

exchange

Working together to keep children safe

Editorial

As the end of 2007 approaches, all LSCBs in England and Wales can reflect on a period of significant change and heightened activity. Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands have also been working hard to prepare for developments in their jurisdictions in 2008.

For this reason, this issue of *Exchange* is sharing tools, resources and learning experiences that will support safeguarding boards and child protection committees and hopefully avoid unnecessary "reinventions of the wheel".

The article about Norfolk's experience of challenging the BBC also highlights the extension of the role of safeguarding boards, while exploring the challenge of timely and coordinated intervention in settings, which are largely unfamiliar to safeguarding agencies.

Ruth Gardner, NSPCC senior research fellow, shares the interim findings of research undertaken with LSCBs about neglect and emotional harm.

As always, *Exchange* welcomes contributions from colleagues and agencies as a means of sharing learning and seeking safeguarding solutions.

Sue Woolmore,
LSCB adviser, NSPCC

While *Exchange* is a platform for sharing information and experiences related to safeguarding children, the views expressed in *Exchange* do not necessarily reflect those of the NSPCC.



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Challenging the BBC

Caroline Ball, chair of Norfolk LSCB, describes how her board challenged the BBC, as it sought to safeguard children and young people involved in a deeply flawed media project in Norfolk called *Baby Borrowers*.

Few would disagree that the incidence of teenage pregnancy in the UK, the highest in Western Europe, is a pressing social problem. However, the Norfolk LSCB could not agree with a BBC executive producer's view that "any attempt to address the problem should be encouraged", regardless of the potential risks to the children and young people involved.

Making reasonable efforts
Norfolk LSCB discussed BBC Three's

intention to commission Love Productions to make a TV series, which their press release described as a "factual entertainment programme designed to throw couples between the ages of 16-19 in at the deep end by giving them real adult responsibilities, including the care of children ranging from babies to 14-year-olds."

The board was unanimous in thinking that the potential risks had not been considered. The LSCB wrote to the Controller of BBC Three setting out its concerns about the potential risks to the participants and those being cared for. They included the risk of young people

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handling a baby inexpertly or losing control, as well as unnecessary disruption for the babies or children separated from their family and familiar surroundings. We also sought assurance that all child care regulations had been adhered to.

LSCB representatives met the BBC's Executive Producer and the production team, who wanted the LSCB to endorse the programme. The LSCB and Norfolk Teenage Pregnancy Unit again asked the BBC to reconsider and sought confirmation that the BBC had made risk assessments and complied with all associated regulations.

The Executive Producer provided written assurances, and subsequently refused all requests for further information and filming went ahead. We then wrote to the Director General of the BBC, Chairman of Governors and the Rt Hon Beverley Hughes MP, Minister for Children, Young People and Families. She asked the Director of the Safeguarding Group and the Director General for Children, Young People and Families to write to the Director General of the BBC, explaining the role of LSCBs and endorsing the Norfolk LSCB's concerns about the programme.

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Learning lessons

The Baby Borrowers programme attracted considerable local, national, and international media attention and the LSCB chair conducted interviews to clarify our position. It was explained that, as an LSCB, our primary concern and statutory responsibility is the health, wellbeing and safety of children in the area, and that we had discouraged the making of the programme before seeking to ensure safeguards were in place.

However, we noted that the lack of existing networks made it difficult to secure timely support from other LSCBs, appropriate professional bodies and child care voluntary organisations. This meant that the views of one LSCB, however strongly expressed, were easily ignored.

If we are properly to carry out our safeguarding role, we should consider how LSCBs can collaborate speedily to formulate a coordinated response to critical safeguarding issues like these.

For more on the issue, please email Caroline Ball, Norfolk LSCB chair, on: C.Ball@uea.ac.uk or visit the Norfolk LSCB website: www.lscb.norfolk.gov.uk

Safer learning

Safety in Learning is a new training resource aimed at the designated senior person within schools and further education colleges.

The resource consists of a day's training that can also be delivered over two half-days or a series of twilight sessions. There is also a shorter programme - though use of the full version is encouraged wherever possible.

The programme has been designed to support people who may not be experienced trainers, and guidance notes, handouts and a PowerPoint presentation are available to support them. An accompanying film features school staff talking about the importance of safeguarding children, and a series of authentic scenarios suitable for schools, nurseries, primary and secondary schools, and further education colleges are included to trigger more discussion.

