



# Cornerstone VR Programme Case Studies

April 2020



Part of the Antser Group

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## **1. INTRODUCTION TO THE CORNERSTONE VIRTUAL REALITY PROGRAMME**

- 1.1 Cornerstone VR™ was born out of innovation and partnership, driven by a need to improve the life chances of children in the care system.
- 1.2 It was developed to use immersive technology and film to tackle the issues of foster carer and adopter recruitment and training, by the founders, both adoptive parents.
- 1.3 The initial evaluation indicated that this was a game changer in social care. As Cornerstone VR™ became more widely tried and tested, the more adaptable the use of VR in many children's sector was evident.
- 1.4 The interactive immersion enables adults; carers; teachers; social workers; parents; professionals; YOU; to understand how trauma and abuse impacts children's development and behaviour.

## **2. CASE STUDIES**

- 2.1 Cornerstone designed and developed a Virtual Reality Programme to help improve the life chances of children in care and children who have experienced attachment-related trauma.
- 2.2 This document contains some case examples of the different ways the Cornerstone VR experiences are used across our partners.

## **ADOPTION**

### **Case study 1: Adopter preparation and assessment**

An experienced social worker in a London LA has started using CVR in 1:1 session, with prospective adopters with promising results.

The social worker found that the VR experience assisted discussions on trauma and age preferences. For example, a couple attending assessment sessions did not know what age group would suit their family. The social worker used VR to provide an insight into how trauma can affect children of different ages. The session led the couple to decide that early permanence is not necessarily the best option for them and that they are interested in being matched with an older child.

Prospective adopters were reported to have found the VR useful and impactful as it provided a timeline of how trauma affects children at different ages. The In-Utero experience was particularly powerful as adopters often do not realise the impact of pre-birth trauma.

Overall, the social worker felt that the “VR was a welcome additional tool that helped with communication and engagement with prospective adopters”.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Case study 1: Developing trauma informed schools**

‘As part of their continued drive to support the schools in their borough to become Trauma Informed Schools, a Family Support Team have used a Whole School approach to deliver the VR experience including receptionists, lunchtime supervisors through to teaching staff. They will be replicating this model across their borough to ensure that all school staff are Trauma Informed which will support children in receiving consistent care and support. The team will also be introducing the VR experience to senior leaders for the nurseries in their area to raise awareness of Trauma Informed practice to support the local authorities’ prevention strategy’.

### **Case study 2: Embedding in training – safe to learn**

The educational psychology service in Southend on Sea Council has been incorporating the VR experience into their Safe to Learn training, which is an eight-week course delivered to staff in schools. The VR has replaced a film in the original course, which depicted a graphic case of domestic violence. Compared to the film clip, the trainers felt that VR stayed with the participants longer.

Training participants often referred back to the VR experience in discussions weeks after viewing it.

The trainers felt that VR helped to 'personalise' the theory discussed, particularly on transactional analysis, and provided a case study to discuss with participants. However, the team noted the importance of using the technology with care to contain the impact and manage any unexpected triggers. Signposting resources and debriefing have been integral to the successful use of the VR.

Southend's teams were very enthusiastic about the VR and were proactively seeking ways to expand its use. Many reported a sense of professional satisfaction about pioneering new approaches and watching the development of the pilot in real time.

## **FOSTERING**

### **Case study 1: Fostering placement stability - Birth parents, foster children and adult birth son**

One of the Independent Fostering Agency's that use the Cornerstone VR in a variety of settings ranging from making reception staff aware of children's trauma to trustees has reported a very interesting use case. A very experienced foster care couple who had been fostering very competently for more than twenty years had two teenage foster children in the home. They had been using the PACE technique and other restorative techniques to manage the children's behaviour to good success.

The home environment then changed quite dramatically when an adult birth son who was a Police officer moved back to the home. This caused a rapid and significant change in behaviour of the foster children and the difference in approach between the foster carers and the adult son created significant conflict between the birth parents and birth son and the birth son and the foster children. The lack of awareness of trauma the foster children had experienced from the birth son was a big issue. The supporting social worker recognised this after consulting with the foster carers and observing interactions during a home visit.

The social worker then decided to offer the family a group intervention, where the foster parents and the adult birth son all viewed the VR experiences. The reaction from the birth son was very immediate and he realised very quickly that his authoritarian language, stance and raised voices with the teenage children was a trigger for the traumatic events they had experienced.

