

# Lessons Learned



## The 'Wilson Family' Story....

The children had all lived in Warwickshire with their parents having moved there from another area where child protection inquiries had been initiated. These had been initiated because of concerns regarding the chronic neglect of the children. Prior to this, the family and some of the children, had also lived outside of Warwickshire in another area where the mother had other children removed from her and a previous partner; again because of chronic neglect.

Whilst in Warwickshire the family were provided with support through a child in need plan, though there was professional dispute about whether this was an appropriate response given the level of developmental delay, significant health needs and neglect of the children. At very short notice the parents moved the children out of Warwickshire to another authority. When this happened the children's school made a referral to Children's Services in another local authority. When social workers visited, they were concerned about the level of neglect and asked the parents if the children could be taken into foster care. However, the parents refused. Whilst legal proceedings were undertaken the parents again moved the family back into Warwickshire. The police were alerted and found the children in such a poor state that they were all taken into foster care and care proceedings were initiated. The children now all live permanently with new families.

## What we have learned....

- The children were not seen by the social worker alone to obtain their thoughts and feelings. The older children in the family had adults, such as teachers, who knew them well and regularly spoke to them without their parents present; these professionals could have been asked to share their understanding of each child's world. All these professionals did communicate with the children and their views should have been sought.  
**Learning for Practice:** always create opportunities to see the child alone or to ensure that the child's thoughts and feelings are considered
- There were several indicators that suggested the children were experiencing serious neglect. Professionals recognised these complex needs, and wanted to try and improve the children's circumstances. However instead they jumped into providing concrete solutions, rather than stepping back and thinking about what had caused these difficulties and what should be done about it. **Learning for Practice:** professionals must name neglect when it occurs and ensure a robust plan is developed as a result.
- Key areas for improvements in parenting were identified. However, there was a lack of exploration of what change was needed, a true reflection of whether it had occurred and whether parents understood the need for it. **Learning for Practice:** always consider what parents need to do to make a child safe and meet their needs and how this will be apparent and measured by professionals.
- The children were moved frequently by their parents. Practitioners need to take seriously parents moving their children where it may be that this is to evade statutory concerns. **Learning for Practice:** When children are moved, and concerns exist, the behaviour of parents must be challenged, information from other areas sought and a continuity of care, need and safeguarding must be established.



# Lessons Learned (cont.)

- The important historical information contained within the children and family assessment which led to the child in need plan was not shared with the agencies who were contributing and delivering the child in need plan. This meant that those agencies did not understand the history, and so were less able to support mother and father, and less able to analyse the risks posed to the children of chronic and ongoing neglect. **Learning for Practice:** It has now been established that all statutory multi-agency assessments including child in need assessments will be shared by Children's Social Care with all agencies and professionals when they start working with a family. Similarly, all agencies and professionals must share information pertinent to the assessment of risk and need when involved in multi-agency assessments, planning and intervention.
- Historical information was provided when the family moved by the previous local authority, but this information was not analysed or connected to future risk of likely harm. **Learning for Practice:** Family history is important. In trying to understand parents' circumstances it is necessary to explore their own childhood and experience of being parented. It is also important to explore the history of involvement of the current family with services, and particularly where there have been care proceedings and children removed from their parent's care.
- There was fixed professional thinking. A later social work assessment branded the concerns of other professionals unjustified. **Learning for Practice:** It is important to understand the potential for fixed professional thinking and the role that supervision and reflective thinking can play in addressing it.
- Professionals identified concerns about the family, but these were not escalated appropriately. **Learning for Practice:** When escalating concerns ensure that you use the Practitioner Escalation Protocol to monitor the outcome to ensure that risks have been mitigated.

## What do I need to do ...

### **Advice for professionals**

1. Familiarise yourself with the *Regional Child Protection Procedures for the West Midlands*; '[Children and families moving across local authority boundaries](#)', the new [Warwickshire Escalation Procedure](#) and with the [Warwickshire Neglect strategy and toolkit](#)
2. Read Warwickshire Safeguarding's 7 Minute Briefings on Professional Curiosity, Neglect, Escalation and Moving Across Authority Borders
3. Record facts in referrals and records for example **Do** - record that the child's clothes smelled of urine; **Don't** - record things like 'the child was smelly'

### **Advice for communities**

1. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Knowing the signs of child abuse can make it easier to spot and take action. Visit the [NSPCC website](#) for more information on the potential signs
2. Talk about or report your concerns to Warwickshire Children's Social Care