The resource can be downloaded from: www.nspcc.org.uk/learningresources



What do sports and witness support services have in common?

Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board has produced a FACT sheet guide on safeguarding.

Sports services and witness support services have been randomly selected from *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)* as services with which



safeguarding boards need to engage. They are just two of an ever-growing list of agencies whose responsibility it is to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Peterborough Safeguarding Children Board (PSCB) recognised that there was a significant task ahead, and that for some agencies these new responsibilities prompted such questions as: "What does this mean for us?"

PSCB decided to develop a FACT sheet, a simple guide to what organisations need to have in place, highlighting relevant reference material and guidance, as well as contact details. As a result, agencies are now asking to meet the safeguarding board for broader discussions and to receive briefings.

**The FACT sheet is available from: www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform
For more information, please email Judy Jones, policy officer on: judy.jones@peterborough.gov.uk**

Less is more

When Wigan LSCB decided to review their procedures in the light of the revised *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)*, they contacted NSPCC Consultancy to work with them.

"There have been many changes over the past few years in how organisations discharge their safeguarding responsibilities, but one constant remains: the production of detailed child protection procedures is fundamental to agencies intervening effectively," explained Sean Atkinson of Wigan LSCB.

The board decided to revise its procedures with the assistance of Tom Narducci, NSPCC senior consultant, to provide a focus for their timely completion and a "critical friend" perspective.

The key factors in delivering on time were a tight project plan, a small reference group working on each stage, and careful consideration about how to consult more widely when needed. Inevitably, such a process highlights opportunities to reflect on best practice and the expertise provided was a useful guide in this.

"A major consideration for us in making these procedures effective was that they must be concise and user-friendly. The old 'less is more' maxim was applied, with most discussions about what could be excised rather than what



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should be included. Most importantly, the end result is satisfaction that procedures are in place with the clarity required to safeguard children in Wigan," Sean said.

Tom Narducci added: "Maybe to some, they will seem incomplete since they do not try to instruct in detail what every member of every agency should do.

What I think we have achieved is a document which is based on and refers to the appropriate guidance, and allows the LSCB to state clearly what its expectations are of individuals and member agencies."

The new procedures are available at: www.wigansafeguardingchildrenboard.co.uk

Learning from Wales

The development of common child protection procedures across the 22 LSCBs in Wales has facilitated shared knowledge and action across the jurisdiction - something that will be of particular interest to those in England who are considering ways to promote collaboration between neighbouring boards.

The shared Welsh procedures have been achieved through the work of the All Wales Child Protection Procedures Review Group, which has been meeting on a regular basis since the production of the All Wales Procedures in 2002.

The group's remit is to keep the procedures up to date, clarify any issues and to produce protocols which are appropriate on an All Wales basis.

The group also acts as a platform for sharing good practice, problems and thoughts. The group has made a positive contribution to inter-agency

working and to the development of common practices and procedures across Wales, and individual boards and agencies are encouraged to promote such inter-agency cooperation.

Recently a considerable amount of work was carried out making two sets of amendments to reflect the changes required from the Clwyd, Bichard and Kelly reports and the standards set by the National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services.

Alongside this work, an editorial group was created to lead on a full rewrite of the procedures to reflect more recent significant changes in legislation. Following consultation with all LSCBs in Wales, the new procedures are likely to be launched towards the end of 2007 and will be available online.

Further information can be found on: www.awcpp.org.uk and: www.allwalesunit.gov.uk



Finding a threshold?



New research carried out by the University of East Anglia and the NSPCC looks at professional views on practice in joint work to safeguard children from neglect and emotional harm. Six LSCBs in England engaged in this research and here NSPCC senior research fellow, Ruth Gardner, looks at some of the lessons and recommendations for LSCBs.

This research profiles current challenges and achievements in work with children and families where neglect and associated emotional harm are issues; reviews recent research and theory-based practice development; and provides concrete examples of improvements to joint practice. Interviews were conducted with senior practitioners and managers across police, social care, health and education, as well as holding a seminar with LSCB representatives and academics.

The role of services

The research found plenty of positive practice in response to neglect and emotional harm. There was also evidence of success from various forms of structured tracking, management and intervention, including, for example, detailing the child's day-to-day experience, child care and development checklists and Family Group Conferences.

There is strong research evidence of profound developmental damage caused by neglect. A significant number of

children suffer continuing, chronic neglect and maltreatment.

