

# Increasing safety for a group of boys in a hostel

This case study shows how supporting friendships between young people, alongside making where they live safer, is an effective approach. Workers were worried about a group of boys living in a hostel for young people who might become homeless. The workers heard that drug dealing was happening around the hostel. Every day hostel workers reported young people missing, but they felt that the police were not looking for the young people. Five boys (16-17yrs) were going to be evicted from the hostel. Each one had a worker from social care who thought about their individual and family needs, but no-one was thinking about how to make the hostel or the group of boys safer.

## What was the response?

The hostel was talked about at a weekly multi-agency meeting led by social care that looked at child exploitation and violence between young people. Workers said they were worried about the group of boys and other young people living there. They wanted to think about how to make it safer. They decided to do a context assessment that would look at the safety of the hostel as a context. One worker from social care was chosen to lead this work.

For the location assessment workers:

- Talked to young people about safety inside and outside the hostel
- Used a survey with hostel staff and residents and local businesses to ask them about the hostel and what they were worried about and what they think might help
- Walked around and spent time in the hostel at different times of day and night to look for anything concerning or anything that might make the hostel safer
- Looked at reports made by the police of any incidents at the hostel, for example patterns of when young people went missing from the hostel and disclosures made by young people staying at the hostel

The weekly multi-agency meeting also decided that they need to assess the needs of the group of boys about to be evicted - as a group rather than as individuals. This involved looking at their friendships and dynamics between them. They found that the friendships between the five boys played a very important part in helping keep them safe. This was linked to the emotional support that they gave to each other.

This new information led to workers challenging an original plan to separate the boys. Instead, it was decided that they should be supported to stay together. Workers found funding for holiday activities for the boys to do together. Relationships between workers and the young people got better, as workers asked them about how they wanted to use the money.

After the assessment of the hostel, these changes were made:

- Specialist support was offered to young people at the hostel, including drop-in sessions by a local voluntary community service around drug use
- Training was given to staff at the hostel to help them learn more about child exploitation
- Police patrols were set up around the hostel
- A named police officer was chosen to work on any cases of young people going missing from the hostel
- Workers talked to local businesses near the hostel to build trust and find any business who would like to look out for young people in the area and help workers make young people safer

## What were the challenges?

The assessment of the hostel found that different agencies were having problems working together. The police were frustrated that staff at the hostel did not search for young people who had gone missing and the staff at the hostel were fed up with the police as they felt left to manage, without support, young people who workers thought were at a high risk of harm. Social workers felt that the young people were not always seen as children and instead the hostel would be too quick to evict young people they were having a difficulty with.

## What difference did this make?

The five young people were not evicted from the hostel and have stayed living there for the last year. This has meant that the young people kept their friendship group together and got the emotional support and friendship they needed from each other.

The assessment of the hostel found that too much pressure has been put on housing providers for young people, such as the hostel, to support young people who have experiences of exploitation. This has led to a review of how places such as the hostel are funded and supported. The review hopes to make sure that young people are given more supportive homes in the future.

## What did we learn?

By looking at the support young people needed in the hostel they were living in and how workers could keep them safe, workers could then respond in a different way. Instead of only supporting young people with their families, they were also able to take steps to change how the hostel was run and how workers looked after young people in the hostel to make the home a safer place for young people to live.

By making the hostel safer, workers were able to stop young people from getting evicted.

By talking to young people and looking at their friendships in the hostel, workers found out that the five boys who were about to be evicted were friends and these friendships were very important. The friendships offered emotional support to the young people. This was particularly important as some of the young people had lost relationships with their family. Finding out about the young people's friendships and how these friendships helped make them safer made workers change their plan and instead of separating the young people they decided to support the friendships.

Working together on this case has helped improve relationships between workers from different agencies. It led different workers to share their thoughts and knowledge about the young people and the hostel, talk about pressures and concerns that they had and helped everyone work together under the shared approach of Contextual Safeguarding.

The hostel now gets better support from other workers, and the staff that work there are better supported to work with young people with high support needs.