



Cornerstone VR in Adoption

August 2020

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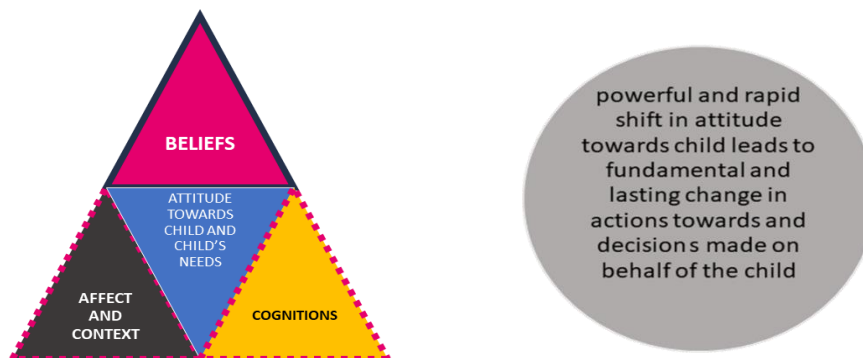
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2. Introduction to the Cornerstone Virtual Reality Programme

- 2.1 Cornerstone VR™ was born out of innovation and partnership, driven by a need to improve the life chances of children in the care system.
- 2.2 It was developed to use immersive technology, and film, to tackle the issues of adopter recruitment and training by the founders, both adoptive parents.
- 2.3 Initial evaluations indicated that this was revolutionary in social care and, as Cornerstone VR™ is more widely tried and tested, the more adaptable its use in the wider children's care sector becomes evident.
- 2.4 The interactive immersion enables parents; carers; teachers; social workers; judges; barristers; health professionals, and wider professionals to understand how trauma and abuse impacts upon children's development and behaviour.
- 2.5 As individuals, in our interactions with others we rely on the inter-relation of affect (feelings), behaviours (interactions) and cognitions (thought). Diagram 1 illustrates simply that if we are seeking to change behaviour, we must simultaneously change the individual's mood (attitude); the individual's cognitions (thinking); and create the right conditions (context - reduce stress and strains). If you provide a person with an experience that allows them to think differently and change their attitude - whilst reducing stress and strains - you can affect their underlying beliefs to secure long-lasting change.

Diagram 1



- 2.6 The evaluation (qualitative and quantitative) collected from users of the VR Programme shows that through using immersive VR, we can change an individual's thinking and interpretations of a child's behaviour. For instance, many professionals know that some children have had difficult early years experiences, but on occasions they do not connect the behaviour with past experience. Evaluations have shown that putting adults into the shoes of children - in VR experiences - impacts upon their affect, allowing them to 'feel' the impact, in new and profound ways. This experience provides new understanding and knowledge (cognition), as to how behaviour may develop as a result of a child's past experiences, consequently, impacting how professionals may feel about a particular child (and their behaviour), enabling them to respond differently.
- 2.7 A recent study shows that people understand, connect and remember things more when they are emotionally connected to the content. *"V-learners felt 3.75 times more emotionally connected to the content than classroom learners and 2.3 times*

*more connected than e-learners*¹. This supports our evaluation, which demonstrates that the Cornerstone VR™ Programme can accelerate an individual's learning which, in turn, leads to a greater chance of behaviour change.

