

Lessons Learned



James' Story.... James stabbed his father at home in an apparent act of self-defence, his father was not seriously harmed but James and his family have been known to a wide range of services over a number of years. He is extremely vulnerable with several complex needs including risk of criminal exploitation, mental health issues, self-harm and suicide attempts, a history of traumatic childhood experiences and frequent cannabis misuse. He has also missed a significant part of his secondary education as he had not been in full time education for a number of years and only accessed very limited part time alternative education provision. James experienced chaotic early life experiences and instability in his care arrangements moving between his parents care throughout his childhood. He has been involved with Child and Adolescent Mental Health since the age of nine and there is an extensive history of mental health issues including nine recorded episodes of overdose and/or suicidal ideation.

James has been subject to a child in need plan and a child protection plan, and the family have been offered support from several agencies. At the heart of this case, however, is a fragmented approach where agencies struggled to engage or maintain engagement with this young person with complex needs. Practitioners described feeling a sense of paralysis and hopelessness when supports such as drug and alcohol services, education and mental health were not consistent or effective in engaging or supporting James.

What we have learned....

There was a fragmented and inconsistent approach to supporting James and his family which led to a sense of professional paralysis amongst practitioners and James's complex needs were not addressed **Learning for practice:** *systems and processes need to identify those young people with highly complex needs and at the greatest risk so that service responses can be flexible and if necessary, fast tracked to respond effectively to unmet need*

There is no evidence that any practitioner was able to get a clear understanding of James's daily lived experience, if they did, it did not contribute to the multi-agency work with him **Learning for practice:** *The multi-agency team around the child needs to adopt a flexible approach where the practitioner best placed to develop a relationship with the child and their family takes a lead in ensuring the child, and parents/carers/ voices are heard*

Lessons Learned (cont.)



What we have learned....

MACE (Multi-Agency Child Exploitation) processes and contextual safeguarding were not well understood or embedded in practice at the time of this review so the risks of criminal exploitation to young people were not addressed effectively **Learning for Practice:** *It is essential that the MACE process and the Child Exploitation Tool are used together to effectively respond to concerns where a child/young person is groomed or targeted for exploitation*

The local authority, the education department and the school failed to meet James's educational needs which resulted in him missing his secondary education and being vulnerable to exploitation in the community. No formal escalation was used to attempt to resolve the situation **Learning for practice:** *Restorative work with schools and the local authority is required to improve the collective ownership of responsibility for the children with the most complex needs ensuring timely and appropriate review of plans*

There is a gap in service provision for those children with complex needs who do not have a diagnosed mental illness resulting in a fragmented and uncoordinated approach which did not address James's mental health needs. **Learning for Practice:** *The multi-agency team needs to provide targeted levels of support to children with complex needs who have high levels of social, emotional and mental health needs*

What do I need to do....

Advice for professionals

- Ensure you are aware of the [escalation process](#) and utilise it when required
- Read the 7-minute briefings in respect of ['The Voice of the Child'](#) and 'Part Time/Reduced Timetables'
- Read the [MACE guidance](#) and [flow chart](#)

Advice for communities

- [Warwickshire Education Service](#) provides a range of information for pupils and families
- ['Somethings Not Right'](#) provides information about support available if you are worried a child is at risk of exploitation