However, direct work in cases of serious neglect is extremely demanding on practitioners and their managers. Without reflection, clinical supervision and counselling, even competent professionals can become ineffective. The project also showed that, while neglect as a term is a useful shorthand, the official definition is circular and set at a very high threshold.

For these reasons, there is a huge variance in expertise and effectiveness in practice with neglect, with some respondents talking about "near misses" and cases where concerns did not give rise to action. To encourage better targeted and earlier intervention, a number of things can be done.

It's clear that more needs to be made of professionals' expertise and local knowledge. Neglect needs to be broken down into specific experiences and their effects on children. With this more detailed picture, you can identify key areas for action and target vulnerable groups such as infants or children with disabilities.

Developing standards and incentives for post-qualification training in

safeguarding children, specifically joint work on neglect, across all key disciplines, will help to improve communication. You can review the professional guidance, and ensure it is disseminated in an accessible way. Perhaps, for example, a "What to do if you're worried about neglect" leaflet would be useful.

Tackling the problem in the community

The research findings also clearly show that there is a high level of "general neglect" in some communities. There may be young children unsupervised at home or on the streets; high levels of truancy; unwillingness by adults to intervene with children lacking care and control; and high thresholds for agency intervention.

It was also shown that much neglect could be prevented through the provision of the right kinds of child health and safety education for parents. However, some antenatal and primary health services are in crisis, and unable to respond to the Every Child Matters agenda.

For these reasons, LSCBs should encourage debate on parental responsibility and neglect within the community and create the widest possible

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constituency to support this. Try to include, for example, housing, emergency services, private and voluntary organisations, businesses, police and probation, and adult services. Meanwhile, involving young people in planning and evaluation of regeneration projects will help to ensure they are as effective as possible.

At the highest strategic level

Neglect is the largest category of child protection registration in England (43 per cent in 2006). It is also present in many cases registered under other categories, so the true level is likely to be much higher.

It is clear that a collaborative approach is needed to tackle neglect, which in some cases is still seen as a less serious

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form of harm. LSCBs can start by identifying leadership to take forward a cross-agency strategy, agreed at chief executive level, to address both general and family neglect.

An emphasis on joint working will also help. Adult services can play a key role in safeguarding children from neglect; specifically community mental health, alcohol and substance misuse services, and services for adults with disabilities. These and other relevant services should all have functioning protocols for joint work, which should be regularly reviewed.

Equally, you can ensure that each agency has clear, fair and accessible procedures and thresholds for action on neglect.

If you have any comments, queries or best practice examples, please contact Ruth on: rgardner@nspcc.org.uk. The report is being produced at the University of East Anglia and will be available by the end of 2007.

Dates for your diary

The role of the LSCB business manager

Thursday, 6 December 2007

A symposium for LSCB business managers, or those with similar roles and responsibilities, at the NSPCC National Training Centre in Leicester. The day aims to:

- provide support to staff holding these posts
- encourage those in similar roles to collaborate, share ideas and good practice
- examine the need for an organised network to support those working for LSCBs in both England and Wales.

Further information will be forthcoming. Please register your interest with our administrator Dal Munder. Call: 0116 234 7227 or email: dmunder@nspcc.org.uk

Safeguarding Children

Tuesday, 11 December 2007

Children and Young People Now's annual Safeguarding Children conference will be held in Manchester, focusing on practical solutions to ensure your safeguarding strategy is proactive and preventative in protecting all children at risk.

The programme includes:

- Department for Children, Schools and Families address: up-to-date regulatory guidance from Peter Clark, Deputy Director, Safeguarding Group
- child death review panels: know what processes must be in place by 2008
- vetting and barring scheme: guidance from Sir Roger Singleton on how the scheme will work in practice
- focus on acting against bullying.

For more information, please visit: www.safeguardingchildren.com

Looking for conferences and events?

Our free weekly email alerts keep you up-to-date with all the latest news about forthcoming child protection conferences and other events for professionals working to safeguard children.

Register online to receive regular information about future events covering all aspects of child abuse, child protection and child welfare planned by a wide range of organisations.

Are you organising a conference or event? If you would like us to promote your event to a professional audience, email: inform@nspcc.org.uk or to sign up, visit: www.nspcc.org.uk/inform

Equal protection for children?

