

# Local authorities use online forum to improve support for vulnerable children

IT Management: Security
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Local authorities use online forum to improve support for vulnerable children
<p>Website set up by charity links council staff and children they look after</p> <p>A website that provides a secure space for children in care to communicate with each other and with council staff, and to store their personal information, is being used by 36 local authorities.</p> <p>Carezone, launched in February 2004, aims to improve the lives of children looked after by local authorities by giving them the opportunity to communicate with those in a similar situation, as well as with doctors and other care professionals, in a secure online environment. A "vault" on the site also allows the young people to contribute to key documents such as their personal education and care plans.</p> <p>Councils can run online forums or clinics on a topic of their choice such as education or health within Carezone's secure chatrooms. And the site's questionnaire facility makes it easy for councils to gain feedback from the young people they look after.</p> <p>Carezone, which is being used by local authorities including Surrey County Council, Gloucestershire County Council and the London Borough of Hounslow, was set up by the Who Cares Trust, a charity that delivers services to children in care. Design agency Lightmaker developed the site, and supplier Cyber Ark provided the Network Digital Vault which lets the children securely store information such as birth certificates and education records. The Network Vault software resides on a dedicated computer, which uses a firewall to police access to the information stored on the system.</p> <p>The vault also allows the various professionals involved in a young person's care to collaborate on key documents regardless of where they are based.</p> <p>Local authorities that are using the safe storage facility to complete the paperwork that is legally required say it has saved time and money - documents can be sent out centrally and completed quickly and securely.</p> <p>Care Zone service manager Sally-Ann Griffiths said, "Carezone offers local authorities a cost-effective way of securely delivering information and online services to looked-after children, in order to improve their educational outcomes and general well being.</p> <p>"It helps to keep them in touch with young people by overcoming barriers of distance, as well as to deliver the e-government agenda - all within a fun, interactive environment."</p> <p>The site is constantly being developed and updated. In February last year Carezone launched the Tutor Message Board, which offers specialised support for homework queries. And recently an "agony aunt" board and an Ask The Doctor board have been added.</p>

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