

## Staying Safe on School Trips.

*Lindsay Newton, Head of Development, at Dudley Children's Services explains how schools in Dudley are using the power of the Internet to plan and record their school trips.*

### 1 Once in a lifetime

- 1.1 Keeping safe is one of these essential life skills that we all have to learn. Where better to teach these skills to our children than on a school trip, whether on a well run residential adventure week or a walk to the local nature park. Many of the children in my part of the world rarely venture far from home and school trips in this country and abroad provide a once in a lifetime experience that can have an enormous impact upon their lives and future wellbeing.

#### Support and training

- 1.2 Over the last few years parents, teachers and governors have become increasingly concerned about the role and responsibilities of the teachers and staff that organise these essential activities. Recent well-publicised events have increased anxiety considerably. Here in Dudley, we have managed these concerns strategically through leading, coordinating and commissioning a new service to provide governors, teachers and group leaders with the information and support they need to plan, record and manage their school trips safety.

#### Knowing where you are

- 1.3 Effective and rigorous self-assessment and '*knowing where you are*' is now an essential tool in the management of schools and Children's Services. If you don't know where you are – how can you manage it - has become the touchstone that all public services now need to address if we are to personalise our services so they meet the needs of all our children, especially those who are looked after by the local authority or those who are at risk and more vulnerable.

#### When events take over

- 1.4 On the day the bombs went off in London, local authorities across the Country were anxiously waiting to see if they had any children and teachers involved on a school trip in the capital. I received a text from my son, who works in Shaftsbury Avenue, to say - *Don't worry I am OK* - even though at that time I didn't understand its significance. Within minutes, the news came through - several explosions had taken place in London and there were casualties. Within two minutes of receiving the news we were able to tell our Director of Children's Services that no Dudley children or teachers were in London that day.

## **A system designed to save time**

- 1.5 The new online service that had been designed to help our teachers plan and record their offsite activities and school trips, was able to tell us instantly that no trips or school visits were taking place in London that morning. If the bombs had gone off the next week, we would have had three school parties in the city, one party staying in a Hotel in Tavistock Square.

## **Emergency Planning**

- 1.6 Our online system records all the important details of all offsite visits so governors, school managers and local authority staff can access the information immediately. This helps with our emergency planning and also provides a comprehensive database of all educational activities outside the classroom.

## **No reported accidents**

- 1.7 Thankfully, over the last three years we have no reported accidents or claims against our local authority insurance on an offsite visit. Over 6,000 school trips have been recorded over the last two years including trips abroad, adventurous residential outdoor activities and a whole host of day trips, work experience, sporting, cultural and environmental activities.
- 1.8 Although nationally, the NASUWT advises its members to carefully consider whether they should be involved in educational visits, all teacher associations locally, support fully the system of offsite planning and risk assessments developed in Dudley.

## **Online training for Group Leaders**

- 1.9 In addition to providing an online training programme for Group Leaders, the system also allows our Head teachers and Educational Visit Coordinators to check and approve all visits and risk assessments online. For those activities involving adventures activities, residential visits and trips abroad, the planning is checked and approved online by the local authority.

## **Risk Assessments**

- 1.10 The risk assessment and approval process is done quickly and efficiently, thus reducing workload for busy teachers and Group Leaders and the need for unnecessary paper work. Everything is saved automatically, stored electronically for future reference and printed as required. Group Leaders have protected Internet access from anywhere on the planet and the system works on any computer or handheld device.

## Development Office

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### Private sector partnership and provider

- 1.11 The online system was commissioned from a private provider and can be adapted for an individual school, federation of schools or a whole local authority involving hundreds of schools. Since the service started in April 2004, the system has processed over 6,000 risk assessments with 90% being approved at school or centre level.

### Children's Services

- 1.12 The system is now being introduced across the new Children's Services Directorate in Dudley to include Children's Centres, Children's Homes and youth and community settings. This will support the rollout of the Every Child Matters agenda and help schools and the local authority provide data for school self-assessment and local authority inspections.
- 1.13 To find out more about the Dudley system and see an online demonstration on your own computer, just log on to [www.offsiteag.net](http://www.offsiteag.net) and click the Visitor button. The ten-minute demonstration is available to view and hear online. To request full access to the site simply email Trilby Multimedia from the Visitor button who will issue you with a PIN number.
- 1.14 Our new service is giving our teachers and Group Leaders the confidence to plan their outdoor activities by providing the help, training, support and backup required to provide high quality outdoor activities in a safe but challenging environment.

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