After viewing the PACE interactions in the home and the school and speaking with the social worker and his parents about employing these techniques, the situation in the home has improved dramatically. This is another example of how a social worker using their experience in providing guidance and interventions to

family has employed the VR as a tool to great effect and a new usage that was not identified in the training programme.'

### **Case study 2: Prospective foster carers 1:1 session**

'A social worker from an Independent Foster Agency had completed several sessions with a couple going through the assessment phase as prospective foster carers prior to using the VR Programme. The focus of the session using the VR was to ascertain their understanding of why children come into the care system. To explore the impact of abuse and traumatic life experiences on children and their role as foster carer in supporting and caring for such children & young people.

Neither has had any real experience of fostering in their lives and whilst they had some knowledge, it was quite general. The social worker started the session with a discussion about their general knowledge of fostering then was able to build upon this knowledge and used the VR to bring that information to life for them.

They were able to explore specific risk factors for children such as drug & alcohol use and neglect and the VR experience made that visually real for them. They were overwhelmed by the sensation of how it felt to be a baby living in such circumstances. One of them stated, "I felt like I was the baby", "I thought he was going to hit me". They could also appreciate that this was just 3-minute window into what life could be like and for some children, which can be repeated daily and for many years.

One of them showed understanding of the impact that was taking place on the child's brain and the depiction of the neuro pathways and the negative information that was being processed. They both felt very emotional following the session and certainly gained a greater insight into what life might be like for some children and their experience of coming into the care system.

The social worker undertaking an assessment, identified that the use of VR is a "fantastic tool to bring to life our discussions. Once they had watched the clips, I was able to use their experience to further aid our discussions. As potential foster carers I feel they gained significant insight from this experience, which will certainly aid further learning and development. It will hopefully better prepare them for wonderful journey of fostering".

### **Case study 3: Developing empathy and understanding PACE techniques with foster carers**

The social worker used the VR with SM's foster carers to enable them to have a greater understanding of SM's needs and how developmental trauma impacts upon a child and their attachment/relationships. The social also wanted to help the foster carers to understand the concept of PACE and to visualise this for them which could aid ongoing discussions. The social worker also saw using the VR as an opportunity to also support the therapeutic work that was being undertaken with them as a family around SM's specific needs.

The foster carers were very engaging throughout the session. They both felt angry towards the parents which was discussed, and they were able to move forward from. The foster carers appeared to gain a good level of insight from the experience and in particular found the clips in the placement with PACE useful.

The social worker followed up the session the next day and both carers reported that they had spent a lot of time discussing the session and have realised that they needed to work on their approach. It had certainly brought about a change in their thinking, which will aid the work being done with the therapy.

The social worker identified that "Overall, I would say that that the session achieved the stated aims and objectives and was a positive experience for the carers. It will be interesting to see how this, impacts upon their interactions with the young person in placement. They certainly developed a greater level of insight into her needs because of the experience".

## **LEARNNG AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **Case study 1: ASYE training**

One Regional Adoption Agency are using the VR experience as part of the mandatory training for their ASYE social work practitioners. They have named the session 'Feeling the Lived Experience of a child'. The VR experience used in this way has been positive as it provides the ASYE social workers with further support in their learning such as enhancing their observation and recording skills. Feedback has been that the VR experience also builds empathy which is important in the social work role.

## **PERFORMANCE**

### **Case study 1: Team building and performance**

In one Local Authority, they specifically used the VR as part of an intervention to improve a social work teams' performance. Key Performance Indicators highlighted that a social work team was the lowest performing compared to its counter parts. The Learning and Development team completed a 7-week intervention to improve the practice of the team and to address the indicators raised by the Team Manager.

The VR experiences was used in Reflective Practice sessions and added to training sessions to upskill social workers. The outcome of the intervention identified that the team are now the highest performing across Children's Services. The evidential change has been captured via completed audits which showed social workers are making connections in reports based on facts rather than opinion and there is clear planning. Audits previously identified that reports used to be descriptive and had no future planning.



The use of VR also re-ignited some social workers and their passion for social work. The Team Manager has derived a safe word for the social workers when they are not coping with the level of work which was a result of the VR experience which has been described as being 'helpful' and more importantly it supports practitioner's overall well-being. The intervention also helped to cement the team identity.