Lessons Learned

Ruby's Story

Ruby was a 3-year-old White British child who lived with her mother and younger sibling. She is described as a lovely character and a beautiful, chatty little girl.

Ruby's mother was a care-experienced young parent with a history of trauma. After separating from Ruby's father shortly after Ruby's birth, she moved to Warwickshire. She later began a relationship with Ruby's stepfather and, they went onto have a child together.

Professionals became aware of repeated concerns within the relationship, including controlling and abusive behaviour towards Ruby's mother, violence during pregnancy, and a pattern of separation and reconciliation. As concerns escalated, agencies received repeated information about risks to Ruby's safety and wellbeing including neglect and sexual abuse. These concerns culminated when her mother attended hospital and alleged that Ruby's stepfather had sexually abused her.

What we have learned...

Voice of the child
Concerns about sexual abuse were raised on more than one occasion, including through information shared by Ruby. These concerns were not responded to consistently, and opportunities to protect her were missed. Professionals too often relied on adult explanations, did not fully consider referrals made by friends/family members, did not consistently speak directly with Ruby, and did not fully consider the wider impact of domestic abuse on her daily lived experience.
Learning for Practice: All concerns, including referrals from family members, members of the public and other non-professionals, must be taken seriously and given equal consideration alongside professional referrals. Concerns should be followed up thoroughly through direct engagement with the child, professional curiosity, evidence gathering and timely multi-agency safeguarding action. Where risk is identified, statutory processes should be triggered without delay.

Information sharing
Information was not shared consistently across agencies, which led to an incomplete understanding of risk and reduced the effectiveness of safeguarding action. Key professionals were not always involved in decision-making, and relevant historical information was not consistently brought together to inform planning.
Learning for Practice: Professionals should share information proactively and without delay, involve all relevant agencies in safeguarding discussions, and build a full picture of risk through effective multi-agency working.

Quality of Assessments
Assessments did not reflect the seriousness of the concerns within the family. They did not fully consider the family history, the mother's vulnerabilities, or the role and risks posed by the stepfather. As a result, decisions were made without a complete understanding of risk, and Ruby's lived experience was not consistently kept at the centre of assessment and planning.
Learning for Practice: Assessments should be holistic, evidence-based, and clearly grounded in the child's lived experience. They should take account of family history, parental vulnerability, and all relevant risk factors to support effective safeguarding decisions and safety planning.

Lessons Learned (continued.)

What we have learned (contd.)...

Responding to domestic abuse
Concerns about domestic abuse were evident, including controlling and coercive behaviour, but the multi-agency response did not consistently reflect the level of risk. Opportunities to provide effective support, including safe housing and specialist services, were missed, and the impact of the abuse on both Ruby and her mother was not fully understood or addressed.
Learning for Practice: Professionals should recognise domestic abuse and coercive control as significant safeguarding risks, ensure responses are coordinated across agencies, use relevant tools to assess risk and provide practical and timely support, including safety planning that reflects the lived realities of the family.

Professional challenge and escalation
Concerns about risk were not consistently escalated when practitioners disagreed with decisions, despite clear indicators that the level of risk remained high. Opportunities to use escalation processes were missed, which limited professional challenge and prevented a fuller re-evaluation of Ruby's circumstances.
Learning for Practice: Professionals should confidently use escalation procedures where there are concerns about risk or disagreement, ensuring that professional challenge leads to appropriate review, oversight and safeguarding action.

Support for care experienced parents
The mother's needs as a care-experienced parent were not fully recognised, and her vulnerabilities and limited support were not adequately considered. This reduced the effectiveness of professional support and affected her ability to protect Ruby.
Learning for Practice: Professionals should recognise and respond to the specific needs of care-experienced parents by providing tailored support and adapting their approach to improve engagement.

What do I need to do....

Advice for professionals

- Visit WSCP's website for a range of resources from the CSA Centre to support professionals working with children and young people where child sexual abuse is known or suspected, including: The Signs & Indicators Template, Communicating with Children, Supporting Parents & Carers.
- Familiarise yourself with the WM Multi Agency Child Protection Procedures, including: Child Sexual Abuse, Supporting the Voice of the Child, Domestic Abuse.
- Visit WSCP's website for a range of resources to support professionals to recognise and respond effectively to child neglect, including the WSCP Neglect Initial Screening Tool and A Day in the Life (for babies, pre school and primary school age children and teenagers) templates.
- To resolve professional differences in relation to safeguarding decisions, all professionals can use WSCP's Practitioner Escalation Policy.

Advice for communities

- Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. If you are concerned a child is at risk of abuse or neglect, contact Warwickshire's Family Connect.
- If you are concerned that someone you know may pose a risk to a child, you can submit a Sarah's Law request to Warwickshire Police. This enables the police to consider disclosing whether that individual has a history of sexual offences.