

Making a supported living home safer

This case study is about how working with new partners helped to make a supported living home for boys and girls aged 16 + safer. Worries about the home came to light in a child protection meeting for 'Rosie' - a young person living there. Workers in the home thought that Rosie, and other young people living there, were being targeted by adults for criminal exploitation. So, children's social care decided to treat the home itself as a 'context of concern'. The response to the context happened alongside the individual work with Rosie.

What was the response?

Rosie's social worker referred the home to a monthly multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding meeting. At the meeting partners agreed that social care should lead an assessment of the home and bring in other agencies and partners to help. The lead workers looked at what going on in the home and in the local area that might be affecting the safety and harm of the young people living there.

The home manager set up a meeting for all the young people living there. They talked together about what could be done to make the home safer.

The assessment team used the 'Context Triangle' tool. This framework helped them to think about different aspects of the home that they needed to think about. This helped them work out what they needed to focus on to make it safer for all the young people living there (have a look at the Locations section for more on this).

What were the challenges?

All of this happened during a Covid-19 lockdown so there were lots of restrictions. The team leading the work couldn't see the young people face to face to do safety planning or speak directly to people who live and work near the home. This really underlined how you need to build good face to face relationships with young people and adults if they are going to be involved in making contexts safer.

At the multi-agency Contextual Safeguarding meeting, the chair supported different agencies to come up with a coordinated and planned response to make the home safer. The things different partners did are in bold below. This is what happened:

- A **Voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE)** specialising in substance misuse talked to the staff and young people (in two groups) to raise their awareness
- A worker from the **Contextual Safeguarding team** (made up of youth workers and social workers) met with the home's staff to talk about the signs of exploitation in young people and also gave them written guidelines on how to notice when different types of exploitation might be happening
- To strengthen the physical safety of the home, the **Community Safety team** assessed the level of security in and around the home. They gave advice on fire safe letterboxes, etc.
- A **local area coordinator** linked the young people to a **community youth centre** and other safe places to go, if they feeling threatened when they are out in the community
- **Local police** visited the home and drove around to put off anyone trying to exploit the young people
- The Contextual Safeguarding team made a short video and sent it to **people living in the nearby community**. The video was about how young people are sometimes at risk of exploitation in the area, and it explained how local people could help to stop it from happening

What difference did this make?

The young people living in the home worked with the staff to make a safety-wellbeing plan that they put up on display. While they were doing this, they realised that they also needed to have a young person's consent form. This was so that the young people knew and were clear about what information could (and could not) be shared with the other agencies who were involved in the safety plan.

Looking at the context as a 'case' was a new thing for these workers. Before that, responses had always been focussed on the needs of individual young people (and their families). So, treating the home as a context of concern was a big change, with a lot of learning and building new skills and relationships between workers and between workers and young people.

An example of this is that young people got to know people working in the community like the local area coordinator and the substance misuse worker. This meant they could get in touch with them directly if they needed information or help. Knowing these workers by name and what they are there to do made it easier for the young people to use their services because they didn't need to rely so much on being told about them by their social workers or workers in the home. These new relationships also helped young people to be part of their local community.

The staff in the home said they felt supported in their work and like they had been helped to respond to exploitation risks. A little while later, a worker at the home contacted the Contextual Safeguarding team to talk about the early signs of exploitation that they thought might be happening to new young person living there, which is something she wouldn't have done so quickly before.

What did we learn?

We learned that sometimes, when a young person is affected by harm in a context, its very effective to also work with the context as a whole, alongside the work with the individual young person.

We learnt how to respond to the home itself as having some 'risks' and 'vulnerabilities'. For example, the staff not feeling very confident about what exploitation is was a 'vulnerability' within the home. This was discovered through the assessment and then became something to target in the response plan. As part of the assessment of the context, the team also learnt more about the individual needs of young people living in the home (as well as learning more about Rosie) and so developed individual response plans for these young people too. So we learnt that doing a 'context' assessment can also lead to new responses for individual young people.

Doing an assessment of the context led to a response plan that involved many agencies, which felt very holistic. One of the agencies involved in this was a local business that provides apprenticeships. An unexpected bit of learning from this was that businesses doing apprenticeships make great partners. This is because they already understand (and hopefully, like!) young people and are familiar with safeguarding.

Finally, we learnt that getting young people involved in conversations about their own safety is a brilliant idea! The young people living in the home came up with some excellent suggestions and helped to make the work more sensitive to their rights.