3. Use of Cornerstone VR Programme in adoption

- 3.1 The Cornerstone VR™ Programme has a number of different uses within the adoption sector. It is being used as part of the training for existing adopters and Family and Friend carers to help them understand how trauma, experienced by a child, leaves a lasting legacy and impacts upon a child's behaviour; for the recruitment and assessment of new adopters; and for family finding.
- 3.2 Cornerstone VR™ helps to re-ignite adopters' emotional connection to their child. Caring for children with challenging behaviour daily can become draining and exhausting. At times, adoptive parents can lose sight of how and why their children are showing these difficult behaviours. The Cornerstone VR™ helps to create empathy, providing a shift in belief regarding the child's behaviour, which may prevent placement breakdown.
- 3.3 The use of immersive VR during recruitment and assessment stages accelerates the prospective adopter's learning and leaves a lasting learning experience. The use of the VR experience can also identify areas where further learning is required and create a 'safe' way to test out carers' responses to situations, leading to greater preparation and understanding.
- 3.4 Cornerstone VR™ is used as part of the family finding and matching process to support the decision making process and ensure adopters understand the experience of the child so they can be fully prepared.
- 3.5 Cornerstone VR™ provides a more realistic insight for prospective adopters, thus increasing their level of understanding of the lived experiences of children who enter the care system. This will help in attracting the right kind of adopters with the resilience needed to care for the most vulnerable of children.

4. How we evaluate the efficacy of Cornerstone VR™

- 4.1 Cornerstone uses meta-analysis, pooling data from our partners. The report will be updated as we gather new evidence but as at August 2020, this report captures data from November 2018 onwards.
- 4.2 Evaluations are integral to providing an objective evidence base for any product/service which seeks to make a difference. Cornerstone implements an evaluation strategy which uses feedback postcards to capture the use of the VR Programme and its efficacy in four key areas:
 - a. **Understanding** – do adults understand how their behaviours and responses affect children?
 - b. **Empathy** – do adults get an insight into a child's perspective?
 - c. **Behaviour** – will adults think differently about their behaviours towards children?
 - d. **Attitude** – will adults consider alternative ways to behave towards children?

¹ <https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/technology/emerging-technology/vr-study-2020.html>

- 4.3 Data is collected using the five-point Likert scale to measure the perception of changes in the four areas from the new user's perspective. The evaluation uses quantitative and qualitative feedback to measure the changes - in the short and long-term - in the above areas.
- 4.4 Independent evaluation has also been carried out: Alma Economics carried out a *Preliminary Evaluation of the Cornerstone VR Pilot Programme*; and Goldsmiths, University of London, are currently evaluating the use in domestic abuse programmes (April 2020).

5. Summary of quantitative and qualitative findings

- 5.1 Cornerstone have worked in partnership with the adoption sector in various ways since 2018, including certifying social workers in the use of VR with prospective adopters and existing adopters; establishing a mentoring programme for adopters, and running trauma-aware sessions.
- 5.2 Cornerstone VR™ has also been used as part of a flagship innovation programme to assist in the transformation process where several local authority adoption teams have become *Regional Adoption Agencies* (RAAs).
- 5.3 See below for a few examples of participants' responses captured from several courses² run across the adoption sector from October 2018, capturing the Cornerstone VR's tendency to produce changes - short and long-term - in understanding; empathy; behaviour and attitude³.
- 5.4 100% of participants agreed to having a deeper understanding of the child's perspective.

"I found the immersive aspects of the VR case studies are a powerful tool, so much more so than the traditional methods we currently use."

- 5.5 94% of participants believe that the VR would help them to attract the right adopters/carers.

*"It will help adopters understand the long-term impact of trauma on children."
"It will help us assess applicants' capacity for empathy."*

- 5.6 97% of practitioners agreed they would consider alternative ways to approach situations in their work.

*"It will make more real the experience of children and engage the feeling of adopters."
"It gives a realistic picture of children's experiences."*

² Summary data is collated from 17 courses ranging from 10 – 36 participants in a group.

³ Individual session findings can be found in the Evaluation: Using Cornerstone VR in Adoption - Event Log.

6. Case studies

5.1 This section contains some Case Studies evidencing the use of Cornerstone VR in different ways across the Adoption sector⁴.

Case study 1: Adopter preparation and assessment

An experienced social worker in a London local authority has started using Cornerstone's Virtual Reality Programme in 1:1 settings, with prospective adopters, with promising results.

The social worker found that the VR experiences 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 were 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 the "VR was a welcome additional tool that helped with communication and engagement with prospective adopters".



⁴ Cornerstone have developed a Case Studies document which evidences the use of Cornerstone VR in a wide range of sectors.