new programme of work, it is important to ensure that the workforce carrying out the programme have the necessary skills and capacity¹². Working directly with those involved in providing services and testing changes was a key element of the PACE programme, which made its successful implementation and long term sustainability possible.

In the early stages of the PACE programme, the CELCIS team supported local authority areas for as long as was required. As more local authority areas joined the PACE programme, there was a recognition that some activity could become stagnant over time. This led to a target timeframe of 15 months being introduced for the completion of the PACE programme in each local authority area. The support offered within this timeframe included helping to drive the programme locally, leading and supporting the Champions' Groups, teaching Quality Improvement, mentoring and coaching, and the provision of technical support. For the five local authority areas involved in the PACE Collaborative programme (see Introduction), this support included an intensive residential learning event to commence the 12 month period, followed by a series of webinars and project surgeries, on-going progress discussions, and continued mentoring and coaching.

The learning from the introduction of the 15 month target timeframe for the original PACE programme, and the 12 month timeframe for the PACE Collaborative programme, was that a time-bound offer of support led local authority areas to be more proactive in identifying potential changes, conducting testing, and engaging with their local data. This in turn improved their learning and capacity development.

Developing an understanding of the situation

The initial stages of the improvement programme in each local authority area focused on building relationships and up-skilling local authority area staff in a variety of ways, including Quality Improvement and permanence planning. The key subject matters for development were identified through discussions of legal requirements for the making of permanence recommendations and decisions, and the exploration of local data. For the local authority areas involved in the original PACE programme, the first major opportunity to gain an introduction to Quality Improvement theory and tools was at a local multi-agency learning event. At these sessions, local authority area teams had the chance to:

- Gain a deeper understanding of their local context, supported by the data
- Learn about Quality Improvement tools and techniques
- Start to think about applying this learning to their local authority area

¹² Langley, G., Nolan, K., Normal, C., Provost, L., and Nolan, T. (1996). *The Improvement Guide: A practical Approach to Enhancing Organisational Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

These multi-agency events included all partners who could have a role in improving the time it takes for professionals to make a permanence decision for a child.

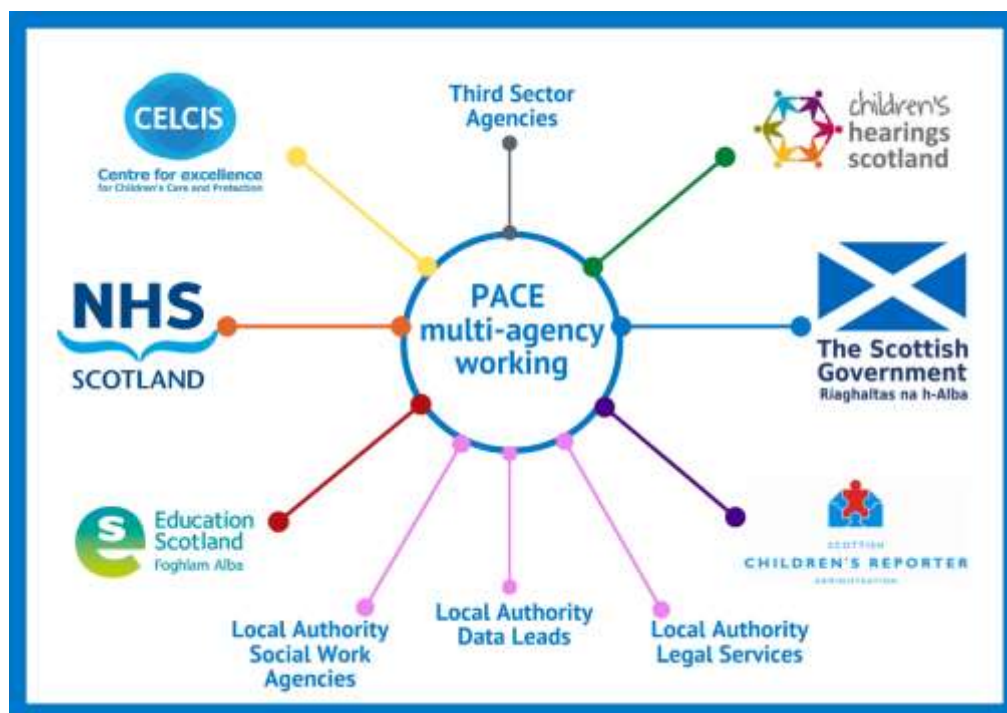


Figure 3: the different partners, brought together by PACE, that have a role in permanence decision making

Active learning

In addition to leading, coaching and mentoring local authority area teams, the CELCIS team found that there were significant benefits to be gained from facilitating links between local authority areas. This included connecting people in different local authority areas who were working on similar changes, facing similar challenges, or where one's learning may have helped another. Feedback from these connections was positive, and contributed to the CELCIS team's decision to organise larger-scale learning opportunities for local authority area teams to network and learn about current issues affecting permanence.

Over the life of the programme, the CELCIS team organised several events, including one-day workshops on topics such as pre-birth planning, concurrency, and data. These events brought together people from local authority areas to learn about current research and good practice nationally and internationally. The workshops often involved expert speakers, and provided the opportunity to discuss challenges and how the principles might have been applied in their local settings.

The CELCIS team also organised larger national events focused on sharing the knowledge and experiences gathered by local authority areas through their involvement in the PACE programme. Poster presentations provided an overview of aims, tests of change, and their impact on their permanence processes evidenced by data, while workshops led by local authority area representatives and the CELCIS team allowed an opportunity for a 'deep dive' into particular specialist topics.

Communities of Practice

To meet the specific learning and collaboration needs of remote and island local authorities, the CELCIS team set up an island community of practice. This involved bringing together practitioners and those with leadership responsibilities for permanence planning from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Orkney Islands Council, and Shetland Islands Council, both in person and remotely, to discuss common experiences and barriers. After the formal programme came to an end, they continued their communication and knowledge sharing. The CELCIS team held a similar community of practice event for local authority data leads and are supporting the group to consider how to become self-sustaining.

Local authority area-led workforce development

Many local authority area teams identified the need for staff training in order to support the changes being implemented. Local authority area teams were encouraged to identify people with the skills and knowledge needed to lead on delivering the training. This was supplemented by the CELCIS team and external advisors where necessary.

Training delivered across Scotland for people involved in the PACE programme covered a range of topics, including:

- Contact for Children's Hearings Panel Members
- Permanence case mentoring for social workers
- Sessions on permanence for social workers, reviewing officers, and solicitors
- Refresher training on Quality Improvement for local authority areas partway through the programme

'It is about excellence, do you know what I mean? That is the level. They're really impressive'

- Locality Manager

Subject expertise

Local authority area teams also highlighted that having CELCIS team support to facilitate the Quality Improvement activity added value to the experience. In interviews with programme leads from local authority areas, several noted how helpful they found CELCIS consultants' detailed knowledge of permanence processes, as well as how they were challenged to reflect on existing approaches and thinking regarding processes and practice.

'...having CELCIS and having their team, and having [CELCIS consultants] in particular, just helping us to pay more attention and to sharpen focus around young people's permanence needs has kind of helped. Not only in the initial stages of setting up our plans and identifying what aims, but also kind of keeping us on track.'

- Principal Social Worker

This knowledge enabled a deeper understanding of the context, challenges, and pressures placed upon practitioners in general, and on permanence decision making.

As a result of this, the CELCIS team was able to rapidly understand the context within which the local authority area teams were working. The CELCIS team was then able to facilitate new ideas and ensure that support from the CELCIS consultants was delivered and received in a positive, constructive manner. Subject area expertise enabled the CELCIS team to support the development of practice and process permanence decision improvements by:

- Supporting the development of aims that were specific to local contexts but still in line with the national aims
- Developing professional capacity within local authority areas through training, coaching and mentoring
- Sharing specialist knowledge and research on permanence
- Sharing evidence of process and practice changes that had been successful in other local authority areas

Key learning

Fixed term support promotes focus and drive: Delivering support for Quality Improvement activity on a time-limited basis promotes the engagement and use of that support.

