



Learning & Improvement

Briefing 3 - October 2014

Learning from a Case Review

A case was recently reviewed by an Independent Reviewer regarding a family in Worcestershire. There were a number of serious concerns including domestic abuse, neglect and emotional abuse. In addition, one of the children was removed from mainstream schooling to be electively home educated. There was a period of time when the children, who were subject to CP Plans, were being given the opportunity to talk to professionals but felt unable to do so because of the domestic abuse they were experiencing. The full extent of the ongoing abuse was not revealed by mother or children due to the very extreme level of coercive control being exerted by the other parent who was monitoring phone calls and movements of family members. The Independent Reviewer met with the mother and children involved to obtain their perspectives and the points below reflect some of the key issues to emerge:

Firstly, believe what the victims are telling you insofar as this aligns with what other evidence is present in terms of domestic abuse within the relationship. In this case, there was domestic abuse from the outset, however, the mother was minimising the abuse, which is typical of victims of domestic abuse. This should always be a consideration in cases such as this. The mother was a victim and all of her actions should have been viewed in that context. Although it is fair to say that no one could have fully anticipated the level of control that became apparent.

Secondly, create an environment that encourages disclosure. There is a necessity for victims to have confidence that they will be safe when they do begin to disclose their experiences. The wrong response can prevent a victim from disclosing abuse again for some time. This safety and ability to disclose was created for one of the children by the neighbour and later the mother and another of the children when they felt assured that they would be safe from the mother's partner.

Thirdly, understand what support is available to the victim. Ensure that when a victim has disclosed domestic abuse that you know where to signpost or refer the victim so that they can continue to be safe. Many victims will retreat after the initial disclosure and sometimes you may have only one opportunity to provide this detail. The mother stated that she is now aware of the support available, but if she had been made aware of this some time ago, she may have made earlier disclosures that would have benefitted her and her children.

Further learning and resources to support improvements in practice can be found overleaf.

Worcestershire Safeguarding Children Board

Key Themes	Learning Points	Resources
Domestic Abuse	<p>Understanding the dynamic of coercive control within domestic abuse and the impact it has on victims.</p> <p>Question what you are being told.</p> <p>Be aware of services and support for victims of domestic abuse.</p>	<p>WSCB Domestic Abuse e-learning package</p> <p>Worcestershire Forum Against Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence</p> <p>http://www.womensaid.org.uk/</p>
Elective Home Education	Lack of understanding from agencies about extent of powers to monitor children	Worcestershire County Council Elective Home Education Policy
Communication	<p>Ensure that everyone is routinely involved in discussions and plans including Housing Associations and local neighbourhood Police Officers.</p> <p>A clear distinction should be made between anonymous information and sources who wish to remain unidentified</p>	WSCB Information Sharing Resources
Professional Challenge	Where agencies have concerns and feel that they have not been listened to they should continue to report new concerns and utilise WSCB's Escalation Policy.	WSCB Escalation Policy
Working with aggressive and controlling parents	Be aware of the potential for control and seek to conduct discussions in neutral appropriate areas.	Working with violent, aggressive and hostile families

Other messages from the Case Review

- All agencies should be able to access records within their agency, which indicates that there has been a child protection history.
- Practitioners should be aware of the influence and pressure that can be exerted when professionals and clients reside in close proximity within small communities.
- The voice of the child may be heard through the community, friends and neighbours. Efforts should be made to hold face to face meetings with key people if appropriate.