

LEARNING LESSONS

Child J

ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE

The NSPCC have produced a paper called Teenagers: Learning from case reviews

The full document can be accessed by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.nspcc.org.uk/globalassets/documents/information-service/case-reviews-adolescents-teenagers.pdf>

They suggest that suicide or attempted suicide of teenagers was the most common type of incident which prompted a review within this age group; often amongst teenagers who had experienced years of abuse or neglect.

The main theme coming from the reviews is the difficulties of working with teenagers who can be perceived as able to look after themselves and their vulnerabilities do not become the focus of intervention. Too often addressing the problematic behaviour takes priority rather than recognition that the young people are vulnerable and in need of protection.

Important learning for organisations and practitioners includes some of the following:

- Listening to young people and hear what they are saying to you and take it seriously.
- Early intervention for children missing from education; be persistent and proactive in understanding the issues for individual young people and make appropriate provision.
- Consider nominating just one practitioner to work with the young person in order to build up an effective relationship; this can require persistence from the professional and it is important not to give up.
- Help young people to access the services they need; don't be put off by failure to attend and withdraw the service. This is particularly important when there are issues affecting the emotional and mental health of young people.
- Practitioners need to understand the risky behaviours young people are participating in and be aware of emerging issues such as on-line grooming and sexual exploitation and Novel Psychoactive Substances (new synthetic drugs) and their potential impact on young people and their wellbeing.
- All children under the age of 18 are vulnerable to risk and have needs; because of the earlier lives some young people are more vulnerable than others and regardless of their behaviours and self-determination they are still children in need. Use assertive outreach techniques to engage young people.

Learning from Child J

Background

Child J was 13 years old at the time of his death. On 7th September 2013 his body was found hanged from a tree in woodland close to his home and his school; he had been missing since lunchtime the previous day, it would seem that he had taken his own life. He had last been seen alive at approximately 1:30pm on 6th September as he was escorted from school premises following an assault on a senior member of staff. Although he faced numerous difficulties in his life he was not considered to be someone who would harm himself. No notes or letters suggesting premeditation have ever been found and the coroner recorded a narrative verdict.

J. was the youngest of six siblings. All of the children had been removed from the care of their mother on an emergency basis when J was aged two and five siblings were placed with maternal grandmother and maternal step grandfather. The placement was not originally expected to be long term or permanent however J was eventually placed with grandparents on a full Care Order as Connected Carers. The children and grandparents continued to require significant input in order to maintain the placement. The grandparents were at times, resistant to input from the local authority.

Key Themes

Family members remained physically close, mainly living in the same district. Relationships within the family appear complex; the children in placement had different needs and abilities, and correspondingly required different parenting techniques and levels of professional support. Contact with J.'s mother remained an important factor throughout his life; this relationship was inconsistent and varied between being a source of great comfort and a source of great distress for J.

- J had decided he wanted to reside with one of his older siblings rather than grandparents. There was a period of instability when he moved between his older siblings and grandparents, refusing Local Authority placements when family placements broke down. The long term placement with his sister which he had hoped for, had not yet been agreed by Children's Social Care, but was unlikely to be approved.
- There are significant gaps in the information concerning J's last few weeks; the impact of his time out of Calderdale is not known.
- The relationship with his grandparents and some of his siblings remained fractious and unsettled; he knew that they still believed that he had stolen from his great grandmother who had come to live in the family home.
- He was not having contact with his mother at the time.
- He was worried about his sister who lived out of area and the impending birth of her baby.
- School was posing new challenges as he entered Year 9

- At the time of his death J. would have believed Police were investigating allegations against him of inappropriate sexual behaviour (later unfounded).

This review identified these events as stress factors which J was poorly equipped to deal with. These were serious events, but not unique or dissimilar from previous difficulties he had faced.

Conclusion

There remains the possibility that J may have accidentally killed himself. The final event in his life occurred following a period of great upheaval and change in a relatively short space of time. The serious case review concluded that School and other agencies did not have time to take stock and adjust to the impact of some of these changes and the stress that J. may have felt.

It is known that self-harm is often prompted by a combination of less serious incidents which appear overwhelming when seen together, rather than a single traumatic event.

Multi-Agency Recommendations

- The LSCB to review the West Yorkshire Procedures and Local Guidance where children are missing or are absent, with specific reference to information sharing and the notification of partner agencies.
- The LSCB should satisfy itself that the practice of removing children from the school site is not standard practice in other schools in the authority.
- The LSCB should review the provision of training regarding young people and their use of social media. This training should also be made available to Foster Carers and others who may have substantial contact with young people. Practitioners working with all young people should be sensitive to the likelihood that they are engaged in using social media. There should be a professional curiosity about their online usage and clear advice given about the potential risks, particularly for vulnerable children.
- The LSCB website should include access to a wider range of material for children and young people and professionals on the subject of e-safety
- The LSCB uses Multi Agency Reflective Practice Sessions to encourage professionals to step back and reflect in families in crisis where there are lots of changes.
- The LSCB reinforces guidance around professionals meeting without families, whilst ensuring good practice is followed and families are kept informed throughout processes.
- Practitioners take appropriate action to safeguard children and young people who display self-harming behaviours.