Understanding the current situation is the first challenge: Improving practitioner understanding of what is happening at present, and where the challenges truly lie is essential, before any changes can be suggested or improvements take effect.

Understanding roles is important: Quality Improvement programmes can provide a greater understanding of the roles and responsibilities of other people within a team or wider sector.

Peer networks promote learning: Linking together people in similar roles or situations from different local authority areas can produce significant learning benefits, in addition to promoting engagement and commitment to the Quality Improvement process.

Identifying internal support: Local authority areas have examples of good practice and access to people with experience, expertise, and skills. These can and should be used as a source of learning.

Subject area expertise is invaluable: Consultants with an understanding of both Quality Improvement *and* the context in which it takes place enables clearer identification of challenges, appropriate tests of change, and the faster spread of good practice either from local testing or evidence based literature.

The place for Data in Quality Improvement

Data and measurement is an integral and pivotal part of the Quality Improvement process. Data is required in order to answer one of the key questions of the 'Model for Improvement', 'How will we know that a change is an improvement?'¹³

This involves several steps and considerations. Baseline data is gathered to determine the current state of a system or process. Observation of how the system or process is functioning allows identification of potential improvements, and realistic improvement aims to be set. Continuous collection of data then allows for monitoring of progress towards achievement of improvement aims. Data is also crucial to evaluate the impact of individual tests of change which are implemented in order to achieve improvement aims, known as the 'Study' element of the Plan-Do-Study-Act improvement cycle which is used for each test of change.

For the PACE programme, baseline data was used to show leaders and practitioners how effectively or otherwise children were moving through the local authority area's permanence planning system. This helped to drive urgency for the need to change the status quo. It also allowed leaders and practitioners to further connect with how long the process was taking for individual children that they were responsible for and this led to increased support for the programme.

Engagement with this data as the programme progressed also allowed those involved in testing changes to see the improvements to the system, and provided evidence to leaders that certain change ideas were having a positive effect and should become day to day practice. Continually utilising the data in this way allowed for progress to be observed almost in 'real time' and helped to galvanise support for the continuation of the improvement work.

Addressing data challenges using Quality Improvement in a multi-agency social care setting

Adapting Quality Improvement and run charts

Quality Improvement programmes can often have many opportunities for testing a change idea.

The system that supports permanence planning for children is completely different and the numbers of children needing support at certain points in their journey through the system can be very small. For example, testing a new template for the agenda of a 6 Week Looked After Child Review meeting relies on children having been accommodated

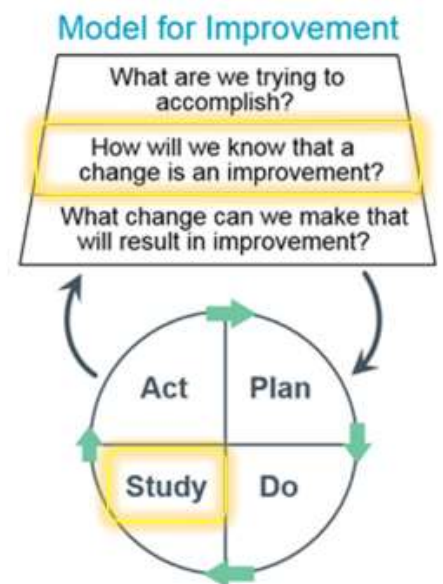


Figure 4: the 'study' element of the Model for Improvement 'Plan-Do-Study-Act' cycle

¹³ Langley, G., Moen, R., Nolan, K., Nolan, T., Normal, C., and Provost, L., (2009) *The Improvement Guide: A Practical Approach to Enhancing Organizational Performance*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey Bass, p23-25

in the previous 6 weeks. It can therefore be difficult to quickly assess the impact of tests of change and to develop these in an iterative way.

Run charts, sometimes referred to as time-series or trend charts, are a common visual tool used to help determine whether a change is an improvement, and if improvement has been sustained. The charts display data plotted in a logical sequential order (usually time order), making performance visible. Probability-based rules can be used with run charts to show that the change recorded hasn't happened by chance.

However, run charts are usually used to look back at how long it took to complete a process. So for this programme, the CELCIS team devised a creative solution to be able to highlight where children were in their journey along the way, by adding a supplementary bar chart. This – an example of which is shown below - enabled leaders to understand not only how quickly or otherwise decisions are being made for the children they are responsible for – but also, crucially, how long some children have been waiting for such important decisions to be made.

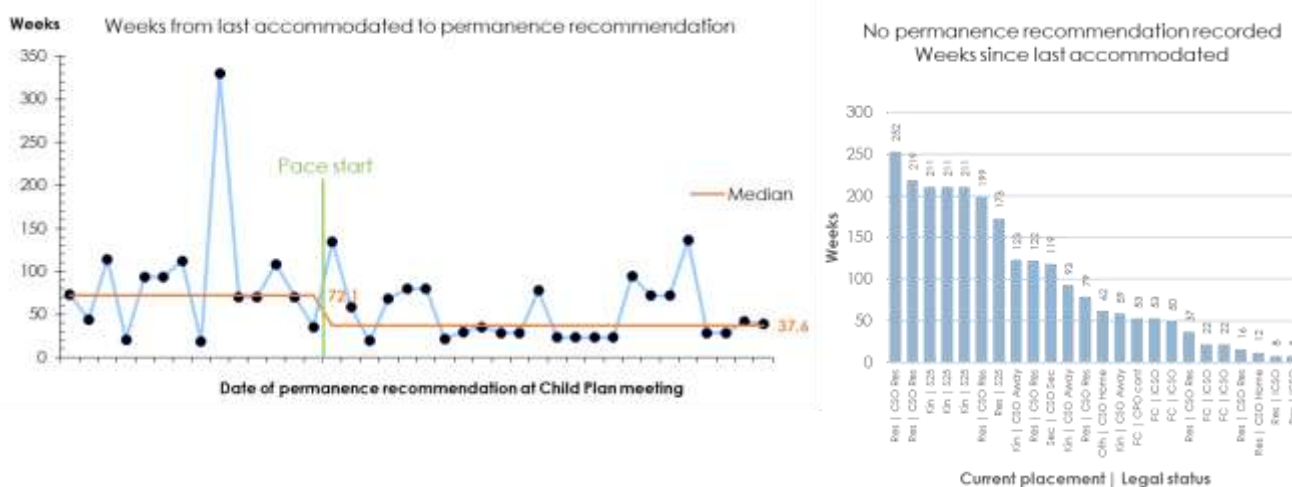


Figure 5: An example run chat and supplementary bar chart

A second innovation here was to order the run chart by the end rather than the start of the process on the x-axis, so that the next child for whom a permanence recommendation is made will appear as a dot at the right of the chart. The axis would usually be ordered by the date that each child was accommodated, but the children waiting for a permanence recommendation shown in the bar chart could appear anywhere in the run chart once they have had a permanence recommendation, making it difficult to identify trends as the picture is incomplete.

Social work data

Within PACE, the key partner for producing data for the local authority area improvement programmes was the local authority, and social work information systems were the primary source of this data. The social work information management landscape in Scotland is complicated, with notable variation across local authority partnerships. Seven different main electronic information systems were in use across local partnerships, with several local authority areas in the process of changing systems, and substantial variation in configuration and use between how the same systems were used. The flexibility of management information systems had a significant influence on the ability to

improve data recording and extraction, and supplementary systems such as spreadsheets were used in many local authority areas.

Practitioners and managers wanted to see how the data could be analysed to better understand how long parts of the permanence process were taking for their children and the impact this was having on the children, both in the present time and potentially on their future outcomes. Gathering information for PACE prompted a shift in thinking, highlighting the importance of having the right information available to inform interventions to make a difference for children.

Local authority resources around information system support, data capture and reporting varied greatly. Over time, budgetary pressures have often led to a reduction in these support resources and an increase in responsibilities, resulting in many local authority areas being heavily reliant on exceptionally skilled and committed colleagues who juggle competing pressures. Their capacity to take on additional responsibilities had implications for data production and timescales for some local authority areas.

