



London Borough of Merton Provides Better Training and Increased Support for its Social Care Staff with Tailored, Efficient, Online Training Solution

The Challenges

Social care for children and young adults in the UK sees a relatively rapid turnover of staff, making training for new employees a costly ongoing necessity. It is estimated that the social care sector loses £78 million per year due to this high employee turnover. Furthermore, nationwide social care staff shortages mean busier social care workers with less time for training, even though post-qualification training is an essential part of their working lives as procedures and protocols are always being changed and updated. Recognising that its existing classroom-based training was reaching capacity, the London Borough of Merton saw e-learning as an opportunity to provide a more accessible, extensive and effective additional training programme. When a full-time trainer left the team 18 months ago, Merton decided to allocate part of its ICS (Integrated Children's System) training grant to e-learning.

A major challenge facing Merton was how to overcome poor take-up of training that, although important, was not compulsory. E-learning presented a possible solution, providing the opportunity for busy staff to undertake training at their own convenience and pace, from any location that has an internet connection.

Choosing the Right Training

Merton purchased its e-learning solution from Me Learning, the sole supplier to offer e-learning specifically for CareFirst, Merton's social care case management system. Me Learning has an exclusive partnership deal with OLM (the UK's largest independent supplier of information solutions for Children's and Adult Services), to supply online training materials for their products. Previously, as a Freelance Training Consultant for OLM, Peter Murr, Creative Director for Me Learning, had provided Merton's CareFirst training, so they seemed the ideal choice moving forward.

Merton invested in Me Learning's Me CareFirst and Me ICS courses which came with an integral learning portal to track the training provided. Me CareFirst, designed for both Adult and Children's services, is a comprehensive suite of e-learning modules developed in partnership with OLM. The Me CareFirst training takes around eight and a half hours to complete and is the equivalent of five days of classroom training. The modules have been designed to help local authorities roll out CareFirst to its staff and to provide a perpetual support and training platform.

Me ICS is a separate suite of online tutorials providing process guidance on the ICS. The Me ICS e-learning suite allows the local authority to incorporate a blended-learning approach to ICS training and provides a comprehensive online resource which is up to date with the latest processes and protocols. This e-learning suite is made up of modules which cover: Child In Need, Child Protection, Looked After Child and Private Fostering. The Me ICS training takes around four and a half hours to complete and is the equivalent of three days of classroom training.

The Benefits

Me Learning worked closely with Merton to provide e-learning modules tailored to Merton's specific requirements and to complement its existing classroom training. This new style of blended learning, with online training for CareFirst and ICS alongside classroom training, has proved successful, resulting in benefits for managers, trainers and participants.

The Me CareFirst training allows new starters and agency workers to get up to speed and start using the system immediately, without having to wait for the next classroom course. As all new staff now have to complete the training before receiving their CareFirst log-in details, uptake of the training is ensured. Data input quality into CareFirst has also improved as all staff are trained in a consistent manner, which ensures all staff are using the system correctly.



Furthermore, Merton has saved time by reducing the number of classroom training days. Merton has found that the provision of online help and training has reduced demand on trainers and the support desk. This means that trainers can be released to focus on those staff who require additional support, as well as ensuring that the CareFirst training keeps in line with changes in government legislation.

Staff are required to complete Me Learning training prior to attending classroom training. This reduces instructor time in the classroom and staff time away from the workplace. It also means that trainers can assume a basic knowledge and understanding from all participants and can build on this, focussing on more bespoke topics in the classroom. Additionally, users of the online training can in their own time delve deeper into specific subjects and read up on system updates that may not justify a full classroom course.

Me Learning's online courses are easy for managers to monitor. They can quickly access key information, such as who has taken a course, when they took a course, how long a course took and whether they passed or failed.

Chloe Mc Sweeney, Information Strategy Manager for Merton Council said: "All new starters are now required to take the online courses before they are given their CareFirst login details. Instead of having to wait for the next classroom course, a new starter can hit the ground running."

