

Plymouth Child Safeguarding Practice Review: Learning on a Page Young Person A

Young Person A's Lived Experience

Young Person A lived with their mother and father during the early part of their childhood. Throughout this time, there were worries about the care of Young Person A in relation to neglect and domestic abuse. Young Person A's mother struggled with drug and alcohol use and both physical and emotional health.

Young Person A's parents separated and following a period of child protection planning they went to live with their father. Whilst still a small child Young Person A's mother was diagnosed with a life limiting disease. This is really significant for Young Person A as they could inherit the condition.

In 2012 Young Person A engaged with CAMHS following a referral from school because of a self-harm incident. Support was offered including art therapy and family support. This wasn't accepted consistently by father but when they did engage the support had some positive impact.

In 2013, when aged 9, Young Person A disclosed they had been seriously sexually assaulted by a family friend who was later jailed for the offence. During 2012 – 2020 Young Person A needed treatment and support for eight further episodes of self-harm. Each episode saw an increase in severity and treatment needed with family tension high and father struggling to cope.

The period of 2018-2020 saw a particular escalation in self-harm for Young Person A alongside them exploring their gender identity. In 2018 they were found on a bridge and taken home by police. In 2019 they overdosed on medication and needed hospitalisation. In 2020 they overdosed on medication again and on this occasion, Father discharged Young Person A from hospital.

When Covid restrictions started in March 2020 support to the family continued by video therapy and telephone support. With Young Person A sharing they were feeling the impact of a lack of social contact.

In May 2020 aged 15 Young Person A tried to take their own life by hanging themselves. Members of the public intervened and following some time spent in hospital made a full physical recovery.

At the time of writing this briefing in April 2022 Young Person A is being supported in the care of the local authority. They've developed skills to help understand their mental distress and seek support where needed. Young Person A feels more settled, happy and relaxed and is looking forward to a career in animal care.

What we Learned from Young Person A

The voice and lived experience of children & young people: Young Person A experienced a number of adverse childhood experiences and trauma but these didn't influence the planning and decisions made for and with them. Young Person A's voice was not at the centre of agency assessments or interventions despite the fact they were showing how they felt through their self-harming behaviour. Using a **trauma informed and responsive** approach all behaviour can be seen as a form of communication. Young Person A shared they felt they were treated like a criminal at times and they weren't listened to.

Trees, maps and chronologies: The use of **family trees** (genograms) and **support network maps** (eco maps) can really help gain a picture of who is in a child or young person's life, what those relationships are like and what support they have. As a tool they can help with support and safety planning. For example Young Person A had a close and trusted relationship with their grandfather but he didn't feature in the support plans made. Similarly Young Person A's brother was also exposed to the challenges within the family but the impact for him was unclear.

The importance of **trusted relationships** is central to supporting positive outcomes for children and young people. Young Person A was able to develop such relationships with their youth worker, education setting and voluntary sector therapy service. During these periods of engagement Young Person A's emotional well-being was more effectively supported.

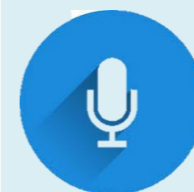
Another important way of understanding what life is like for a child or young person is through a **chronology**. As an on-going record of significant events, impact, actions and outcomes they support emerging themes and patterns and can bring hindsight into the moment.

Taking a multi-agency approach: Agencies involved with Young Person A responded to the presenting issues in isolation. This meant the support offered lacked a multi-agency co-ordinated approach which didn't fully understand Young Person A's family, home life and needs. Young Person A's self-harm was responded to but could have benefited from a wider multi-agency safeguarding approach.

Young Person A was assessed by children's social care as needing support through a child in need plan but this was declined by father. A more **analytical and restorative approach** that offered sensitive challenge to father would have been helpful as it's likely that a multi-agency safeguarding plan could have managed and offered the breadth of services to support Young Person A's sense of self and emotional well-being.

Learning into Practice for Young Person A

Be the Voice of the Child: Ask yourself:



- Do I understand what life is like for a child or young person?
- Have I fully understood how their experiences have influenced their current circumstances?
- What is their behaviour trying to tell me?
- Is the child or young person's voice recorded in anything I write about them and shows how this has been considered?

If you manage or supervise others then explore these questions with the people you support. This can help ensure the voice of the child and their lived experience is central to the help provided.

Get Mapping: A picture can be worth a thousand words so **get mapping** and consider how you can use genograms, eco maps and chronologies in your work.



You might already do this but if not think about how you can include these in your processes and ways of working.

It's more than just doing a map or chronology though...it's about taking a look at what they are telling you about a child, young person or family and using this to inform your future support.

Talk to your supervisor or manager and explore together what a map or chronology is telling you. As a supervisor or manager you may be able to see something different, help identify patterns and place a child or young person in the context of their wider world/family circumstances.

Think Multi-Agency: Sometimes when we are so focused on providing our own agency help we can forget that we are part of a wider system of support. Children, young people and families often benefit more when we all work together in a co-ordinated way that helps build support. **Ask yourself:**



- Who else is/should/could be involved with the child/young person and family?
- Are we all working together and could this be in a more co-ordinated way?
- If parents decline support, including children's social care child in need support, have they/can they be encouraged and sensitively challenged to work with the proposed help?

In Plymouth the way we come together to support children, young people and families is called **Building Support. For more information on this approach [CLICK HERE](#)**

To read the full report on Young Person A please [CLICK HERE](#)