'I was very frustrated at the time it took to get the data right, to get it all right, but I now can see that without that, you're not going to make improvements'
 - Locality manager

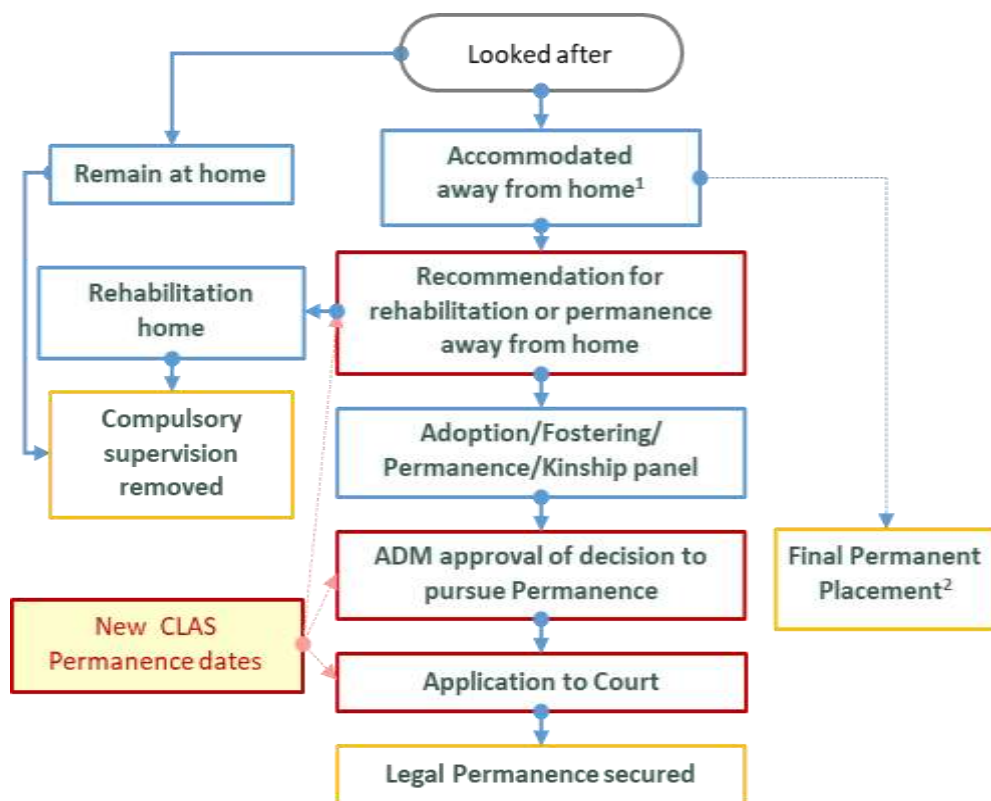
Data relevant to reducing drift and delay in decision making for babies, infants, children and young people

The CELCIS team created a data requirements document to detail the expected set of data that participants would need to collect and analyse in order to establish baselines and set aims in the first phase of the project. The document included a data measurement plan, which detailed how the local authority area would capture data in order to monitor achievement. This served to emphasise the centrality of data to the PACE programme and ensured that local authorities understood the data commitment they would be making.

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
|----------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Contracting and baselining | Diagnosing and testing | Implementation |
| Dataset to baseline and set aims | Data to monitor performance against main improvement aims | |
| | Balancing measures Children/young people between milestones | |
| | Data to monitor and evaluate tests of change | |

Figure 6: Data Use Throughout PACE Phases

Local authorities report their Children Looked After Statistics to Scottish Government annually. From 2016, these reports included (on a voluntary basis) three new permanence milestone dates; the date of permanence recommendation, Agency Decision Maker (ADM) sign-off of the agreed permanence route, and application submission to court for an order.



¹First accommodated away from home and last accommodated away from home

² Child/young person could be in final permanent placement (no further moves planned before adulthood) before the Agency Decision Maker approves permanence. Legal permanence could also be secured through a Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt before the child is in their final placement.

Figure 7: Key permanence milestones

The PACE programme’s national aims were chosen to reflect these key permanence milestones and build on the data already commonly collected by local authority partnerships.

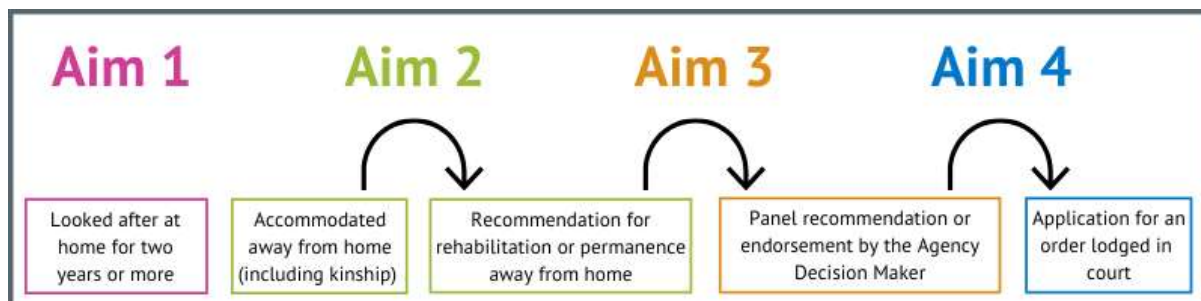


Figure 8: the four PACE national aims

It quickly became apparent that production of the dataset for PACE could be very challenging for some local authorities. The voluntary status of the Children Looked After Statistics permanence dates, as well as issues around definition and local interpretation, meant that many local authority areas had not developed appropriate recording mechanisms. In order to monitor each of the PACE national aims, CELCIS data analysts assisted local authority areas to develop their recording capacity to capture the necessary information.

Permanence recommendations, usually, but not always, the outcome of a formal Looked After Child Review, were often not explicitly captured in a format that allowed reporting. Review processes can be different between children in foster care placements, kinship placements and those looked after at home. In many local authority areas, permanence recommendations were recorded in the minutes of individual children's Looked After Child Reviews. To facilitate reporting and analysis of these recommendations, one local authority area introduced a review outcomes permanence checklist. The Independent Review Officer Team then went through Review minutes for every child who was looked after to record the recommendations in this new checklist.

Agency Decision Maker sign-off was often not routinely captured in a child's record. The recording of court submission dates also proved particularly problematic, as these were often only known by legal teams and not recorded in social work management information systems.

Where changes to information systems could be made, CELCIS data analysts encouraged local authority areas to take a Quality Improvement approach and test changes before full implementation. Other examples included:

- Expand recording to cover children in kinship placements and those looked after at home
- Developing electronic permanence forms to track processes
- Repurposing available data fields to capture permanence activity

CELCIS data support

Very early on in the PACE programme, the CELCIS team identified a need to provide dedicated data analytical support to aid capacity building to use data for improvement. Over the course of the programme, two dedicated data analysts from CELCIS worked with the local authority area teams to support their approaches to recording, gathering, and analysing data.

Preparatory work in each new local authority partnership included identification of a data lead, and an initial dedicated data meeting led by the CELCIS consultant and data analyst, bringing together key colleagues involved in data capture and reporting alongside those entering and using information about looked after children. CELCIS data analysts provided advice, guidance and practical support to local teams and data analysts, seeking to identify and maximise use of the data that was readily available, while also paying attention to the longer-term data needs for the improvement programme.

In local authority areas where it was challenging to produce key milestone data for all looked after children, data analysts supported manual exercises to provide information on children recently experiencing permanence processes. Data analysts produced and

presented from Child Looked After Statistics at learning events to show how local authority partnerships compared. Data produced for learning events also provided a baseline against which the impact of improvement activity could be measured.

With the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulation in May 2018, setting up data sharing agreements became a key element of the preparatory phase. Ongoing support involved data analysts assisting local teams to resolve data capture and extraction issues, as well as provision of training and coaching support on creation of run and bar charts, and construction of child timelines.

