



## ANTSER CASE STUDY

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HOW THE WEST MIDLANDS SOCIAL WORK  
TEACHING PARTNERSHIP USED  
VIRTUAL REALITY TO IMPROVE THEIR  
PRACTICE AND SUPPORT BETTER OUTCOMES  
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

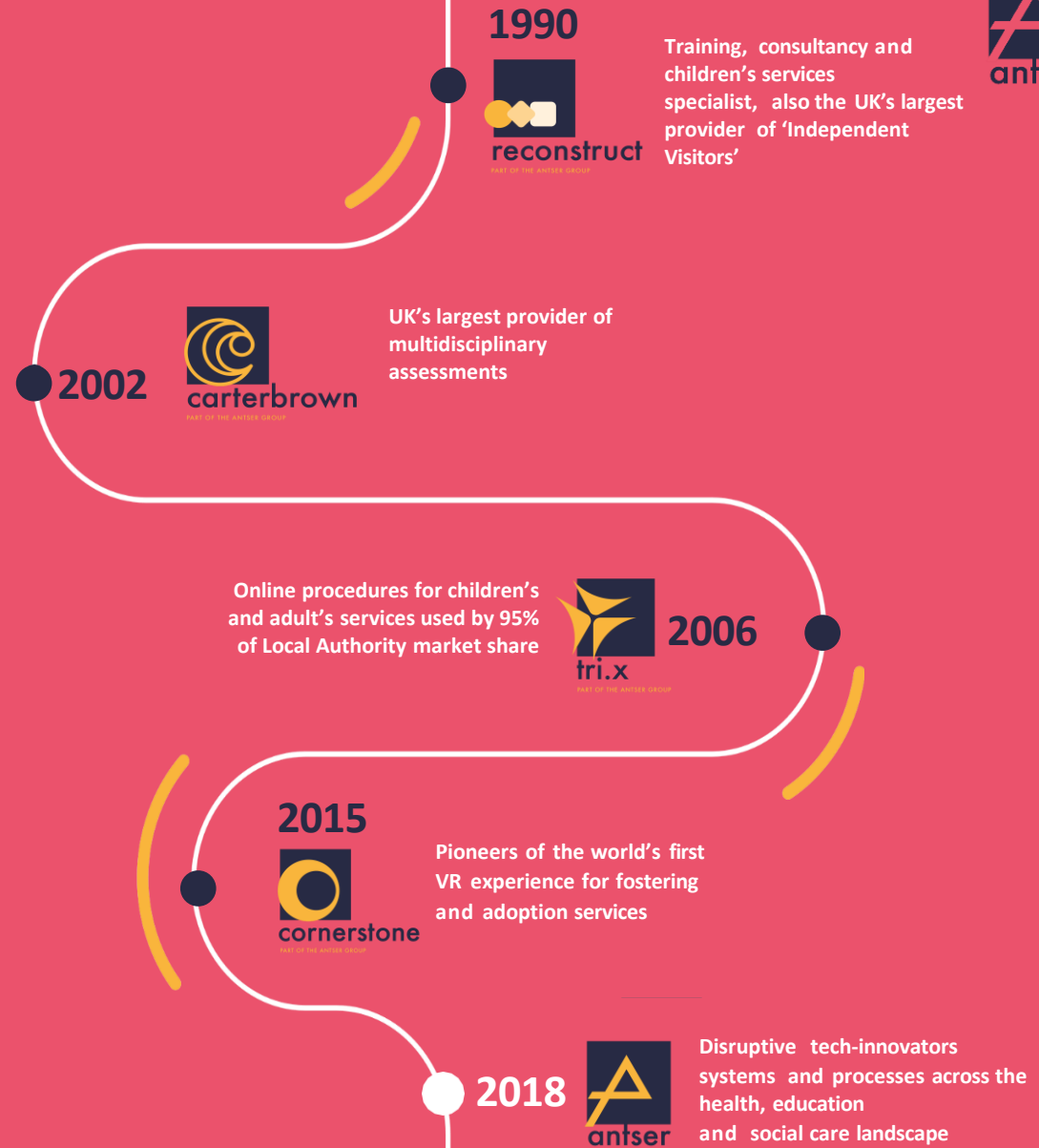
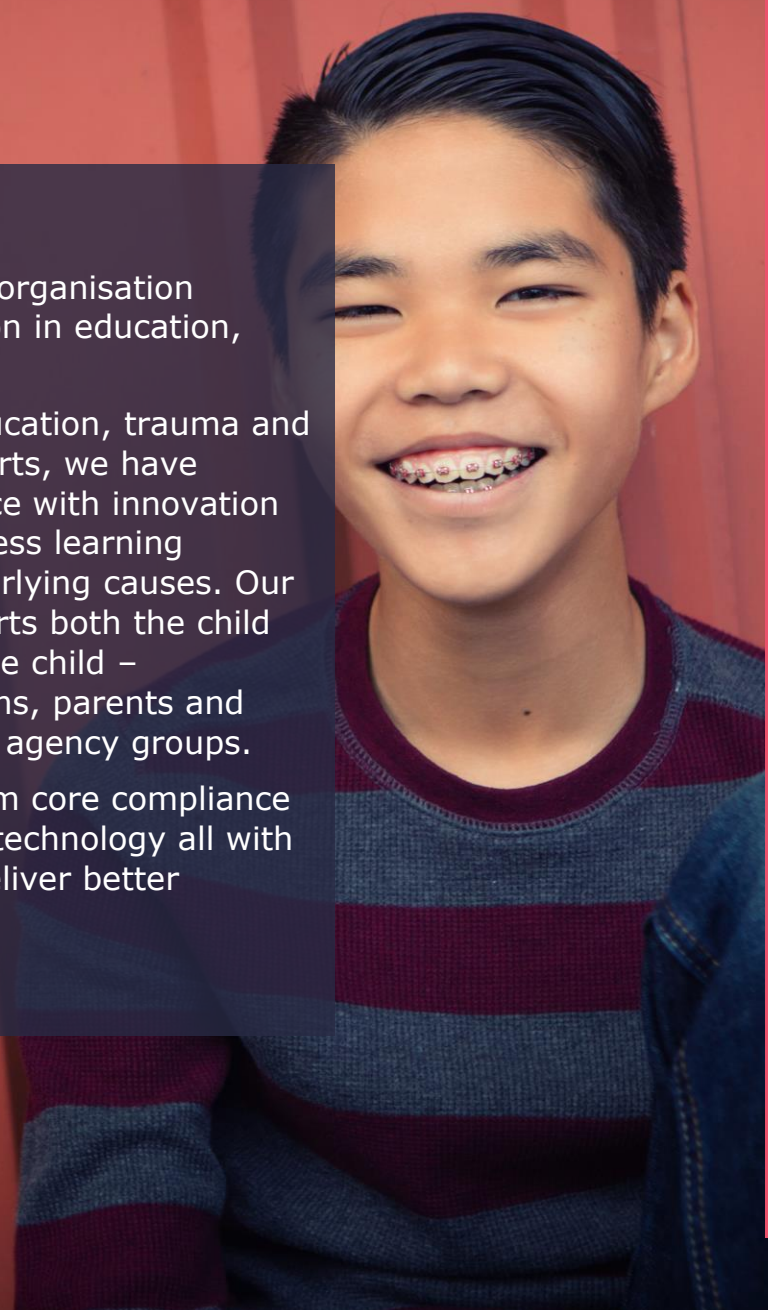


