

LT Consulting Ltd

## Better Outcomes at Reduced Costs in Children's Services

Solihull MBC faced a major challenge in its own foster care service – in one year 70 children had to be found foster placements through the private sector. Whilst 80% of these could have been fostered directly through the Local Authority, there were insufficient numbers of carers available at the time. Furthermore, outsourcing was proving hugely expensive – the budget allocated for placing children through the private sector was estimated to be overspent by £1 million for 2006/07.

Evidently, the position was not sustainable. It became critical to achieve a higher proportion of children being placed into local authority fostering arrangements rather than through the private sector. To do this, Solihull needed to increase their number of foster carers, requiring improvements in the process and timescales for taking potential foster carers, from their initial enquiry to achieving approval.

“One of the key things that I have learned from this experience is to never underestimate the capacity of people to change”

**Mike Gregory,**  
**Fostering Team Manager**

This process had become a problem. With the welfare of children at stake, frontline staff took foster carer assessment very seriously but felt frustrated by administrative bottlenecks.

A new approach was needed and Solihull's Children's Services searched for help that would not only facilitate change but would partner with them to implement it. That help came in the form of LT Consulting.

### Realising the Untapped Contribution of Solihull's Staff

LT's extensive experience of successfully applying lean principles has shown that a fundamental requirement of change is to have the buy-in of those people responsible for implementing those changes.

When asked how she felt before meeting with LT, Pam Huggins, Assistant Team Manager, described feeling resistant and laughed as she remembered wondering how their process could work with “living people” rather than in Lean's traditional manufacturing context. Her colleague Derek Walker felt that people were initially defensive as they were putting themselves “under the spotlight and open to criticism.” He commented that while LT clearly knew about process management, “they didn't know about fostering.” But LT's openness and willingness to learn from the Foster Care Team won them the group's support and engagement. Pam was surprised how enthusiastic she felt as she was helped to see how things could practically be changed.

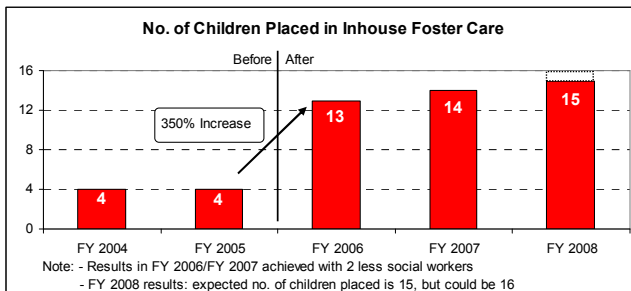
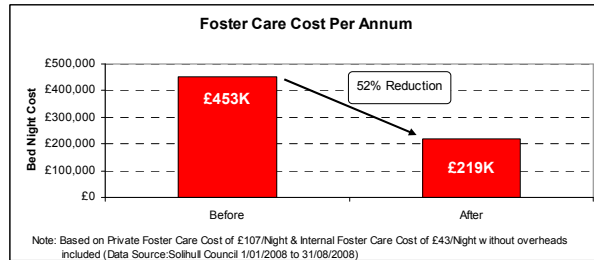


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## The Results of This Collaboration Have So Far Been Remarkable

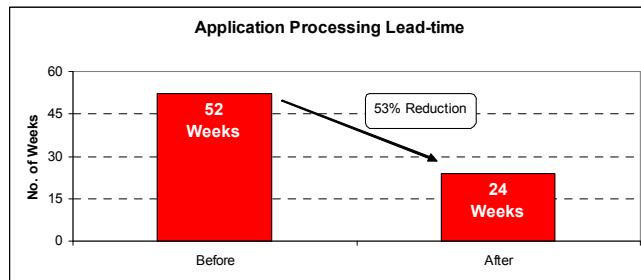
Minimum cashable savings of over **£1/2million per year** which has already resulted in millions of pounds saved and will continue over the number of years the children will be in care. This has given Solihull Council a return on investment of 13.5 times per year on the sum invested in LT Consulting's services and includes a 52% reduction in care placements through the private sector.



A recruitment target of 12 foster carers was set for the end of the first year (2006) and **13 were actually approved, compared to only 4 in 2005**. In 2007 another 14 carers were successful, all completing the process within 9 months and another 16 carers are expected by March 2009 - a step change, then continuous improvement.

The lead time for the foster carer recruitment process was greater than 52 weeks. Now it is 24 weeks consistently.

## More Time for Children and Foster Carers



The reduced lead time has enabled social workers to spend more time providing quality care over a depth and range of services not possible in the previous ways of working. The overall effect for the management team has been greater control due to the increased visibility of issues and the reduced risks within the process – resources became easier to manage and more activities were completed on-time.

In times of mounting challenges and shrinking budgets Solihull MBC is an example of what can be done when sensitive, able suppliers partner with innovative, committed staff. Ultimately though, this work was not about Lean management or staff working more productively; it was about children. Reflecting on what benefits this partnership has had on children, Anne Plummer, Corporate Director Education & Children's Services at Solihull concludes:

"Stuart Fisher and his team worked alongside our Fostering Team giving them the techniques and confidence to not only improve, but also sustain their valuable service to the community. Solihull is very proud that it can further enhance the safe and caring service to the children in our care".