As with the wider support provided by the CELCIS team, the intention was to promote independence, or 'self-sufficiency', so that local teams could continue to produce data for the PACE programme without relying on CELCIS support.

'The support from CELCIS around data has been helpful for us... I think we are definitely more confident and more aware as a result'
- Principal Social Worker

Facilitating learning and exchange across local authority areas in Scotland

CELCIS organised a practice exchange workshop to bring together social work managers and practitioners, staff with data responsibilities, representatives from the Children's Hearings System, and voluntary organisations. The focus of the event was on 'using data to make a difference', exploring how systems could support the work of practitioners and managers by giving them information back at the right time to help inform intervention. To influence the development of information systems to support the emerging needs of practitioners, CELCIS invited system suppliers to participate in a discussion of what the ideal case management system might look like, and to hear directly from the sector what they would need from such a system. A follow-up presentation was also delivered to key local authority system support staff attending a Scottish users' group for systems supplied to 21 of the 32 local authorities.

A further event brought together data leads from local authority areas involved in PACE to start to build a community of practice around data across local authority areas. Two local authority areas presented their learning from data usage, and CELCIS led a workshop where participants produced run charts and explored the probability-based rules used for analysis of the charts. Participant feedback was positive:

'Well presented, useful to see how information can be shown and filtered. Very optimistic. Being a small team we will be able to introduce visual report/write and work with families'.

Key observations and reflections on the use of data for improvement

Driving urgency for change and improvement

The CELCIS team observed that the data displays and visuals used at the initial stages of the programme were essential to help create a sense of urgency for change and improvement. This, in turn, influenced levels of motivation and 'buy in' from managers and practitioners to participate in the PACE programme. Seeing data visualisations of the duration of different stages of the permanence process brought into sharp relief the likely implications for children's wellbeing. Seeing this information displayed in this way was new for many managers and practitioners who described it as enlightening on the length of time it took for permanence decisions to be made. This generated momentum as well as helping to focus attention and efforts on those stages of the permanence process that appeared to be contributing to drift and delay.

'[W]hen you looked at the sort of mainstream expectation, for meeting of the statutory framework, I think people were quite shocked at how far off we were...When you put all the data together and you show it, then you can see quite clearly that there are issues...And instead of thinking well, that happened in a one-off occasion or well, that's that particular case, we were able to actually show that there was patterns.'

- Team leader

Aiding appraisal of what needs attention

Data visualisations allowed local teams to identify patterns and to scrutinise where there appeared to be disproportionate lengths of time between key milestones for children. For example, local authority areas may become more conscious of the high proportions of children who have been 'looked after' at home for long periods, or who are living in kinship care without any attention to legal permanence. It also illuminated 'blind spots' for local teams, who might be formulating a picture of what is happening that is incomplete. The run chart example here showed very few children getting to a permanence decision making panel near the 12 week aim, a part of the permanence process that was not an initial concern in this area. In another area, a social work manager's preconception that courts were responsible for significant delays was not supported by data which indicated that social work processes prior to application submission to court were more of an issue.

'The data has enabled us to see what we thought was the case, which is that new children entering into the system are progressing through the system a great deal quicker. What it's also shown is that we have regrettably, a cohort of children whose permanence plans were not progressed.'

- Local Authority PACE lead

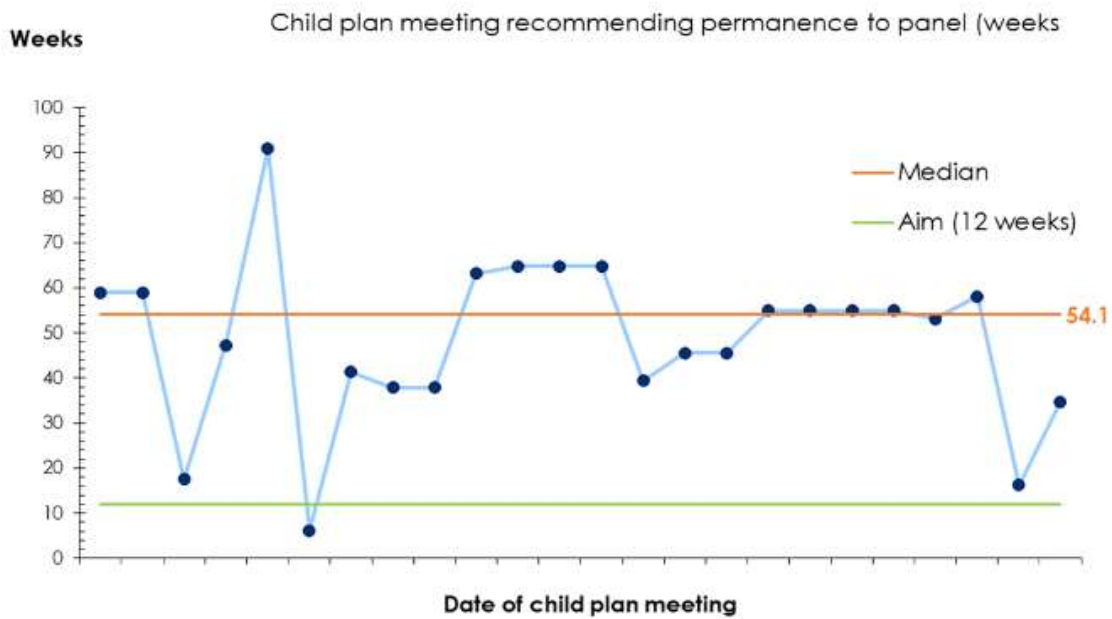


Figure 9: Using run charts to challenge assumptions

Data visualisation brings stories to life

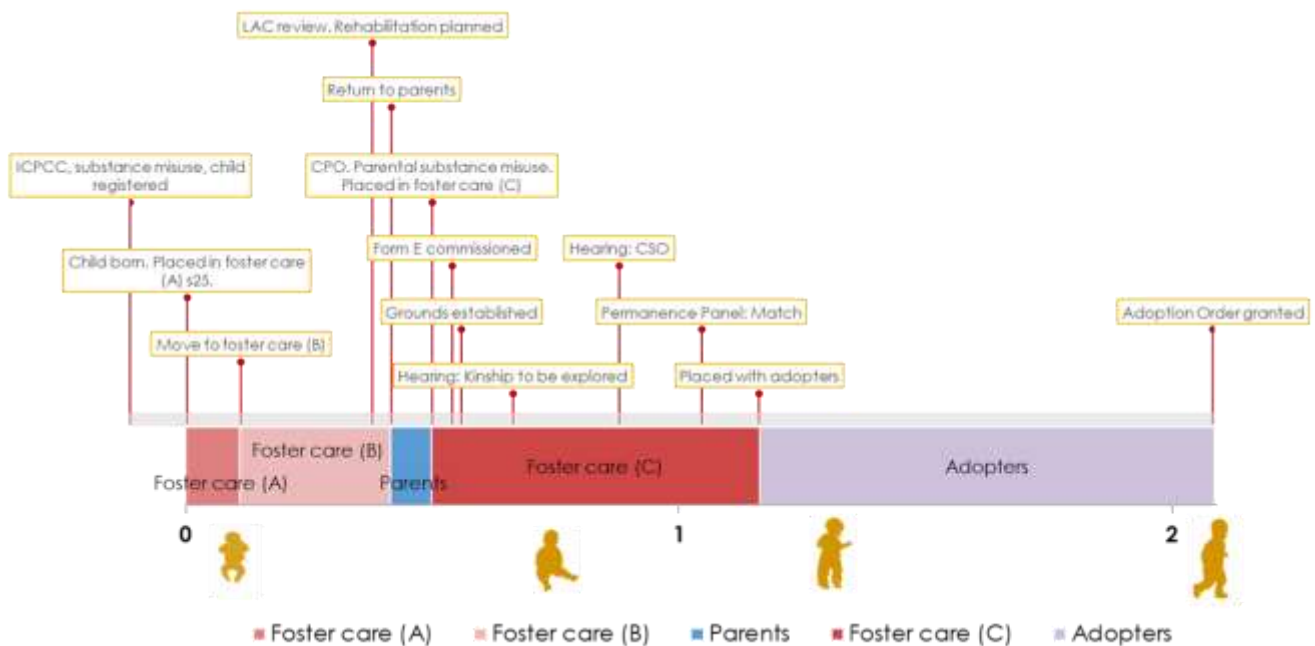


Figure 10: an example of a visual timetable showing a child's journey to permanence, from initial referral to legal permanence

Data about permanence processes and decisions is data about children's lives. Run charts (Figure 9) proved to be an effective tool to portray individual experience of parts of the permanence process, and it was clear through the course of the work that drawing together and presenting data about milestones and decisions created the space to move beyond considering patterns and trends in an abstract way.