## ABOUT ANTSER

Antser is an integrated organisation delivering transformation in education, health and social care.

Led by our board of education, trauma and children's services experts, we have combined our experience with innovation and technology to address learning disruption and the underlying causes. Our holistic approach supports both the child and the team around the child – educators, support teams, parents and carers, as well as wider agency groups.

Our solutions range from core compliance to transformation and technology all with one aim in mind – to deliver better outcomes.



## OVERVIEW OF THE WMSWTP ANTSER VIRTUAL REALITY PROJECT

In October 2020, The West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership (WMSWTP) undertook a project with Antser to implement virtual reality (VR) within its services to train students, experienced qualified social workers and newly qualified social workers (NQSW) in their practice.

The WMSWTP is a collective made up of local authorities, the NHS, Children's Trusts, and higher education institutions (HEIs) across the whole of the West Midlands of which Staffordshire University and Stoke-on-Trent City Council Children's Services are a part of.

Real-life placements help prepare practitioners for life as social workers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was identified within the WMSWTP that students and NQSW placements were in a specific area of disadvantage with less opportunity to experience real-life scenarios, which impacted practitioners' experiences ahead of qualifying and the early stages of their careers.



## HOW ANTSER USED VR TO IMMERSE PRACTITIONERS INTO THE FOOTSTEPS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The innovative project has focused on ensuring that through VR, students and newly qualified social workers have the unique and unrivalled opportunity to immerse themselves and experience lived experiences of children and families.

Putting in a bid to the Department for Education (DfE), funding was secured for this project through a 'continuous improvement fund' that the DfE offers for technological projects aimed at learning amongst practitioners and maintaining their drive to improve outcomes for each case.


Staffordshire University and Stoke-on-Trent City Council Children's Services soon identified a way in which Antser VR would be able to bridge the educational gap formed by the pandemic, whilst also revitalising practice in a modern way and reaching out to students and professionals to better support those receiving social care services.



With this ongoing pilot, the main aims of the project have been to primarily “keep the voice of the child” at the forefront of practitioners' minds while delivering innovative and transferable training to social work students and NQSW.

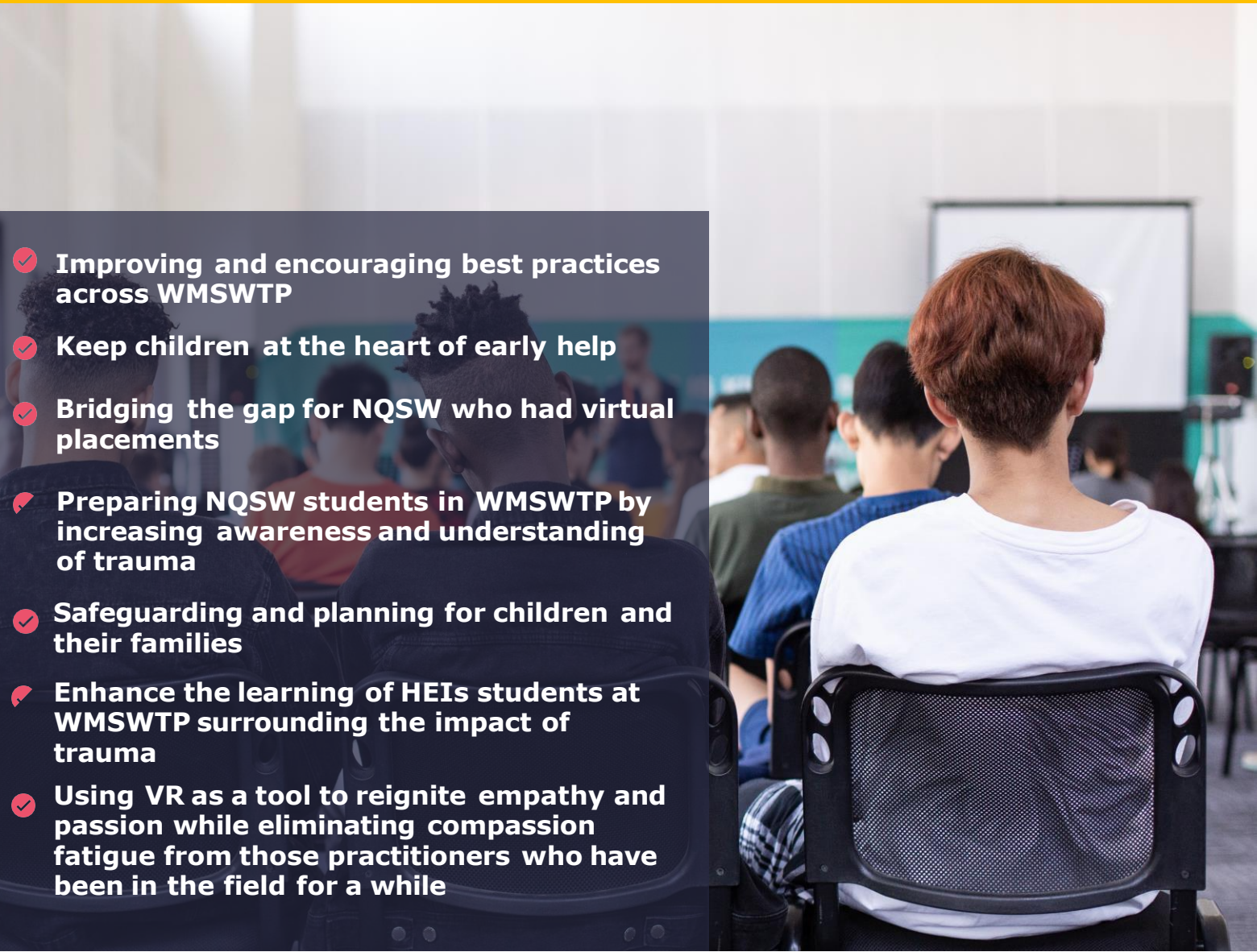
For students, there has been a focus on acknowledging situations they may face, understanding their emotions and how they may react whilst remaining professional.

