

Lessons Learned



Child A's Story....

Child A was born outside of Warwickshire, where shortly after her birth, she became subject to a Child Protection Plan (CP Plan) by the local authority due to concerns of domestic abuse between her mother and father.

The CP Plan was closed 9 months later when Child A's parents separated, and she moved to Warwickshire with her mother. Child A's father continued to reside outside of the county and went on to form a new relationship, where he had further children who were also placed under CP Plans as he was considered to pose a risk of causing them physical and emotional harm.

Whilst in Warwickshire, concerns were raised that Child A was showing signs of neglect and maltreatment from her mother, however a combination of her mother's resistance, inadequate information gathering, and limited management oversight caused delays in agencies responding. These delays were complicated further when Child A's father removed Child A from her mother's care and took her to live with him outside of Warwickshire. As a result, the handover of risk from Warwickshire services to the other local authority was not as effective as it could have been, and the professional network was falsely reassured that Child A's safety and welfare had been mostly resolved due to her father's intervention.

Child A continued to live with her father and stepfamily outside of Warwickshire, where she was again the subject of child protection proceedings. Concerns continued to be raised by agencies that Child A was being physically abused and neglected by her father. These concerns were confirmed when information came to light during a police investigation into an unrelated matter that involved Child A's father. Child A was subsequently removed and placed into the care of the local authority.

What we have learned...

- When confronted with a resistant or challenging parent it is important to actively reflect – through supervision or management oversight – what the cause of this might be, and how best to overcome it in order to safeguard and promote the best interests of the child.
Learning for Practice: Authoritative, pro-active and relationship-based case management is needed in order to avoid 'stopping and starting' with cases and losing sight of the child's best interest.
- Neglect can have damaging long-term effects on a child's physical, social and emotional, cognitive and behavioural development. If your assessment concludes that the home is a '... depressing environment ...', then it probably is depressing.
Learning for Practice: Place yourself in the child's shoes, consider what this must be like for them living there 24 hours a day, and think 'what questions does this child need me to ask in order to help them to have a better life?'.
- Consent to share information is not needed if there are concerns about the safety and welfare of a child, or if in seeking consent it would put a child or young person's safety at risk.

Lessons Learned (cont.)



What we have learned (contd.)...

- All professionals need to be alert to any form of bias when faced with making key decisions about children's safety and welfare.
Learning for Practice: Make use of tools such as a discrepancy matrix or Munro's conceptual model for challenging and correcting biases, oversights or the subsequent clinging to mistaken beliefs. Seeking supervision and ensuring management oversight will also be helpful.
- Professional over-optimism can be a common and natural thinking trap to fall into for those professionals working with cases of neglect.
Learning for Practice: Maintaining a focus on the child's day to day experience is critical to maintaining pace and purpose as well as avoiding drift and delay.
- When making decisions about risk in a group setting it is important to be alert to the 'group think' effect – the views of one or more individuals consciously or unconsciously influencing the decisions of others to conform.
Learning for practice: Maintaining professional integrity, listening to the available evidence, and holding a line about your views is important when being asked to make judgements.
- Cases of neglect can be especially challenging to assess and gather evidence in order to demonstrate a threshold has been consistently crossed.
Learning for practice: The importance of chronologies, accurate record keeping and using tools to aid information gathering and analysis is critical to avoid drift. Failing to take these steps may result in repeated starts and stops, which run in parallel to the fluctuations of care for the child. Seeking 'quick fix solutions' in cases of chronic neglect is often a thinking trap to be avoided.

What do I need to do...

Advice for professionals

1. Make use of the [Neglect Toolkit](#) if you think a child is at risk of experiencing neglect and refer to [Warwickshire's Thresholds for Services](#) document when determining a course of action in regard to safeguarding children.
2. Read the 7 Minute Briefings on [Children moving across Local Authority boundaries](#), [The Voice of the Child](#), [Child Neglect](#), [Parental Capacity to Change](#) and [Professional Curiosity](#).
3. Familiarise yourself with [Warwickshire's Escalation Process](#) and don't be afraid to use it.

Advice for communities

1. Spotting the signs of neglect isn't always easy. Visit the [NSPCC website](#) for more information on the potential signs and what to do if you suspect a child is at risk of abuse or neglect
2. If you are concerned that a child is suffering abuse or neglect, talk about or report your concerns to [Warwickshire Children's Social Care](#)