



KRSCP briefing on local learning review concerning neglect - June 2024

What did we do?

Kingston and Richmond Safeguarding Children Partnership undertook a local learning review concerning a sibling group who had experienced chronic neglect.

The review used a systems model to understand the view of practitioners across three key practice episodes, guided by research questions (see 'what did we learn?'). We held a multiagency practitioner workshop with professionals with direct involvement, and the learning was then tested with the review panel comprising senior leads from relevant agencies.

Some members of the family were invited to participate in the review, but this was not taken up. It is a limitation of this review, that we do not have their perspective on how practice may be improved.

What did we learn?

Q1 - What is helping and hindering us responding to neglect in adolescence?

The current partnership neglect toolkit does not have widespread use and there are no established mechanisms for monitoring its use. The toolkit is limited with respect to adolescent neglect. There is scope to extend the section on home environment to include hoarding, including evidence-based approaches to enable families to make and sustain necessary improvements. There is a need to ensure an appropriate interface with safeguarding adults processes, and to support multi-agency practitioners in making onward referrals.

KRSCP needs to consider the specificity of its training offer around neglect.

The pandemic response shifted risk from older to younger generations. Restrictions impacted professionals' ability to visit the family, nurture a relationship with them, and appreciate their home environment. Future pandemic responses should consider wider psychosocial risks to young people.

The widespread and well-known issues of placement insufficiency and instability (https://assets.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wpuploads/2022/01/cco_childrens_social_care_putting_childrens_voices_at_the_heart_of_reform.pdf) is inhibiting practitioners making the case for removal, despite where it may be in children's best interests.

There is a need for proactive work with connected networks to explore and empower family responses to concerns; this will help inform and underpin options of kinship care in the event children cannot remain at home. The forthcoming programme of social care reform outlined in government strategy Stable Homes Built on Love (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love>), expands on how kinship care may be developed in future; the statutory safeguarding partners will be enacting the relevant requirements as they are published.

Practitioners working with young people living with their families approaching adulthood are aware of the cliff-edge in safeguarding provision triggered by the 18th birthday. This awareness inhibits long term planning for young adulthood and can be contrasted with services that work with young people up to the age of 25. KRSCP has chosen adolescent/transitional safeguarding as one of its priorities for 2024-26.

Whilst neglect at any age in childhood may be contributed to by factors in parents/carers such as mental ill health, it is imperative that the focus is kept on the impact for the child and their lived experience rather than being derailed where it is not possible to define the parental factor precisely. The review highlighted that a historic medical diagnosis can lead to diagnostic overshadowing, and the failure to consider alternative explanations for behaviour.

The review also highlighted that professionals may have a simplistic understanding of hoarding behaviours. Additionally, there is a need to develop legal literacy around the Mental Capacity Act.

Q2. What can we learn about how practitioners can be supported to recognise and respond to professional fatigue?

The practitioner workshop highlighted the need for and benefit of opportunities to come together as a network around a case particularly those that may feel 'stuck'.

The review considers that the partnership initiative, Think Space, offers a helpful multi-agency reflective forum and would encourage its continued use and resourcing. The partnership should also consider how Think Space is promoted across the partner agencies to ensure awareness and access and how this is monitored for impact. The partnership may wish to consider whether there are any trigger points other than practitioner referral, for bringing families to that space, for example children being made subject to repeat child protection plans and/or plans continuing beyond a certain duration.

Q3. What are the barriers and enablers to eliciting older children's lived experience and using this to inform our work with them?

The review highlighted that continuity is of prime importance in professionals working with a family. Recruitment is a key priority for all services working with families in Kingston and Richmond.

Children subject to PLO processes should be supported to contribute their wishes and feelings, this may be through the use of an advocate.

There was limited awareness of advocacy services for children among professionals.

It was considered that professionals may benefit from training that deepens understanding of behaviour as communication.

Q4. What can we learn about the power and positioning of independent expert assessments in contributing to our work with families?

Overvaluing of independent and external reports by courts impacts on confidence of practitioners and may reflect on overstretched capacity of frontline teams. The review did not make a recommendation regarding capacity challenges, as recruitment and retention is a key priority for all services.

It is important that within the legal planning process, practitioners are supported to inculcate the outcomes of these reports into the holistic assessment of a child and their care.

Q5. What is helping or hindering escalations to be effective?

KRSCP escalation pathways were not well used, including by senior practitioners. It was notable that different agencies had very different understandings of the family situation.

Public Law Outline

Professionals working outside children's services have limited understanding of the Public Law Outline (PLO) process. The progress & outcomes of the PLO process should be communicated to the multi-professional network. Professionals must maintain a robust level of parallel planning even where a PLO process has been instigated.

What did the review recommend and how is this being taken forward?

1. KRSCP should refresh its neglect strategy. It is proposed this is undertaken by a multiagency task and finish group and include:

- *Refreshing tools with input from practitioners and using evidence from others, ensuring they have an appropriate level of specificity to capture adolescent neglect. There should be appropriate interface with adult safeguarding as indicated.*
- *Establishing an ongoing process for induction, oversight of use, and monitoring for impact.*

The partnership has established a neglect task and finish group that is considering the learning and recommendations from this review. Existing and future strategies and tools can be found on our website: <https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/guidance-policies-and-procedures/neglect-guidance-for-professionals/>

2. Partnership to consider further resource to expand multiagency Think Space to enable courageous conversations heard by senior leads, to assist recognition and response to vicarious trauma.

KRSCP is committed to resourcing and promoting Think Space and awareness-raising information has been developed and shared to promote this – see the following page of our website:

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/about-krscp/structure-subgroups-and-forums/think-space/>

3. Partnership to revisit possible commissioning of multiagency trauma informed training to support the lived experience of children and responses witnessed through behaviour for a holistic response and evidence base.

KRSCP has commissioned some dates for multiagency trauma informed practice training. For details of our full training offer including this course and how to access visit:

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/training/>

4. Partnership to consider adequacy of existing procedure for resolving professional differences (escalations) and whether there is sufficient awareness, use, and inclusion in single/multiagency safeguarding training.

KRSCP has agreed and promoted a companion pathway for the procedure on resolving professional differences to aid local multiagency escalation of concerns/challenges, available on our website:

<https://kingstonandrichmondsafeguardingchildrenpartnership.org.uk/guidance-policies-and-procedures/resolving-professional-differences/>

5. KRSCP to consider pilot of developing multiagency chronologies for children subject to repeat plans.

This is being considered by KRSCP's neglect task and finish group.

6. Regarding Public Law Outline

- *AfC to update benchmarking against Best practice guidance: Support for and work with families prior to court proceedings March 2021. This should include consideration of the use of the use of advocacy and other means of bringing child's voice into legal planning meetings.*
- *AfC and LA legal team establish formal mechanism for sharing updates/outcomes from PLO process with professional network. This will need to include advice to family for use in PLO meetings to explain that information will be shared and why.*
- *Training to be offered to the wider workforce on public law outline; this may be usefully developed and delivered by AfC's case progression officer and the local authority legal service.*

This recommendation has been referred to AfC's Case Progression Officer and the LA Legal Team for their consideration, alongside the Learning and Development Subgroup Chair and Partnership Manager.

7. KRSCP should seek assurance from all agencies that practitioners have access to training on the Mental Capacity Act, and hoarding behaviours.

The partnership will explore this with partner agencies and through a forthcoming training needs analysis.