Unfortunately,
hitting your children does
teach them a lesson



During the summer the Government announced a consultation on the effectiveness of section 58 (s58) of the Children Act 2004. This limits the availability of the "reasonable punishment" defence in cases involving alleged assaults by parents on their children. The Government has now announced that it will retain the law in its current form in the absence of evidence that the law is not working satisfactorily. We do not agree with the Government's view. Section 58 has not improved protection for children as this article demonstrates.

Over the last 15 years, the NSPCC has delivered public education campaigns and lobbying for legal reform to give children equal protection under the law on assault. We consider that, to tackle the violence that some children experience, the law must be unequivocal in the protection it affords.

The NSPCC does not believe that s58 has improved legal protection for children. On the contrary, it has sent parents the message that they have a justifiable right to hit their children.

Putting children at risk

One girl in post-abuse therapy said that she was frightened because her dad had told her: "I can still hit you without leaving a mark". The worker regarded this as a potential disclosure of further abuse and so, with her permission, the worker spoke to her dad. He responded by withdrawing the girl from therapy, suggesting he was afraid of what else she might say about

him. It was referred to the local children's services, but they could not intervene because the alleged actions do not legally reach the threshold either of assault or of significant harm.

The law fails to give professionals working with children and families a mandate for being clear that physical punishment is ineffective and potentially harmful. Yet seventy-seven per cent of practitioners working in Sure Start and children's centres said that "banning smacking" would help them achieve their professional aims.

A law that contradicts best practice

A local authority family centre worker worked on developing positive parenting techniques with a couple whose children were at risk, and she advised them not to use physical punishment. The family then threatened to sue, as legally they can hit their children. The local authority now tells all staff to advise the families they work with that the law does allow them to smack their children. However, this clearly hinders their efforts to help parents find more respectful, positive ways of parenting.

Data from ChildLine demonstrates that children remain at equal risk of physical assault by their parents since the law was modified. It is the third most common reason for children calling - in 2006/07, ChildLine counselled 14,561 children about physical assault, 88 per cent of whom had been assaulted by a family member.

What can you do?

NSPCC representatives on LSCBs have reported that many boards have wished to engage in the debate about equal protection for children and have explored ways of promoting this message. The majority focused on the public education necessary to effect such a cultural shift.

Other ideas for LSCB action:

- Sign up to the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance.
- Ask the Lead Member to champion the issue of equal protection among elected members, in council and on appropriate committees.
- Write to your local MP, expressing the LSCB's support for equal protection for children.
- Release a statement to the local media supporting equal protection for children.
- Make a commitment (eg through the LSCB business plan) to promote positive, non-violent parenting within the local area through service provision (eg Sure Start, schools, health centres).
- Facilitate debate within the voluntary sector (including faith groups) about equal protection. This could be incorporated into the board's 'communication and awareness' function.
- If your board has a website, include a statement about equal protection and the rationale for supporting this.

To read the NSPCC's response to the section 58 consultation, please see the public policy pages on:
www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform

Making a difference to practice

Catherine Hall, nurse consultant, Safeguarding Children with Wakefield District Primary Care Trust (PCT) describes how Wakefield has developed the safeguarding expertise of specific health practitioners.

Wakefield District PCT has been keen to explore the possibility of producing a framework capable of developing individual worker's competency to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities. This also demonstrates the trust's compliance with the Children Act 2004 and *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)*.

A focus group of representatives from across disciplines was set up to look at a variety of competency frameworks. Due to its straightforward approach the Intercollegiate competency document was overwhelmingly favoured for use. This was also used to write the training plan for 2007, allowing practitioners to validate their training and competency expectations.

In order to develop and implement such a far reaching and significant change to the children's workforce, the focus group set up a working party and steering group.

In conjunction with the clinical governance team, the working party developed a traffic light system for demonstrating levels of competency, working on the basis that each criterion being assessed has an assigned level of achievement. For example, a practitioner who is fully competent in a criterion will be green, whereas a practitioner who has significant development needs will be red. An action plan for achieving green will then be jointly written and agreed by the



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Several professionals have described "eureka" moments.

practitioner and assessor. This process allows the organisation to benchmark the workforce's level of competency.

The steering group consists of managers from a variety of disciplines, ensuring organisational commitment and sign up.

The impact of the process is already being seen in a number of areas. The workforce is articulating increased safeguarding confidence and allied health professionals have been able to express their important role in safeguarding children. Several professionals have described "eureka" moments when they fully

appreciated how their experience of working with families fitted into the overall picture.

