



Technology Transforms Interview Process at Child Protection Centre

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BARBARA SPENCER
CEO
Zebra Child Protection Centre

A first of its kind in Canada, the Zebra Child Protection Centre is a not-for-profit organization that, through partnerships with police, judicial and government services, gives children a safe place to tell an adult about concerning events in their lives.

Since its inception in 2002, the Centre has given children a place to use their own words to describe what is happening in their lives. The child-friendly centre creates an environment that breaks down barriers formed from mistreatment.

According to CEO Barb Spencer, Zebra seeks to create a friendly space where children will feel comfortable sharing their stories. This prevents them from having to visit a more intimidating institutional space – like a police station or even a school office — where they may feel less comfortable sharing difficult details.

“The Centre integrates a multi-disciplinary community of professionals — Edmonton Police Service, Alberta Children’s Services, Crown Prosecutors, Child at Risk Response Teams, medical and trauma screening professionals (off site) and volunteer advocates — in a child-centred environment that nurtures the child and uses all the wisdom of its partnership to see that justice is done,” said Spencer.

“The team approach allows for streamlined, thorough and expert investigations, interventions, prosecutions and supports. Through our own resources as well as alliances within the community, Zebra provides children and their non-offending parents and guardians with essential social, medical and mental health services and supports.”

A large part of the organization’s work centers on collecting sensitive and difficult information from children about their experiences; therefore, having the proper equipment to create and preserve these interviews is essential.

The problem:

Zebra’s consideration of a new recording system came from the suggestion of RCMP Winnipeg, where officers, based on their experience, suggested that switching to computer-based digital interview recording (DIR) technology would greatly enhance the

Key Benefits

- DIR has made the review-and-find process more efficient by creating high-quality, reliable digital recordings.
- DIR has reduced the chance of human error, namely losing a recording and thus having to interview a child a second time.
- All of these help support Zebra’s mandate – to strengthen a child’s voice.

reliability and efficiency of the interview recording process.

“We prefer that kids are interviewed once,” Spencer emphasized.

However, with Zebra’s former combination of DVD and VHS recording equipment, human error could lead to an interview not being recorded.

A DIR system provides the ability to record, playback, annotate, save, access and manage recordings. The recording remains readily accessible as a user works on the child’s case and it can be copied to a transportable physical media as required.

Unlike traditional recording methods where the end result is restricted to a format such as a VHS tape or DVD, a DIR solution can provide output to any digital media. In contrast with traditional methods, digital recording makes it easier to record, manage, search, store, back up and share information.

Spencer thought the Centre’s goal of strengthening children’s voices could only benefit from this type of technology.

Not only would interviews automatically and instantly be stored on a secure stand alone computer, they would be available to law enforcement officials and crown prosecutors in a more easily navigable and reliable format.

Deployment and installation of the For the Record DIR technology posed another challenge.

Zebra espouses a “child-first” approach. That means, if a child needs to be interviewed, that interview takes precedence over all other business.

“Kids come first, administrative tasks take a backseat,” Spencer said. “So we had to install the equipment on a day when there would be no impact on a scheduled interview. We had to coordinate all people involved, including an EPS technician and two other technical experts and have the equipment at our back door, ready to go that morning.”

The Solution:

Spencer said the resulting installation was successful, thanks to the close attention paid by Acrodex Client Manager Ian Gates and FTR’s Tim Grant.

“I felt that there were caring hands around the process; for example, when we realized there was a problem with a missing piece, it was resolved in minutes,” Spencer said.

By installing For The Record (FTR) technology, professionals have been able to create digital interview recordings that are instantly stored on a standalone CPU. These are compatible with FTR court recording technology, easily transportable and offer users easy playback.

The technology has also made the recordings more searchable. So, for example, during an investigation when a police detective is searching for a particular point in an interview, he or she has an easily referenced digital file to search through.

The transition among partner officials was a reasonably smooth one, Spencer said.

“Right away, people were commenting on how slick the program was.”

A key element to Zebra’s philosophy is being able to accurately capture a child’s voice as he or she recounts his or her story of abuse.

A strong recording of a child’s interview means the words of a child will be accurately depicted in court.

Spencer described one of the strongest examples that FTR is working at the Zebra Centre: When an interviewer is confident he or she can wholly rely on the interview system to record a child’s statement, and make it easy to play back and organize, he or she can then focus on making that child feel that someone there believes in them.

Or in Spencer’s words, “That there’s nowhere else that interviewer wants to be in the world but right there, talking to that child.”