Using Antser’s immersive storytelling VR films, HEIs and employer partners utilised a range of VR scenarios to promote a reflective environment to:



For Stoke-on-Trent Children’s Services, the aim was to primarily use the VR with newly qualified social workers who are in their approved social work year of education. The VR was adopted to be a tool for continual professional development, allowing NQSW to hold case discussions, safely exploring how they would approach certain social care cases.

For HEIs, the overarching aim was to use the VR with students completing a social work degree at all levels to further enhance their learning. For many second and third-year students on first placements, it will be the first time they have experienced real-life cases, so the VR prepares them for their ‘first’ case in a safe space.

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- ✓ **Improving and encouraging best practices across WMSWTP**
  - ✓ **Keep children at the heart of early help**
  - ✓ **Bridging the gap for NQSW who had virtual placements**
  - ✓ **Preparing NQSW students in WMSWTP by increasing awareness and understanding of trauma**
  - ✓ **Safeguarding and planning for children and their families**
  - ✓ **Enhance the learning of HEIs students at WMSWTP surrounding the impact of trauma**
  - ✓ **Using VR as a tool to reignite empathy and passion while eliminating compassion fatigue from those practitioners who have been in the field for a while**

## OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

To date, the reach of those who have benefited from this partnership includes over 400 social work students and wider practitioners. The breakdown of this number includes over 300+ students and over 100+ qualified practitioners, each with future sessions scheduled to take place throughout 2022.

Since the initial pilot came to an end on March 31st, the funding provided by the DfE has enabled this pilot to continue for additional five months, allowing for a wider opportunity for VR training sessions and learning throughout the whole WMSWTP.

Written and verbal feedback has been overwhelmingly positive and has demonstrated all the aims of the project. To date, Stoke-on-Trent has delivered the VR programme to:

- ✓ **20 Level 6 Social Workers**
- ✓ **60 Level 6 Social Workers**
- ✓ **70 Level 4 Students**
- ✓ **50 Level 5 Students**
- ✓ **60 Level 6 Students at Staffordshire University and other HEIs**



During the pilot period, Stoke-on-Trent often used the VR headsets with several students at various levels, and in one case, Stoke-on-Trent used the VR with first-year students in the Readiness for Supervised for Practice module. Findings have shown that VR has been an effective tool to prepare students ahead of going into their placement year, allowing students to deliver best practices.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Stoke-on-Trent reported that the VR training sessions have proven to be an effective tool for opening very important discussions amongst their students and NQSW. As reported in feedback, VR is a tool that helps bring theory to life which, in turn, provides users with a deeper understanding and empathy when communicating with vulnerable individuals. In addition, the VR was reported to allow students to recognise their own triggers which were otherwise unknown to them.

Through the partnership, results revealed that VR provides social worker students and NQSW the opportunity to reflect on their own emotions, manage them effectively before dealing with real-life cases and discover how it feels to be in the footsteps of vulnerable children and young people.



