

## TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN: CASE STUDY

### USING COACHING AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

In August 2021, The OCM partnered with Sunderland-based not-for profit organisation, Together for Children (TfC), to deliver an ambitious organisation-wide coaching programme focused on sustaining a cultural transformation through improved leadership capability.

TfC provides a range of services to improve the lives of children, young people, and families on behalf of Sunderland City Council. TfC's vision is to keep children safe from harm and ensure they are allowed to fulfil their potential.

In 2017, Sunderland Council Children's Services received an 'inadequate' Ofsted rating and Together for Children was established in response.

The OCM is a UK-based, global coaching and mentoring organisation, that provides coaching services and consultancy, as well as accredited qualifications and training.



### WHAT WERE THE KEY CHALLENGES FOR TOGETHER FOR CHILDREN?

The challenge was to sustain a transformation Jill Colbert OBE, Chief Executive, and Director of Children's Services, and her team had started, and catalyse a continued shift in their culture to one where coaching was at the heart. Designing a holistic coaching programme which embedded coaching skills broadly across the organisation would act as an enabler for their new performance management strategy and support the cultural shift that they were looking for.



Annual employee surveys and ongoing exit interviews revealed that TfC's management and leadership behaviours, particularly when it came to conversations and performance management, were a major issue. There were also many grievances raised by employees, each taking an average of 120 management hours to resolve.



An organisation-wide cultural shift was needed, including the improvement of relationships between individuals and departments, as there were many fractured relationships and tensions between functions.



TfC wanted to put coaching at the core of their cultural transformation. They wanted to improve performance and lift colleague engagement by enabling leaders to have the skills and confidence to engage in supportive and challenging conversations.



It was the aim of TfC's CEO, Jill Colbert to use the development of coaching skills to sustain much-needed behaviour change and to improve the organisation for the sake of employees, and the children and their families of Sunderland. It was the cornerstone of an entirely new approach for TfC, but also one that could be adopted more broadly across children's services in the UK

## HOW DID THE PARTNERSHIP START?

Ed Parsloe, CEO of The OCM, had been looking for a not-for-profit organisation to partner with and in conversation with TfC's Learning and Development Manager, it became clear that TfC would be an ideal organisation for The OCM to support.



The OCM's ambition for coaching is huge and we passionately believe in its power to transform the lives of individuals, teams, and organisations. We had been searching for a client with social impact at its core to demonstrate this transformative potential through a pro-bono and not-for-profit project where they could unleash the full range of coaching services.

This is why, when we learned about the work of Together for Children and the journey they had been on, we knew we'd found the perfect partner.

- Ed Parsloe, Chief Executive, The OCM





## HOW DID WE DELIVER THE CULTURAL SHIFT?

The OCM's approach started with coaching the Senior Leadership Team (both individually and collectively) to help create clarity on what a coaching culture would look like at TFC and how they could collectively deliver the desired transformation.

Something many of the Senior Leadership Team found beneficial was the one-to-one coaching which, combined with the team coaching, ensured a shared clarity of the overall destination for the organisation, and improved the Senior Leadership Team's understanding and commitment to their roles in leading the changes needed.

As the organisation moved forward on a journey of improvement, personal coaching provided an opportunity much of the team needed to refresh and challenge some of their thinking.

The next phase in delivering the cultural shift focused on developing the coaching skills of all leaders and managers within TfC including Jill as the CEO. This gave leaders throughout the organisation an increased awareness of coaching's potential to solve strategic issues. Enabling them to use a coaching approach to improve individual and team performance and have quality performance management conversations. Altogether we trained over 120 people using our innovative, digital ELECTRIC online programme.



We wanted the philosophy and culture to be underpinned by those crucial coaching conversations we had had. This included principles around speaking to each other differently and understanding each other and what improvements we could still be making and working on.

- Jill Colbert OBE, Chief Executive, and Director of Children's Services



We work in a highly regulated environment where we were constantly being externally moderated, assessed and measured, we didn't have the time not to be doing our day job. What the team coaching allowed was for us to take a breath and step back from things and to collectively review where we were at, and challenge some of the behaviours we had just learnt to accept.

- Senior Leader, TfC



## OUR PLAN FOR MEASURING SUCCESS

Throughout the partnership the focus was on how to achieve the greatest impact for TfC, so identifying and measuring relevant success criteria was crucial.

