

Creating a new child protection conference process

This case study is about how a new child protection conference process led to a safeguarding plan that was better at targeting the exploitation experienced by a young person. The police raised significant safeguarding concerns about child criminal exploitation for a young person called 'Jack' (aged 14), and his siblings. Jack had been very seriously injured because of his links to a group thought to be involved in serious violence. While Jack was in hospital, the family were moved to an emergency temporary home. Jack's workers realised that he needed a child protection plan that could target the harm he was facing within his community.

What was the response?

A new way of running child protection conferences was being tried in this area - for children experiencing harm in the community.

Before the conference, partners who knew Jack were asked to fill in a Contextual Safeguarding report template. This was to help the chair understand the risks that Jack was facing in the community and what support he might also need within his family.

What were the challenges?

One of the options that was looked at was to move Jack and his family to a new home in a safer place, but the council did not have a permanent home like this for them to move to. Even the temporary home found for the family was later found to be unsafe, causing Jack and his siblings emotional harm, as well as not mitigating the high risk of Jack continuing to be criminally exploited.

Another challenge was getting all the agencies to give the right information for the meetings, on time. For example, not having the right information from the police made it hard for social care to make a decision about whether the family were safe to go back home to live. They had to stay in the temporary home which wasn't safe and a long way from their community and friends.

Jack's child protection conference looked separately at issues in the community and his support needs at home. This was helpful because:

- Workers could create different child protection plans for Jack and for his siblings that matched the different levels of risk they faced. People at the conference agreed that Jack was at risk of child criminal exploitation and an ongoing risk of serious violence. They also thought that the impact of the harm Jack was facing in the community was causing emotional harm to his siblings
- A safety plan was put in place for while Jack was in hospital. To make the family safer in the short term, they were found a temporary home outside of the area
- Jack's plan included how he could get emotional support from his father and extended family, following his attack
- When Jack was ready to leave hospital, neither he, nor the police, thought it was safe for him to go back to his home community. There were also worries about whether the place where his mother and siblings were staying temporarily was safe enough for Jack. So, Jack agreed to go to live with someone else in his family
- Later, Jack's mother and siblings did go back to their original home. Jack was then supported to get the social and emotional support he needed from his family and friends, even though he was no longer able to go back and live there

What difference did this make?

Over time, some of the issues in Jack's community of children being exploited, that had led to the violence he experienced, changed. This lowered his risk of harm and exploitation. Jack stayed living with his extended family member, and there were no new worries about criminal exploitation there.

The impact of the harm on Jack meant that he stayed on a child protection plan, to support him emotionally and with his education. Jack's views were taken into account in the safety plan and he settled in a different area to live with his wider family. The child protection plans for his siblings were 'stepped-down' when they went back to their original family home.

After Jack experienced the violent attack, the conference brought together Jack's father and wider family members. This was to support Jack to re-connect with them and get the emotional support he needed at this very difficult time.

What did we learn?

We learnt that we need to get better at understanding the experiences of families when they are unsafe because of criminal exploitation. For example, in this case, moving a family to try to make them safer can also led to other problems, because the new home can in fact, increase the risk. The social care team leading this work now has an action plan - based on the learning from Jack's case - for future situations when young people face violence and child criminal exploitation, to avoid this happening again.

When we run child protection conferences to address harm of this type, its important that all the right agencies are involved, understand their role and are motivated to help. For example, the police didn't have to come to the child protection meetings, but there were some key moments in Jack's situation when they were needed. The team leading this work realised that there needs to be a way to make sure all the right people come to child protection meetings. This is to make sure that the family get what they need when they need it.

Usually, social workers and child protection chairs use single categories to talk about harm in conferences - for example 'physical' or 'emotional'. They also usually think about what needs to happen in a family home to keep children safe. But Jack and his siblings faced harm from more than one category, and the risks to Jack were from outside the home. Also, Jack and his siblings were affected differently by the harm and needed different safety plans. So, this case shows that sometimes child protection conferences need to work with very complex situations and this needs more than one category, to target plans at reducing harm outside the home as well as support within the home and to offer different things to different siblings. Realising this helped the workers involved understand the issues better and this made it easier for Jack and his family to be actively involved in the safety planning because they did not feel they were being held responsible for things that were outside their control.