This data prompted enquiries to understand which child was represented by specific data points in order to look further into the circumstances and experiences around the decisions that were being taken. So producing individual visual timelines which combined a child's placement history and key events to explore their experience was begun as a test of change by a CELCIS consultant for a local authority area. This approach was further developed by CELCIS data analysts and shared with other local authority partnerships, resulting in production of individual timelines for individual children and groups of siblings in many local authority areas (see Figure 10 above).

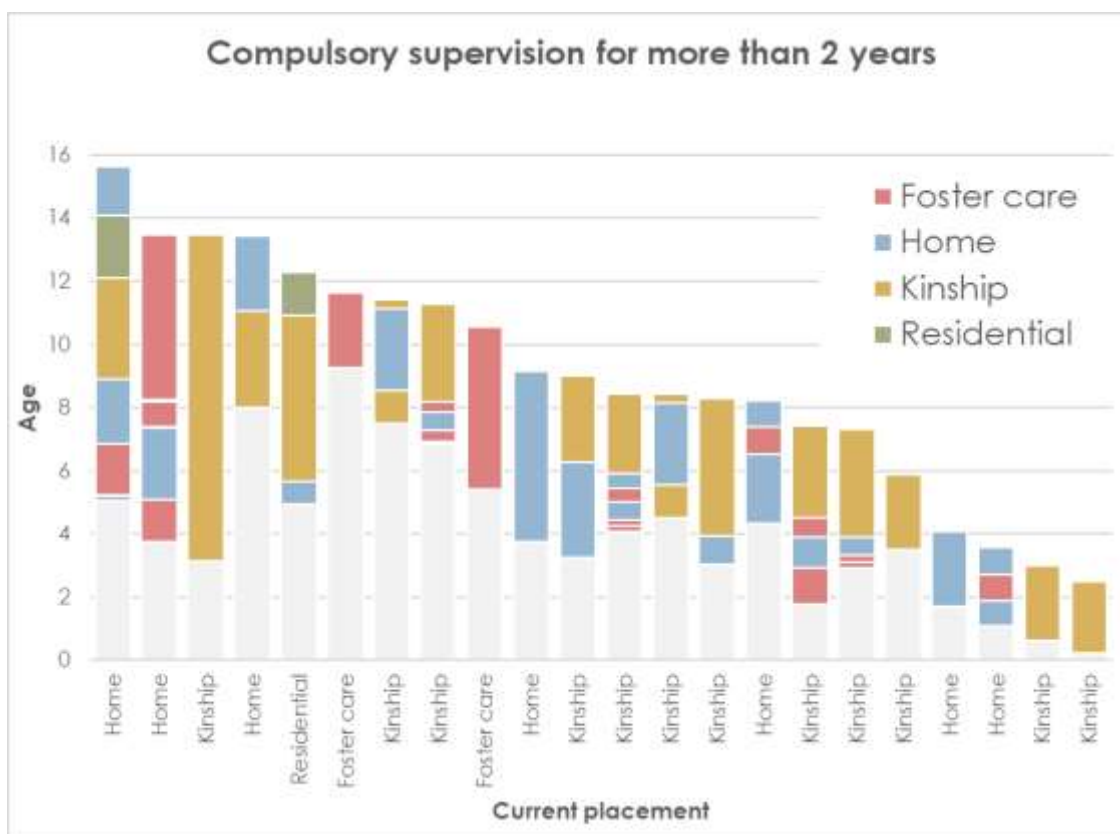


Figure 11: Grouped placement history timelines

In addition, working with local authority areas and their data, CELCIS data analysts produced placement histories for groups of children to show individual experiences of multiple placement moves together.

The timelines raised new questions and concerns within teams about apparent drift and delay in decision making and how this would be affecting individual children, and groups of children within particular circumstances (e.g. being looked after at home, living with kinship carers). This led directly to tests of change for groups, such as reviews for all children looked after at home for more than eighteen months, and recording of permanence recommendations for children in kinship placements.

'And I think the other thing was that you know when we started looking at the data and you know we looked at time, it was two children we looked at timelines for. I think that totally shocked people.'

- Team leader

Demonstrating improvement builds momentum

Run charts were successfully used to demonstrate the impact of tests of change and evidence improvement to parts of the permanence process for children. An example of this is shown below for one area that introduced tests of change including new agendas for 72 hour planning meetings and an initial review at two rather than six weeks in order to reduce the time taken from a child becoming looked after away from home to their permanence recommendation. The chart shows reduced timescales and much less variation after the start of the PACE programme, with the number of points below the extended median line indicating that this improvement was not random.

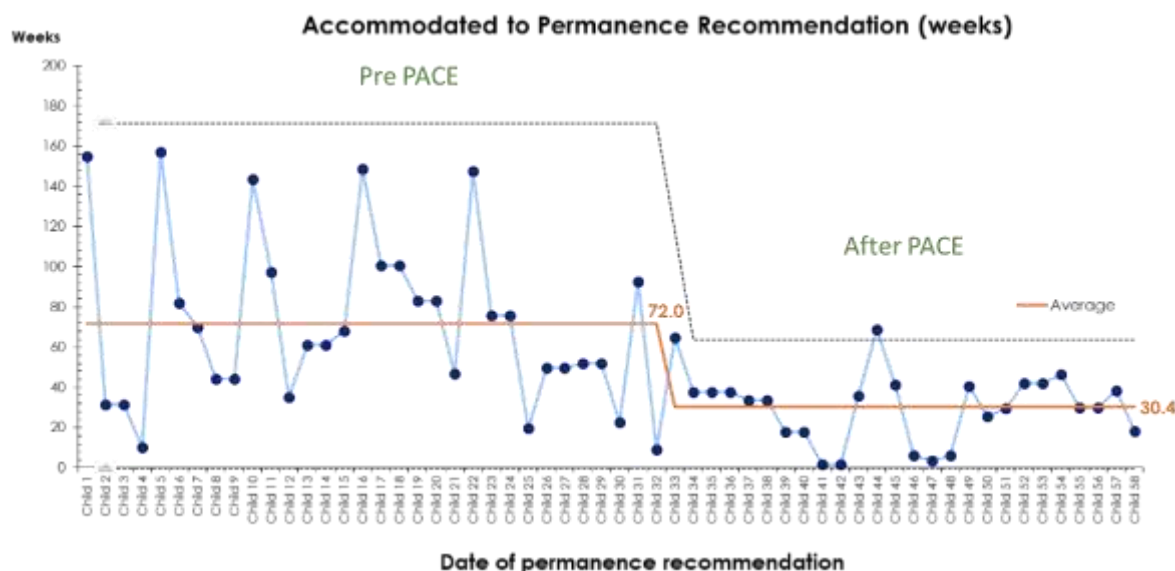


Figure 12: Evidencing improvement

Evidence of improvement helped to build morale and momentum, and led to a (sometimes premature) push to spread and scale change across areas.

Setting measurable aims

Data collection to monitor the achievement of aims highlighted issues with how aims were constructed and defined. CELCIS data analysts and improvement consultants were able to work with the local authority areas involved in PACE to address this. For example, this original aim was applied to desired progress for all the accommodated children in one local authority area:

'By 31 December 2016, 80% of Looked After and Accommodated Children will have plans to return to parental care ruled in or out at their 18 week Looked After Review.'