The teams agreed to focus on some key metrics where increasing leadership capability and improving the quality of conversations through coaching, would significantly contribute to shifts in the staff survey scores.

If the project could evidence increases in staff engagement; in morale; improve retention rates; increase well-being; and reduce grievances over the long term, they'd know they had achieved their goals.



Coaching hasn't been a quick fix, it has taken a lot of time, effort, and investment from everybody across the company. But the feeling of being invested in, being challenged, and pushed to think differently about how we can achieve success has changed our way of thinking.

- Senior Leader, TfC



## WHAT DID WE ACHIEVE?

In 2020 there were five live disciplinary investigations and three live grievances. Today there is currently only one live grievance. Through the ELECTRIC coaching programme, The OCM are delighted that TfC has achieved its aspirations to be able to attract and retain talent and most importantly, be rated by Ofsted as Outstanding and to maintain that rating.

TfC can now ensure that children's services across Sunderland are supported by a management population who both qualified coaches and significantly improved leaders.

Completion surveys from everyone who had undertaken the training included some extremely positive feedback from leaders with comments such as.

"As a manager, I feel I have a more supportive and beneficial approach to conversations with colleagues", "I feel better equipped to help colleagues to help themselves to find the solution and be more autonomous", and "I listen better, don't leap in with my own solutions and ask more open questions. I feel like a better manager."

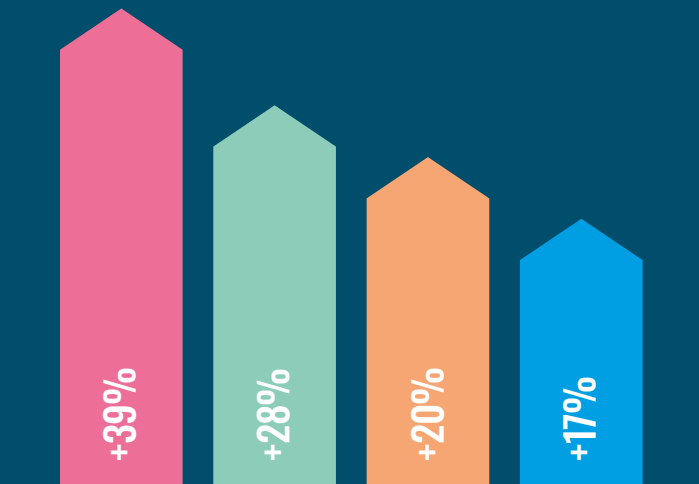
As leaders began to take a coaching approach as their preferred way of engaging with teams, they started to notice that their team members were also adopting that approach with the families they were working with, creating a real sense of empowerment.

Improved leadership communication  
up 39% from June 2019 to June 2023

Morale has increased by 28%

Career development and career  
progression opportunities up 20%

17% rise in employees stating they see  
themselves remaining in their role in the  
next year.



To get everyone through this programme was a real achievement and showed that there was a willingness and a commitment to improve.

- Jill Colbert, CEO, TfC



## IN SUMMARY

In summary, The OCM delivered a bold organisational-wide coaching programme which involved one-to-one coaching, team coaching for the Senior Leadership Team, as well as the development of coaching skills in over 120 leaders. As a result, all TfC leaders are now externally trained coaches, which is believed to be unprecedented in UK children's services.

Other councils and children's services are now learning how TfC made the leap from a rating of 'inadequate' for five years, to 'outstanding' using coaching and mentoring as a catalyst for change. The OCM also helped TfC to clarify their strategic priorities and reconnect with their purpose.

TfC now has an internal coaching pool that has helped to foster a "listening" culture, improve team dynamics as well as be able to take the temperature with the workforce and act accordingly.

TfC wanted the philosophy and culture to be underpinned by those crucial coaching conversations they had had. This focused on principles around speaking to each other differently and understanding each other, and what improvements they could still be making and working on. As a result, it is felt that conversations became of real value.

Working with The OCM has allowed for a rapid development of new practices at TfC which within a year, introduced a whole new performance process while TfC were being externally moderated and inspected by Ofsted.

The coaching training programme also taught managers how to use their leadership and listening skills to empower their teams to find the answers to problems themselves.



We are consistently using the language of coaching as part of our everyday practice

- Jill Colbert, CEO, TfC