



Meeting the Challenge: Technology steps in to keep relationships going during COVID-19

How Kibble, a specialist provider of services for young people facing adversity, is using technology to sustain relationships What was the challenge faced by Kibble?

During the COVID-19 public health emergency, government lockdown restrictions meant physical, face-to-face meetings could no longer take place at Kibble, the specialist provider of services for young people facing adversity or trauma, therefore impacting visits from young people's families, social workers, advocates, and other important meetings. Kibble therefore sought ways to ensure children and young people retained vital contact with their families, social workers, and advocates, as well as identifying ways to support remote meetings including: Looked After Children's reviews, Children's Hearings, Foster Panel Assessments, and staff operational meetings. Given the importance of face-to-face meetings, Kibble needed to try and retain this, by using virtual means, as far as could be possible. It was essential to identify ways to retain safety and structure for their young people while reducing transmission of the virus.

What change in practice took place?

Prior to the lockdown restrictions being imposed, family, social work visits, and other important meetings could take place in person, however, under the new guidance Kibble needed to find alternative solutions. By beginning to use video technology and providing each care house with a dedicated smart phone with access to Skype, WhatsApp, and FaceTime, new arrangements were quickly put into place. Calls were co-ordinated by staff using an agreed phone list to ensure safeguarding. Across Kibble, employees were given access to Microsoft Teams and Skype, allowing both internal and external meetings to take place virtually. For the fostering services, video technology was used for foster carer recruitment to conduct assessments, virtual home visits, and Skills-to-Care Training. Their HR team was also able to conduct staff recruitment to fill essential roles using video technology. Using video Looked After Children Reviews and Children's Hearings went ahead as planned.

Who was involved in making the change?

With this already such an important channel for their age group, the children and young people naturally adapted to the use of video calls in order to speak to their families. Families, social workers, and children's rights advocates were kept informed through posters outlining simple instructions on this new way to contact their child, with each really welcoming this approach. As video use was growing across organisations, partners and stakeholders embraced this method and regular meetings were held with others across the sector including the Scottish Government, Care Inspectorate, and The Children's Panel. The Kibble Board was able to retain regular contact with senior managers, keeping them updated on progress while visits were not possible. Collectively, everyone across the organisation embraced the technology and this started to become the 'new norm'.

What difference did this change make?

Embracing video technology has been a lifeline for Kibble for several reasons. Firstly, it enabled children to retain regular contact with their families when physical, face-to-face visits were not possible. This was incredibly important for the young people's wellbeing and helped reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Video technology supported Kibble to remain fully operational, enabling foster carer recruitment to proceed as well as assessments and training but by virtual means. Without this method, Kibble would not have been able to support important Looked After Children Reviews, Children's Hearings, foster carer assessments, and staff recruitment. The use of video technology also enabled support services to assist staff to work remotely, allowing daily progress meetings to take place. Following the lifting of lockdown restrictions, Kibble will continue to make use of video technology alongside physical, face-to-face meetings to enhance and streamline communications across the organisation.

More information: Steven Warner, Quality Improvement Manager, Kibble.
Telephone: 0141 889 0044, Email: Steven.warner@kibble.org

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