Many of these accommodated children already had a return to parental care ruled in or out, and therefore wouldn't be affected by any new changes that were being tested. Adding a 'from' date (i.e. children accommodated after a particular date who would be subject to tests of change) addresses this issue, as this example shows:

'From 1 April 2017, any child accommodated will wait no longer than 6 months for a LAC review to make a permanence decision.'

To ensure that children accommodated before 1st April 2017 who didn't yet have a permanence decision were not omitted from the aims being set out, a second part of the aim covered these children:

'By 31 October 2017 all children looked after and accommodated before 1 April 2017, will have a LAC review that makes a permanence decision.'

Improving data use for ongoing improvement beyond the national PACE programme

Data can be used to make a difference, and it certainly did for some children affected by changes introduced in local authority areas as part of the PACE programme.

Data has the power to tell stories of children and young people, and describe more readily their experiences of services before and after being looked after. Data has the potential to show what issues are arising in planning and decision-making and can, therefore, inform aims for improvement, ideas for change, and track progress towards more timely decision making for children and young people.

Based on CELCIS's learning from supporting the 27 local authority areas involved in PACE to apply Quality Improvement principles to their permanence processes, it has been possible to identify what it takes to sustain effective data management and what is required to use data effectively to assist with ongoing Quality Improvement.

'Visual representation of children's journey was very impactful.'
-Data event participant

Key learning

Information systems that capture key permanence milestone data for all children: Making timescales visible focuses attention and this data is essential to determine if change leads to improvement.

Clear, consistent permanence recording policies and quality monitoring: Clearly stating the responsibility, format, and deadlines for recording permanence milestone data for children, with adherence regularly monitored.

Allocated staff time and responsibility: For extraction, analysis, and presentation of permanence data in order to monitor and understand timescales achieved for children.

Timely production of information so that this can be used to inform action: Rather than looking back at what has happened, focus on what is currently happening for children and young people, and provide information to practitioners and managers at a point where it can guide intervention.

Regular analysis and reporting on permanence data: Reporting on permanence data to accountable groups and/or managers responsible for minimising drift and delay in decision making for appropriate support to children and their parents or carers.

Making change happen: practice, impact and outcomes

Background

In order to maintain momentum and focus on priorities, the CELCIS team encouraged people working in local authority areas to provide regular feedback on progress to senior management and wider staff. This often resulted in increased buy-in of the changes that eventually emerged.

'Qualitative data re. feedback on how tests worked is also powerful. Hearing that parents found the [specific test of change] really beneficial is equally powerful, especially when communicating to other colleagues why this new way of working is of benefit.'
- CELCIS Data Analyst

Key Practice Changes

1. Review of Compulsory Supervision Orders for children looked after at home

A compulsory supervision order is a legal order placing an infant, child, or young person in the local authority's care. During the PACE programme, the CELCIS team introduced a national aim to review cases for children who are looked after at home on a compulsory supervision order for more than two years. The importance of reviewing compulsory supervision orders is to avoid maintaining unnecessary legal orders and to ensure the child and their family are getting the appropriate support.

As the number of children looked after at home is often small, the CELCIS team found that local authority areas felt this change was achievable and that the activity could be undertaken to improve experiences for this group of children. Many local authority areas set aims to analyse children's reviews within 18 months rather than 24 in order to be prepared with plans for children approaching the 24 month point.

In terms of the impact of this, all local authority areas that have undertaken a review have found at least one child whose child's plan has changed, and now have a plan to change their Compulsory Supervision Order.

Examples include:

- One local authority extended the aim to cover children living in kinship care on a Compulsory Supervision Order, and another involved Children's Hearings Panel Members and a survey of hearing outcomes within the review.
- A local peer review process used a template to help professionals involved in the review to create a timeline from initial referral through to successive looked after child meetings and children's hearings, including the recommendations and outcomes for each, as well as evidence available regarding actions met or changes sustained.
- Several local authority areas tested and implemented new regular review processes for children who become looked after at home on a Compulsory Supervision Order
 - One such review process mirrors the review processes for those who are accommodated, with six week, three month, and six month looked after child reviews.

Several local authority areas have also allocated independent reviewing officers to these children, who monitor the child's plan every four weeks. They have reduced the number of children on compulsory supervision orders at home for more than eighteen months from thirty to six. Through the review they recognised that their practice had been to allocate cases of children who are looked after at home to social workers with less experience working on permanence cases and have since reviewed this practice.

2. Two week child's planning meeting

CELCIS introduced the idea of an early permanence planning meeting two weeks after the date a child became accommodated in addition to statutory meetings, which are required at 72 hours, six weeks, three months, and six months. In this new meeting, permanence is discussed with parents whose children have been in the care of the local authority and accommodated away from home. The meeting focuses on actions to facilitate earlier permanence decisions: discussing all four potential permanence outcomes with parents (return home to parental care, kinship care, permanent fostering, or adoption), agreeing on the contents of a child's plan, and aligning the dates for Looked After Child Reviews with the dates that necessary assessments are to be completed by.

Early evidence indicated that this meeting contributed to a reduction in timescales for children who were accommodated. It has since been tested and implemented in multiple local authority areas as a formal looked after child review meeting, either at two or four weeks after a child becomes accommodated.

In addition, other impacts noted as a result of the new meeting include:

- Improved child's plans
 - Independent Reviewing Officers noted seeing more well developed child's plans at six week looked after reviews than they had seen previously
 - Education services in one local authority area commented on the benefit of ensuring key issues were dealt with at the earliest opportunity, such as securing a child's place in an appropriate school
- Reduced timescales for permanence decision-making for children
- Many local authority areas moved the successive meetings forward so that there was no longer a risk of six months between the planned three month review and the six month review, to ensure that the six month review actually took place no later than six months after accommodation
- Improved parental engagement
 - Parents noted that they felt more able to engage at the new two week planning meeting compared to the seventy two hour meeting
 - Parents stated that they had an earlier understanding of permanence from the discussions at this meeting
 - Parents had a clearer understanding of what was expected of them in relation to parenting capacity assessments and the progress of the child's plan at an earlier date, in order to begin working on required changes
 - Parents had a clear idea of the timescales for assessments

- A better understanding of processes for all
 - Social workers have had the opportunity to meet with parents earlier on in the process
 - Setting the date for the final permanence recommendation acted as a new goalpost for social workers to complete assessments and recommendations, and seek legal advice
 - Feedback suggested that practice leads have oversight of the child's case at an earlier stage

3. Improvements to Kinship Care Practice

It was identified that timescales and permanence processes within local authorities often differed between those in kinship care and other children who were looked after away from home. As a result of the PACE programme, local authority areas have reconsidered how they assess, review, and make permanence decisions for infants, children, and young people living in kinship care. The specific improvements to kinship care across the local authority areas has been varied.

A range of measures were put in place, including:

- Concurrent kinship carer assessment by a social worker that is not the child's social worker. This arrangement has allowed children's social workers to focus solely on working with the parents on having the child returned to their care. As a result, parenting capacity assessments have been completed within shorter timescales, leading to quicker permanence decisions for children. Parents and carers have provided positive feedback on the process.
- Recording milestones for children in kinship care alongside other children who are looked after to more readily compare and monitor permanence work
- Actively reviewing cases of children in kinship care with Compulsory Supervision Orders for longer than two years
- Establishing a dedicated kinship team to improve assessment of and support provided to kinship carers, and ensure that kinship care cases are reviewed with the same regularity and scrutiny as for other children who are looked after
- Creating a local kinship panel, led by social work service and involving health, education, and legal, which meets monthly to approve and review formal and informal kinship carers
- Ensuring children in kinship care now have a process for scrutiny of their permanence plans
- Writing and implementing new local kinship care guidance and procedures
- Reviewing the legal support provided to families, including ensuring that policies are explicit about what 'reasonable costs' are available to kinship carers seeking a Section 11 order, and further explanations on the different support available under a Section 11 order versus a Permanence Order. A Section 11 order is known as a kinship care order when it is granted to a child's kinship carer in order to obtain some or all parental responsibilities and rights for the child.