One of the key benefits of Me Learning's online training solution is that extra modules can be added as time goes on. Merton has chosen to provide small overview modules that are compulsory and then offer larger, more in-depth versions of the modules that are optional for those workers that consider the subject a priority. This gives users the opportunity to expand their knowledge and delve deeper into core areas of particular interest.

Initial Results

The London Borough of Merton originally purchased the Me Learning courses in early 2008. In January 2009 it became obligatory for staff to complete the Me CareFirst module before receiving their log-in to the system. This led to a significant increase in the number of online training hours carried out by Merton's social care staff – in fact, the total was 120 hours during June 2009.

Chloe said: "Investing in online training has been a learning curve for me and I am delighted to be seeing such positive results this year. Me Learning's courses are easy to use, engaging and a great way for our staff to refresh their knowledge at their own pace on an ongoing basis. A huge benefit to our staff is that they can access the training at any time and from anywhere there is an internet connection."

As the online training courses can be tweaked, Merton has embedded links that run the courses from within Care First as Help items, and this is proving popular with the users as they can get help as and when they need it.

She continued: "Whenever we are thinking about adding to our IT suite for Children's Social Care, we build in an element for training covered by a Me Learning module. The Me Learning team has been very helpful at every stage to ensure that our solution is as efficient and flexible as it can be for our workers and is always on hand to help, should we have any issues. So far, our workers have taken over 1800 modules and this number is increasing every day and will continue to do so as we gain new members to our team."

Feedback from Merton's internal training team has been extremely positive regarding the addition of online training to the existing classroom-based sessions, with one Care First trainer, Clive Yelf, stating: "Me Learning has helped improve the basic knowledge of CareFirst and I've noticed that when people turn up for classroom training they are much more familiar with the nuts and bolts of CareFirst. All in all it is a valuable part of our holistic training solution for children's services!"



Moving forward, Merton will continue to encourage its new and existing social care staff to get in the habit of using the online training modules and to increasingly use the online modules as a source of knowledge and guidance.

About Merton Council

Merton has a population of approximately 191,000; 25% are from ethnic minority communities and over 40 languages are spoken. There is a sharp social and economic contrast between wards in Wimbledon, which are in the top 5% most affluent nationally, and wards in the Mitcham area which are amongst the 15% poorest. Merton has an annual budget of around £233 million and employs over 5,000 staff including teaching and other school staff. The council is the largest employer in Merton and many staff live in the borough.

For further information, please visit www.merton.gov.uk or call 020 8274 4901.

About Me Learning

Me Learning provides Local Authorities with online training tools to ensure all professionals involved in social care are fully informed, working together and following the latest national guidelines, protocols and legislation. Me Learning's government-compliant and engaging computer-based courses cut through the ever-changing red tape, providing an all encompassing future-proof resource to help social care professionals to carry out their roles effectively and cooperatively.

The ultimate goal is to provide more effective social care services and improve the quality of life for both children and adults with additional needs. In 2003 Lord Laming investigated the circumstances leading to the death of Victoria Climbié and his report recommended actions to prevent such a tragedy happening again. However, in April 2008 Lord Laming commented: "I have yet to be convinced there is uniformly good practice across the country." Furthermore, government regulator the General Social Care Council (GSCC) has suggested social workers need further training post-qualification to deal with an increasing number of "complex and risky" cases such as Baby P, for which they needed greater expertise.

Me Learning provides both off-the-shelf and tailored courses covering key elements of the Government's 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme run by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). It is the only provider of online training courses for two of the leading ICS (Integrated Children's System) software suppliers: OLM and Liquidlogic. 20% of the UK's Local Authorities that have a social care responsibility are already using Me Learning's cost-efficient courses, ranging from Essex County Council's purchase of the MePROTOCOL ICS suite for its own ICS roll-out to over 1,200 staff, to Manchester City Council's purchase of Me Learning's Information Sharing and ContactPoint courses to train 3000 people on the 'Every Child Matters: Change for Children' programme.

More information can be found at www.melearning.co.uk or by calling us on 01273 455 194.