Most importantly, in our view, Wakefield children and families will have a guarantee of the competence of the workforce, whose confidence and skills enable it to deliver a better service.

To view the Intercollegiate competency document on Safeguarding Children and Young People: Roles and Competencies for Health Care Staff, Department of Health April 2006, please use the search facility on: www.rcm.org.uk

For further details, please contact: catherine.hall@wdpct.nhs.uk

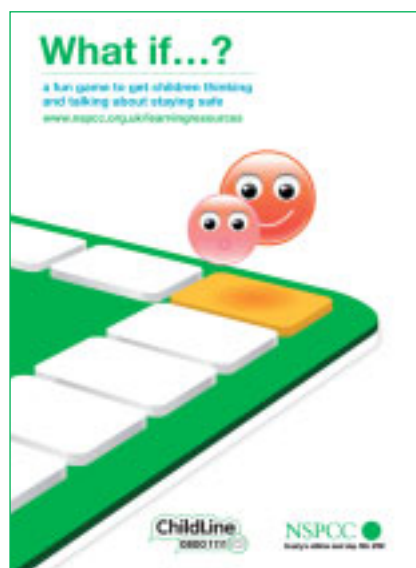
What if...?

Launched in August, *What if...?* is an online tool for practitioners involved in therapeutic work with children between seven and 12 years.

Working in a Family Support team, practitioner Jason Loffman developed the original board game in an attempt to find ways of enabling children to recognise what their thoughts and feelings meant - for example, to understand the difference between the fear generated by a theme-park ride and the fear prompted by a situation that might threaten their wellbeing - and what to do to stay safe.

As well as drawing on children's familiarity with computer games, the online version also gives practitioners the flexibility to adapt the *What if...?* scenarios to the needs of the children with whom they are working. Challenge cards provide some fun as children journey across four levels of board, collecting tokens along the way, which are shown on a printable, personalised certificate at the end.

For further details of the game, please visit: www.nspcc.org.uk/whatif or go to: www.nspcc.org.uk/learningresources for information about other child protection learning resources.



Making communities safe

Lord Laming's report described community groups as eyes and ears, especially for hard-to-reach children and concluded that the support and protection of children is best achieved when statutory services work in close association with community-based groups. Alan Coombe, a policy adviser at the NSPCC, describes a new safeguarding toolkit, and invites LSCBs to use the new resource (available to them without charge) to engage with the community sector.

Three-quarters of school-age children attend clubs or other organised activities outside of school. There are at least 35,000 parent and toddler groups not receiving the same levels of support and access to training as staff working in more formal pre-school settings.

The Safe Communities Project aims to reach out to organisations working with some of the most disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups of children and young people.

The project aims to enable local community organisations to put safeguards in place to prevent the abuse of children and young people, and ensure that there is someone with the confidence, knowledge and skills in every community-based organisation to act. It also encourages voluntary and community

organisations to integrate keeping children safe into local inter-agency safeguarding arrangements, and influence safeguarding policy and practice nationally, so that it becomes the accepted norm that all organised community activities for children and young people have essential safeguards.

The project promotes the use of a new resource: Safe communities - a toolkit to protect children and young people. The toolkit, available in English, Punjabi, Urdu, Bengali and Welsh, contains:

- a step-by-step guide to running a safe organisation
- a DVD, explaining what is meant by abuse and how we can stop it

- two EduCare programmes (courses on safeguarding children)
- booklets enabling children and parents to check out the safety of a group or club.

The resource is available to community groups and local agencies in three pilot areas - Brent, Birmingham and Denbighshire - and across England and Wales via grant makers and umbrella organisations.

LSCBs are also encouraged to use this new toolkit and therefore a pack has been sent by the NSPCC, free of charge, to every LSCB in England and Wales. For more information, please visit: www.nspcc.org/toolkit or email: toolkit@nspcc.org.uk or phone the support line: 0116 234 7253.



Sharing learning

At a recent LSCB briefing event, delegates expressed the unanimous view that it would be very helpful if LSCBs could share their experiences of ascertaining the wishes and feelings of young people in the work of their board (both the successes and challenges) with other areas, so that pitfalls do not have to be repeated and good practice can spread.

Exchange will be pleased to provide a platform for sharing this learning. If you would like to contribute, please contact Sue Woolmore on: swoolmore@nspcc.org.uk

To discuss the NSPCC's contribution to your LSCB or ACPC, please contact:

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Cruelty to children must stop. FULL STOP.