

A Briefing from the Joint Learning Review

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Background:

Harry was born with foetal alcohol effects which caused learning problems, taken into care at 5 years old and diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder in 2007. Prior to 2013 Harry and his three siblings lived in a neighbouring authority where they became looked after children following physical and sexual abuse.

The family moved to Northumberland in October 2013 and following allegations that the legal guardians were physically abusive, Harry and his siblings were taken into care. Harry was subsequently separated from his siblings and experienced multiple placement breakdowns.

Harry lacked stability from birth, and this continued throughout his life. Before transition to ASC Harry had experienced 18 placement moves and did not have a relationship with a consistent care giver throughout his childhood. There were limited opportunities for Harry to form secure attachments and trusting relationships. It is likely that this had a significant impact on Harry's capacity to engage with services and accept help and support from practitioners.

Following a 5 month custodial sentence Harry was placed in approved lodgings where he lived for 12 days before his death by suicide in 2021.

Concerns:

Substance misuse, mental health, and abuse from those caring for him were significant concerns shared by professionals who worked to support Harry.

Harry's siblings shared the same concerns and said that it was clear to them that Harry would eventually come to harm and they questioned why more was not done to support Harry.

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Key Themes from the review – good practice and key learning points were identified within each:

- Understanding of Harry's lived experience, identification of needs and vulnerabilities
- Trauma – knowledge, understanding and response of agencies
- Capacity and consent – refusal to engage and challenge for services to support and intervene
- Housing – providing a stable base for young people with complex needs and unresolved trauma
- Transitions, physical, emotional, practical and specifically between children and adult services

It was noted in the review that each theme had an impact on the others, and the learning identified in one area has the potential to influence practice in all.

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Good Practice (from the themes above):

- Key practitioners had a good understanding of Harry's lived experience and there was much evidence of multi-agency collaboration in response to identified needs and vulnerabilities.
- It was acknowledged in most agency reports that staff used a trauma informed approach and that Harry's pathway plan and youth justice asset plus assessment involved all elements of Harry's needs and reflected the impact of past trauma.
- Professionals worked constructively to respond to an ongoing series of crises
- Many professionals attended a strategy meeting in August 2020 such was the level of concern for Harry's safety and wellbeing. All multi-agency processes were used (MAPPA, Channel, Safeguarding)
- Housing services demonstrated commitment and tenacity to safely house Harry and support him in his tenancies, even when his presentation became increasingly challenging.
- Adult social care was involved for 9 months before Harry's 18th birthday, there was a clear transition process between youth justice and adult probation. The professional accountability meetings oversaw these transitions and Harry had an advocate who made sure his voice was heard.

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Key Learning (form the themes above):

- Harry was telling professionals that he was using substances to manage difficult emotions. It is important to assist young people to understand the causes for their behaviour and address these to have a realistic opportunity for change.
- Early identification and response to trauma experienced by children in care will reduce the challenges experienced by care leavers due to unresolved trauma and relieve pressure on adult services.
- Mental capacity assessments should include consideration of information provided by family members and the cumulative impact of what may appear to be unwise decisions.
- Close collaboration between housing providers and mental health services is required when young adults with complex needs and mental health vulnerabilities require support to maintain accommodation.
- When young people leaving care are provided with good quality accommodation and appropriate support this will assist a positive transition into adulthood and increase stability.
- When professionals are aware of the legal frameworks for children and adult services, they will have a clearer understanding of the role and responsibilities of practitioners and agencies and increase knowledge and confidence to provide appropriate support.

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Recommendations:

The Safeguarding Partnership seeks assurance that:

- Policy, procedures and training on listening to the voice of young people and vulnerable adults includes the importance of understanding behaviour as a means of communication.
- The C.A.R.E Northumberland approach continues to be implemented and embedded across services, and the impact of the improved response to adversity and trauma across children's and adults services is evaluated.
- Policies and guidance for the implementation of mental capacity assessments are explicit about: (i) considering the views of family members and other relevant parties, (ii) use of formal recording pro forma and review of decisions, and (iii) following a pattern on 'unwise decisions', consideration is given to specialist assessment regarding executive function.
- Housing professionals working with young people leaving care have access to advice from mental health services to enable them to understand presenting behaviour and provide appropriate support.
- Transitional safeguarding training for children and adult services.....for staff in children and adult services the better understand the roles both play in safeguarding young people through transition, and
- The ASC Transition Policy and Transitional Safeguarding protocol to be embedded across children and adult services and to ensure the principles of transitional safeguarding are implemented and embedded in practice.

Further information and resources:

- Northumberland Safeguarding Adults Policy and Procedural Guidance incl. Transitional Safeguarding Protocol: [Northumberland Safeguarding Adults Board Procedures \(proceduresonline.com\)](http://proceduresonline.com)
- 39 Essex Chamber: Guide to Carrying out and Recording Capacity Assessments: [Mental-Capacity-Guidance-Note-Capacity-Assessment-January-2022.pdf \(netdna-ssl.com\)](http://netdna-ssl.com)
- Oregon Health Authority: What is Trauma Informed Care?: [Microsoft Word - TIP_ What is Trauma Informed Care \(TIC\).docx \(traumainformedoregon.org\)](http://traumainformedoregon.org)
- C.A.R.E. Northumberland Animation: [Caring about Adversity, Resilience and Empowerment \(C.A.R.E\) in Northumberland - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

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