

Young Person N Learning Briefing



How this document can be used

- Please read this document carefully and consider the learning in respect of families you are currently working with.
- Keep this document in a handy place to support easy reference in future work.
- Take this document to team meetings and share with colleagues.
- Use this document in supervisions for reference and to support case management / reflective practice.

Case Summary

Young person N was 17 years old when he was subject to a serious assault by multiple perpetrators. At the time of the assault he was living away from his family with adult friends and had been living with them for over a year. At the time of the incident he was identified as a Child in Need and had an allocated social worker. He had been attending college at the beginning of the academic year; his attendance had been poor and he eventually withdrew completely a few months before the assault. Young person N had a learning disability* and sensory disabilities. In the preceding 12 months he had been arrested and charged with several offences. In addition to the allocated social worker, a Youth Justice Service worker was also supporting young person N.

Findings

The review identified learning in several areas including; a lack of consistency in the application of child protection procedures and private fostering regulations. The extent to which his additional needs and learning disability* were recognised and how this increased his vulnerability and potential to be subject to criminal exploitation. There was an absence of robust assessment, and appropriate agency checks. The review also recognised the potential for professionals to be groomed by carers. Key learning is outlined below.

Learning

Private Fostering Regulations

Whilst private fostering arrangements end at the age of 16, they can and should still apply between 16 – 18 years for young people with disabilities. Every disabled privately fostered child nearing the age of 18, should be provided with details of the LA procedures for assessing their eligibility for adult community services. This information should be provided automatically by the local authority so that these assessments can be carried out in a timely manner.

*Increasingly being referred to as intellectual disability

△ Assessments of 16 – 18 year olds should apply the principles of the mental capacity act 2005.

Application of Child Protection Procedures

It is critical that child protection procedures are followed in all cases of alleged abuse. This should include strategy discussions and section 47 procedures, even in the absence of a disclosure.

Practitioners should

- Be mindful of giving equal consideration to all concerns raised, regardless of source.
- Not dismiss reports they feel are less credible, or are not supported by the young person.
- Remember that there are many reasons for children and young people not disclosing what is happening.

The fundamental importance of applying procedures cannot be underestimated. This is a repetitive learning theme in reviews; by nature the failure to apply child protection procedures leaves children inherently unsafe. Child protection procedures support a framework for examination and challenge to case narratives formed and the presence of confirmatory bias.

Understanding and assessing individual needs / Personalised care plans

Young person N was known to and involved with several organisations and services, over many months leading up to the incident. However, the review found that there was no contemporary multi agency assessment or understanding of his needs. Decisions made about the suitability of his living arrangements were not based in sound assessment, taking into account his capacity, and additional needs. This left him extremely vulnerable.

The only contemporaneous assessment conducted was through the court in relation to his criminal case. This psychiatric report concluded that he was not fit to plea. This should have been known prior to the court hearing as a thorough needs assessments should include an assessment of mental capacity^Δ. Without comprehensive assessment, and information sharing subsequent care plans are likely to be compromised and fail to address risks.

The review also identified the need for police officers to understand behaviour in the context of distress, capacity, and learning disability*. This young person was exposed to the criminal justice system for charges that the court later assessed he did not have the capacity to understand or respond to. He was not considered as a possible victim of exploitation.

Professional grooming

The review highlighted the potential for professionals as well as young people to be groomed. In this case the carer who went on to abuse young person N had worked consistently to elevate his status with professionals, quickly establishing a perception of him as a protector and advocate of child N.

Practitioners should be mindful of confirmatory bias:

- Remain objective and have professional curiosity
- Be mindful to interpret information with equal scrutiny regardless of source of information
- Question whether the information provided fits with what you are seeing and what the young person is experiencing.

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^Δ Assessments of 16 – 18 year olds should apply the principles of the mental capacity act 2005.