4. Improving family assessment

Local authority areas have reconsidered how they undertake the family assessments that support permanence recommendations, including changes to parenting capacity assessments and how they assess kinship carers as permanent carers. Changes to

parenting capacity assessments have made them more person-centred, focused on outcomes desired for children, and delivered with acknowledgment of the impact of trauma or barriers experienced by parents.

In one local authority area, this has meant introducing a three month timeframe during which parents are supported and expected to seek help for the issues that prevent them from parenting to meet the needs of their child; beginning the parenting capacity assessment after this period; and, revising the assessment paperwork to focus solely on what was identified for improvement. The local authority area notes an increase in parental ability to engage in the changes required and stronger assessment evidence. CELCIS data analysts have supported local authority areas to create visual timelines of individual children to better illustrate chronology information ordinarily only accessible in report form (see diagram below). The visual timeline allows those viewing it to imagine how professional processes have impacted upon the child at a particular stage, such as seeing long periods of time without decision-making progress or a high number of placement moves. Timelines have been tested in a range of meetings including with parents and extended family, children or young people, carers, within social worker supervision, with Children’s Hearings Panel Members, and within permanence panel meetings.

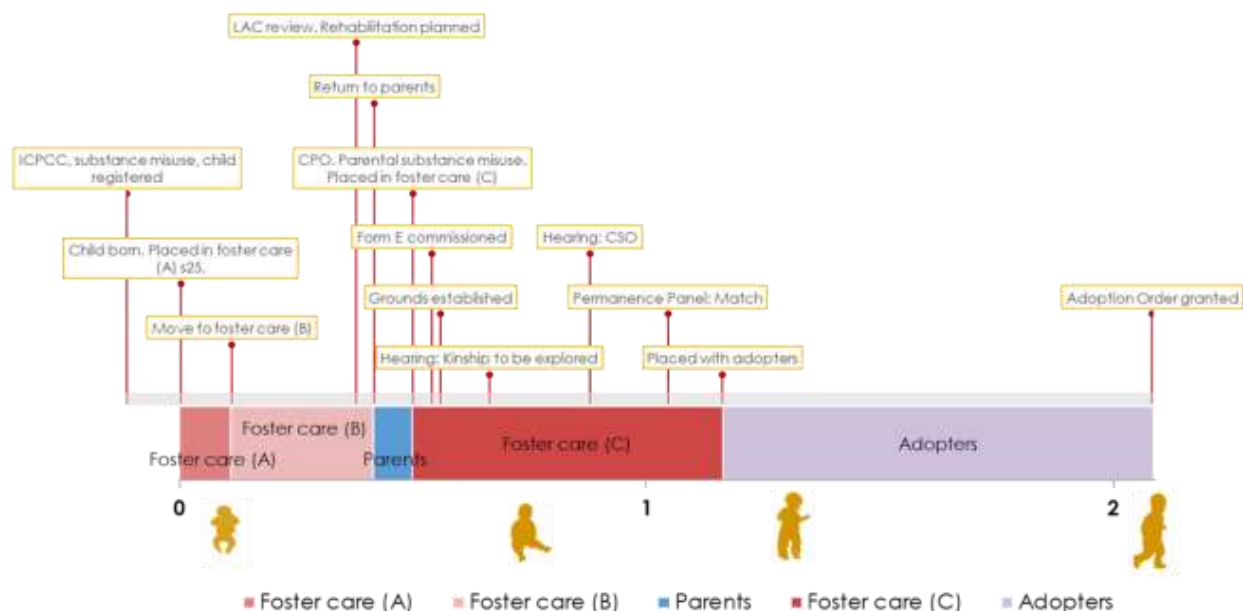


Figure 13: an example of a visual timetable showing a child’s journey to permanence, from initial referral to legal permanence

5. Streamlining Processes

Many tests of change have focused on reducing the volume of paperwork and simplifying what is sent between agencies throughout the permanence planning process. Some changes have aimed to improve social worker confidence or capacity to complete permanence paperwork:

- Allocating dedicated social workers time to complete Section 80 reports¹⁴ to provide evidence for Permanence Order applications
- Assigning social workers experienced in permanence to mentor those less experienced to complete permanence reports
- Providing protected time for social workers to complete Section 80 reports and Child's Adoption and Permanence Reports
- Assigning two separate social workers to the case - one to support the child and one to complete a kinship care assessment
- Adding permanence report writing as a discussion point in the supervision template used

Other changes have focused on ensuring that all information is available at the right time in order to help to drive process improvements. Instead of seeking legal advice on a child's plan after a permanence recommendation has been made, several local authority areas have sought this advice prior to the time at which a permanence recommendation is made. These changes were tested to ensure a child's permanence plan was supported by legal advice at the earliest possible stage, to reduce the waiting time for solicitors to provide considered advice on a child's proposed permanence plan or avoid cancelled looked after child review meetings.

The nature of the advice requested included:

- Informally through monthly permanence meetings between social workers and solicitors
- Formally through the submission of a referral form completed by a child's social worker when seeking advice on the child's plan, leading to a reduction in cancelled looked after child review meetings as a result of solicitors having appropriate timescales and information to provide advice
- Formally through Legal Advice Meetings or Permanence Planning Meetings

Another area where tests of change were undertaken was around medical advice and information. Such implemented changes have aimed to streamline paperwork. This has included:

- Ensuring a child's health needs are considered at Children's Hearings by involving health visitors in the completion of reports submitted to Children's Hearings
- Involving health colleagues in permanence reviews or planning meetings
- Health assessment checklists brought by a social worker on a permanence case to the permanence meeting

¹⁴ Scottish Government (2007) [Adoption and Children \(Scotland\) Act 2007](#), Part 2 section 80.

(Note: a 'Section 80 report' is a report submitted to the Court with an application for a permanence order or a permanence order with authority to adopt. It provides the evidenced rationales and recommendations as to why a child requires a legal Permanence Order/permanence order with authority to adopt to fulfil their immediate, short term and long term welfare and best interest needs as required within Section 80 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. It may sometimes be referred to as Permanence Report).

- A 'wellbeing baby tool' used to focus pre-birth discussions with parents when there are concerns about parental capacity to parent.
- Moving medical assessment of children who become accommodated earlier so that carers have access to vital medical information before a permanence decision is made for a child. This marked a change from permanence medicals previously only taking place in order to inform applications for Permanence Orders and Permanence Orders with authority to adopt.

Local authority areas have also worked to reduce the volume of paperwork around the child's plan (for example, the 'Form E', one of the forms used to articulate a child's needs) when professionals progress applications for either a Permanence Order or Permanence Order with authority to adopt. In some local authority areas, they have stopped using Form E and updated the assessment paperwork to include everything required within Form E in order to avoid writing multiple reports with similar evidence supporting the recommendation to meetings and decision makers that require this information. It has also meant that decision makers receive one report rather than two parallel reports written in different formats. In other local authority areas, professionals have tested changes to completing Form E itself through 'Form E workshops', which bring together all professionals involved in a child's life to facilitate complete evidencing and story-telling of a child's experiences. One area reflected that multi-agency involvement created a more child-centred narrative after decision-making concluded and when the local authority area was seeking a 'match' between children and prospective permanent carers.

6. Culture Change

Traditionally, 'permanence' has often been viewed as either adoption or foster care. For children living in kinship care, consideration of permanence either didn't take place, or the decision-making processes were not as robust as these were for other children. A significant outcome of the PACE programme has been a culture change within local authority areas, which reflect shifts in thinking around permanence and the development of new ways of working.

Two important changes have been:

- The recognition that *all* looked after children need permanence, regardless of where they live, rather than permanence being viewed as something only for those children for whom there is a plan for them to live in foster care or to be adopted. A permanence decision and outcome now includes children returning to their parent's care, or living in kinship care.
- A desire to change permanence planning processes to reflect the need that children in living in kinship care require the same level of scrutiny of their permanence plans as for all other accommodated children.

Glossary of terms

Adoption

Adoption is the legal process by which a child or a group of siblings who cannot be brought up within their birth family become full, permanent and legal members of a new family.

Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

In Scotland, a designated person within a fostering service or adoption agency who, on the basis of recommendations made by a Fostering Panel or Adoption Panel, makes decisions about the acceptance of foster or adoptive parents.

Baseline data

Information that is collected and analysed to establish a picture and understanding of how a system or process is functioning. This can be used as a comparison to measure trends and, in the case of improvement programmes, to measure the impact of changes implemented.

Care leaver

In Scotland, a young person who was 'looked after' on or after their 16th birthday and who is aged under 26.

Champions' Group

A group of people responsible for leading the PACE improvement work in their agency, including overseeing tests of change, assisting with the collation and interpretation of data, reporting progress, planning and attending champions' meetings. Some areas have opted to use the term 'permanence lead' instead of 'champion'.

Children Looked After Statistics (CLAS)

This is an annual official release of data about looked after children in Scotland. Published by the Scottish Government it captures (anonymised) the gender, age, ethnicity, special educational needs of children, type of accommodation in which they are cared for, the amount of time they have been looked after, and how many newly needed care and how many no longer needed formal care.

Children's Hearings Panel Members

Panel Members are trained volunteers who take part in a Children's Hearing panel in Scotland to make decisions to help the children and young people who attend a Hearing.

Community of Practice

A forum where practitioners and other people with subject knowledge and leadership responsibilities for PACE and permanence planning are brought together to share common experiences and learning with the purpose of improving practice.

Compulsory Supervision Order

A compulsory supervision order is a legally-binding document determined by a Children's Hearing or sheriff, in Scotland, that requires a child to comply with specified conditions and requires the local authority to perform duties in relation to the child's needs.

Concurrency planning

Concurrency planning is an evidence based approach to achieving early permanence for young children where a risk to their safety and wellbeing may be identified pre-birth, at birth, or soon after. It offers a parallel planning approach in which there is a plan for hoped for rehabilitation with the child's birth family as well as a parallel plan whereby a child may remain with their current carers if rehabilitation is not found to be possible.

Corporate Parents

Corporate parenting refers to an organisation's performance of actions necessary to uphold the rights and secure the wellbeing of a looked after child or care leaver, and through which their physical, emotional, spiritual, social and educational development is promoted, from infancy through to adulthood. A corporate parent listens to the needs, fears and wishes of children and young people, and is proactive and determined in their collective efforts to meet these. Part 9 of the Children (Scotland) Act 2014 puts this concept and policy of 'corporate parenting' onto a statutory basis in Scotland and established a framework of duties and responsibilities for relevant public bodies, requiring them to be systematic and proactive in their efforts to meet the needs of looked after children and care leavers.

Form E

The Form E, which may be replaced with a Child Adoption and Permanence Report (CAPR) in some Scottish local authorities, is an assessment document designed to provide adoption and fostering agencies with a standard way of collecting and presenting information about a child in need of a family placement. It should bring together the child's history, current situation and, where possible, a child's wishes. It should contain enough information to link a child with a suitable family, as well as insuring adoption regulations are met.

Foster care

Foster care is where a child is temporarily cared for within a domestic family setting which is not their own family, by carers who have been trained, assessed and approved for providing such care.

Governance

The programme management arrangements, including roles and responsibilities, process for monitoring progress, reporting arrangements against funding and/or delivery plans and agreeing strategies to address any problems or blockages to progress.

Kinship care

Kinship care is where a child is cared for, informally or formally, by a relative or close friend who is known to them.

Looked after

The term which is used in legislation in Scotland to mandate care and protection of children.

Looked after child

In Scotland, a child or young person currently looked after in a formal arrangement with a local authority, typically, but not always, involving compulsory supervision arrangements following a children's hearing. Children can be 'looked after' while remaining in the family home, with social work support, or in a kinship, foster or residential care placement.

Looked After Child Reviews

A meeting to review the agreed plan and arrangements for caring for a child who is looked after. Overseen at a local authority level, this is usually chaired by an independent reviewing officer and attended by the child, their family, carers and the professional team around the child.

Looked after at home

In Scotland, a child or young person currently looked after in a formal arrangement with a local authority, typically, but not always, involving compulsory supervision arrangements following a children's hearing. Children can be 'looked after' while remaining in the family home, with social work support.

Looked after away from home

In Scotland, a child or young person currently looked after in a formal arrangement with a local authority, typically, but not always, involving compulsory supervision arrangements following a children's hearing. Children can be 'looked after' by a kinship carers, foster carers, prospective adopters, residential care homes, schools or secure units.

Model for Improvement

The three questions of: what we are trying to accomplish; how we will know that a change is an improvement; and what changes can we make that will result in improvement, together with the PDSA Cycle, make up the Model for Improvement which guides the PACE approach.

Permanence

Permanence in Scotland refers to a child's permanent, loving, safe, and nurturing home, which provides them with emotional, physical and legal stability, where possible within a family setting and which continues into adulthood. In PACE, permanence can be achieved through four routes:

- Returning or remaining at home where family functioning has improved.
- A permanence order for a child who is living in kinship care, foster care or residential care
- A child living under a kinship care order (or 'section 11 order') where they are living with kinship carers
- A child living with an adoptive family

Permanence Order/Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt

A Permanence Order is an order applied for by a local authority to give them rights and responsibilities to safeguard a child who is no longer able to live at home, as required by the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. It enables other carers (e.g. foster carers) to make day-to-day decisions that concern the child.

A Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt is a Permanence Order that may contain a provision which grants authority for the child to be adopted, and which removes the child's legal identity as a member of their birth family.

Permanence Panel

In Scotland, a Permanence Panel is a fostering and/or adoption panel appointed in line with the Looked After Children (Scotland) Regulations 2009 and the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007.

The Permanence Panel reviews the recommendations of Looked After Child (LAC) Reviews, receives assessments on prospective adopters and foster carers, and considers matches between children approved for permanent care away from home and identified carers. The Permanence Panel does not make final decisions, only recommendations, which are passed to a local authority decision maker.

Plan, Do, Study, Act (PDSA)

A cycle for capturing the results of the tests of change in an improvement project or process, which helps to decide whether to scale up, adopt or abandon tests.

Quality Improvement

The application of a systematic approach to achieve improvement that uses specific methods and techniques to design, test, measure and implement new ways of working.

Residential care / Residential child care

Residential child care is a form of short or long-term care that is provided for children within a non-family-based group setting, alongside other children. The care provided includes accommodation and support from qualified staff. Some residential child care also includes educational provision.

Run charts

Graphs which display time-series data to help communicate variation in a process.

Section 11 order

An order made by the Court of Session and Sheriff Court in Scotland which sets out the arrangements for maintaining personal relations and direct contact between a child and a person with whom the child is not living, as required by Section 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995.

Section 80 report

In Scotland, a report that is submitted to the Court with an application for a permanence order or a permanence order with authority to adopt. It provides the evidenced rationales and recommendations as to why a child requires a legal Permanence Order/Permanence Order with Authority to Adopt to fulfil their immediate, short term and long term welfare and best interest needs as required within Section 80 of the Adoption and Children (Scotland) Act 2007. This may also sometimes be known as a 'permanence report'.

Sibling

Two or more people who have one or both parents in common; a brother or sister.

Test of change

Testing a proposed change in a system to see if this leads to improvement. In PACE, tests are scaled up if they are successful, and tried out across different conditions (e.g. teams, localities, ages of children etc.) before any decisions are made on implementing the change.

Whole-system

In PACE, this term is applied where all of the agencies who have a role in progressing permanence outcomes for children, including local authority social work and legal teams, health, education, Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, Children's Hearings Scotland, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service, and this may also involve third sector and other organisations, depending on local models of service delivery.

About CELCIS

CELCIS is a leading improvement and innovation centre in Scotland. We improve children's lives by supporting people and organisations to drive long-lasting change in the services they need, and the practices used by people responsible for their care.

For more information

Visit: www.celcis.org **Email:** celcis@strath.ac.uk **Tel:** 0141 444 8500