Learning from a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) for Joanna*

*not her real name

SEND US FEEDBACK
Please complete the **short feedback survey** to tell us how you have used this learning briefing.

INTRODUCTION

Joanna was a woman in her 30s. She had a learning disability and lived independently in Bristol.

A Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR) was commissioned by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership (KBSP) after a series of incidents in which Joanna experienced serious physical, sexual and financial abuse.

An independent SAR reviewer, Julie Foster, was appointed to lead the SAR and a review panel made up of 8 different agencies was convened. A practitioners' event was held as part of the review which was well attended by practitioners who knew Joanna.

The SAR focused on systems and how different agencies worked together in order to learn what improvements can be made to protect adults at risk in the future.

The SAR made 15 recommendations for improvements to the safeguarding system across the partnership

ANALYSIS OF THE CASE FELL INTO SIX MAIN THEMES


Safeguarding adults


Mental capacity


Organisational systems


Mate crime


Sex education


Coercion and control

KEY FINDINGS

- There was input from several organisations to safeguard Joanna and maintain her independent living. This proved to be challenging due to the determination of Joanna's associates to exploit and abuse her and due to Joanna's lack of capacity to make the decisions that would keep her safe.
- The SAR found that there were opportunities across the systems which would have accelerated the processes needed to understand Joanna's mental capacity and thus enabled action to be taken to keep her safe earlier.

Key Finding Safeguarding Adults

Initial concerns referred to Adult Social Care Safeguarding Adults Team (SAT) met the threshold for further enquiries but did not result in the multi-agency partnership working to manage risks to Joanna's safety. When this was put in place, all organisations involved shared information and this facilitated a robust approach which safeguarded Joanna.

Some referrals in this case were not considered to meet Section 42 criteria. However, this does not necessarily mean that the individual is not at risk of abuse, particularly if several 'low level' concerns are raised across the partnership. This resulted in missed opportunities to understand the situation in which Joanna was being abused.

Key Finding coercion and control

Coercion and control from multiple perpetrators were factors in this case. This SAR has shown the difficulties faced by police in obtaining evidence to meet prosecution standards for this and other offences from people with learning and communication disabilities. This results in a lack of action regarding perpetrators and allows them to continue to abuse others. It has also shown that there may be several perpetrators operating individually or as a group to cause harm to one person. In Joanna's case, nobody has been brought to justice for the crimes committed against her.

Key Finding Working with individuals with learning disabilities who are difficult to engage

Joanna had difficulty in making decisions to keep herself safe from several harms due to her cognitive ability and due to the influence of her associates who sought to manipulate and control her. This resulted in difficulties for practitioners trying to engage with her for assessment and support. Joanna did engage with some people with whom she had built up trust, but this was not always consistent. Consequently, missed appointments and failure to keep to arrangements created significant delays in completing the formal assessments required to safeguard her. This protracted the period during which Joanna experienced serious harm.

Key Finding mental capacity

Although Joanna was considered initially to have capacity to make some decisions, there was evidence that she continued to make 'unwise decisions' which put her at considerable risk of harm. This is a complex area, with changes to the law imminent. Practitioners' carrying out assessments had appropriate skills, but duty practitioners did not have the benefit of knowing Joanna and greater insight into her understanding and decision-making abilities. This resulted in different outcomes.

Key Finding Mate crime

There was no record of mate crime being identified in Joanna's case, even though Bristol has made significant efforts to understand mate crime and it has been a theme of another SAR.

GOOD PRACTICE

The records regarding assessments and decisions around Joanna's capacity show that there is good understanding of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 across all organisations.

There was good practice in establishing Joanna's capacity in terms of sharing relevant information from different assessments of her abilities and in terms of using assessment tools designed to facilitate Joanna's participation, a laptop, and pictures.

The police evidenced a good understanding of Joanna's learning disability and behaviour. They managed difficult community situations and evidenced good communication between officers and with other agencies. The available assessment tools were used to identify vulnerability effectively.

The Support worker and GP were consistent figures in Joanna's life and Joanna was able to trust them with her concerns. The Social Worker was also consistent once allocated.

RESOURCES

SAFEGUARDING

Safeguarding Adults - Types of abuse

Care and support for adults in Bristol

KBSP Information Sharing Guidance

KBSP Adults Escalation Procedure

Guidance on making a Safeguarding Adults Referral and other training resources

Mental Capacity Resources

Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) Briefing note

MATE CRIME AND SEX EDUCATION

What is Mate Crime?

Mate Crime Professionals' Resources

The Hive Avon offers free sexual health and relationships training for people with a learning disability which has been commissioned by the BNSSG ICB - Impact Projects (thehiveavon.org.uk)

DOMESTIC ABUSE & COERCION AND CONTROL

Information about where you can access support if you are experiencing domestic abuse Support for Bristol Residents - Domestic Abuse

A teaching pack for delivering awareness of domestic abuse to people with learning difficulties

Safe Lives DASH Risk Assessment tool safe-lives-dash-ric.doc

INTER-AGENCY TRAINING

The KBSP offer a wide range of training courses including: Introduction to Safeguarding Adults, Mental Capacity Act Training, and Introduction to Domestic Abuse and Safeguarding Training. Find out more and book your place at KBSP Training.

Find more learning from SARs on the KBSP website.