One Qualified Social Worker of 10+ years from Shropshire reflected on the VR training and said:

*“This allowed me to see so much more (by looking around), so the learning was much more encompassing. Talking through after each section helped to understand what others had also picked up (I had missed some things, as I was busy concentrating on other aspects of the film).”*

They continued to say:

*“It helped me to understand how childhood trauma affects the brain and how this can produce a life- long effect on decision making, and how you react to difficult situations. I did know this before it was just such a unique way of reminding me that I believe this will stick with me”.*



*“It is really a very creative and excellent way of sensitizing especially new social workers of what lies ahead. I believe it would go a long way to help social workers to be very reflective in practice, empathetic and effective.” - Another Student Social Worker from the WMSWTP*



## FUTURE PLANS FOR USING ANTSER VR

The funding from the DfE has enabled a 12-month license with Antser VR, supporting the project over the next five months in addition to the pilot period.

Primarily focusing on delivering better outcomes for early year help, Stoke-on-Trent has also explored Antser's dementia content with five social work students with the plan to focus more on exploring Antser's content and resources for adult services.

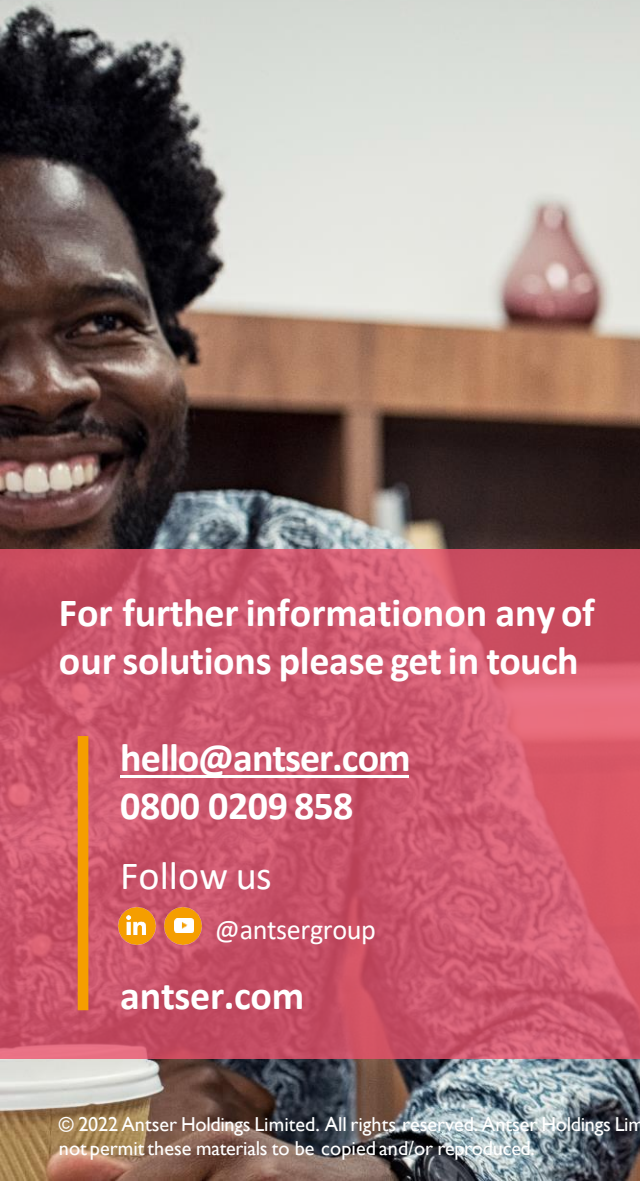
Looking ahead, there is a plan to continue to deliver these sessions wider across the WMSWTP to ensure future utilisation of the VR headsets is embedded across employer and HEI partners.

As the academic year is ending, the focus has turned to engaging local authorities whilst also ensuring that simulation is embedded into the curriculum for September. There are also plans to use this tech in upcoming simulation conferences and across other disciplines at Staffordshire University.

Early plans are currently being explored outside of this project for training to take place with Staffordshire Police. These plans are designed to explore how VR can be used in the training of their Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to evidence the importance of social work and multidisciplinary working.

In addition, WMSWTP is looking to get more of the team certified to enable more people to train local authorities across the area, ensuring they are reaching and helping as many vulnerable people in the area as possible.





For further information on any of our solutions please get in touch

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