

Abstract:

This article discusses work done over several years in the London Borough of Havering (LBH) to develop and strengthen services for young people transitioning from children's services to adulthood, care-experienced young people in particular. The impetus for this development work was a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) published in 2017 concerning a care-experienced young adult, Ms A, who was receiving leaving care services at the time of her death at the age of 20. Following a successful funding bid to the Department for Education, LBH made significant investment in transitions services, co-producing these with young adults themselves in conjunction with a work-support mental health charity MAC-UK. This work resulted in the creation of: The Cocoon, a new 'one-stop shop' onsite multi-agency service provision; and the Transitions Panel, a new multi-agency planning forum. This article describes the development of The Cocoon and the Transitions Panel, and summarises the impact of these developments.

Key words: Transitional Safeguarding; transitions; Safeguarding Adult Review; care-experience; leaving care.

Introduction

In 2017 the Havering Safeguarding Adults Board (HSAB) published a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) about Ms A, who took her own life. She had a long history of involvement with statutory support services due to her highly complex needs (Preston-Shoot, 2017). Ms A was a care-experienced young person in receipt of statutory Leaving Care services at the time of her death, that were delivered by the Local Authority through the provision of support from a Young Person's Adviser. Ms A's transition to adulthood and how agencies worked together to meet her needs were critical issues explored in the SAR (Preston-Shoot, 2017).

The SAR report advises on how to improve services delivered to the cohort of young people in similar circumstances, including how they 'would benefit from access to key provision which did not rely on rigid threshold criteria but was more flexible and examined need, risk management and longer term prediction of need and support' (Preston-Shoot 2017, p. 23). Reviewing the multi-agency arrangements made for Ms A's transition, Preston-Shoot acknowledges that her needs were recognised in assessment and support plans, but observes that 'agencies did not fully pull together, that threshold criteria were obstacles, and that communication between agencies may have dropped off once Ms A reached 18' (Preston-Shoot 2017, p. 25). Preston-Shoot also comments that, 'either partnership working could have been improved or that what was lacking was sufficient flexibility for a young person with an extremely complex presentation' (Preston-Shoot 2017, p. 28).

The voices of other Havering young people were also included in the review report. Young people provided their perspectives on the issues central to the SAR. Some young people, who were care leavers stated 'that they would have benefited from more help with their education and job hunting, and more information on benefits' (Preston-Shoot 2017, p. 23), and that not all care-leavers are ready for independence at 18 years of age. Additionally, the importance of care-experienced young people being involved in all decisions made about them was raised as a key message for practice across all agencies.

The recommendations of the SAR provided Havering with a clear direction of travel on its journey of improvement. In response, the HSAB developed a plan through which to implement the SAR's recommendations, which required Children's Services (CS) and Adult Social Care (ASC) to work

closely together. This involved a successful funding bid to the Department for Education (DfE), whereby the Local Authority secured £2.4 million of Innovation Funding (a funding stream available to Children's Services), enabling it to create a transformation programme, referred to as Face to Face Pathways (F2FP). An essential feature of this programme was enabling social workers to spend more 'face to face' time working with young people in care and leaving care (LBH, 2017a). This article discusses the work undertaken in Havering since the publication of the SAR relating to Ms A, to address Transitional Safeguarding issues in transition planning for care-experienced young people.

The Cocoon

The central part of Havering's transformation agenda was the creation of The Cocoon. This is a hub for specialist multi-agency services to be provided to care-experienced young adults, creating opportunities for them to meet with key workers and progress their personal development. Agencies involved in operational delivery include CS, Housing, Police, the North East London NHS Foundation Trust (NELFT), and the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The service was opened on a premises in central Romford in October 2017, alongside LBH's creation of 6 new pathway co-ordinator posts. The Cocoon was specifically designed to enable young people to: develop key life skills; build peer relationships, thereby reducing social isolation; receive support with seeking employment, education and training; access mental health support and systemic therapeutic input; learn how to cook and perform other independent-living tasks; and get help with housing and benefits. The service has been independently evaluated (Bostock et al., 2020).

LBH's approach to developing The Cocoon involved co-production with care-experienced young people. This development work was supported by the mental health charity MAC-UK. Through this engagement work, a care-experienced young person named the space and created the branding. Young people also designed the layout of the premises and led on planning decisions, including selecting the kitchen. This active co-production with care-experienced young people enabled LBH to deliver a provision able to support them to have the best chances in education and employment as they transition out of the care system.

The Cocoon has gone on to receive external commendation from several sources. At the time of its opening, the Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, said of LBH's new provision:

The opening of The Cocoon marks a significant day for children in care and care leavers in Havering. It is a positive and exciting development, which reflects the specific needs of care leavers. [...] It will provide a hub for young people where they can learn key life skills and receive training. But it will also be a place where they can meet with friends and socialise at a time in their lives where they might need the extra support. (LBH, October 2017b)

Visiting the provision after its first full year of operation, the Chief Inspector of Schools, Amanda Speilman, said:

My inspectors were really impressed by the work taking place at The Cocoon when they inspected Havering Council earlier this year which is why I was so keen to visit. [...] This impressive hub has a very positive atmosphere, and the practical support and advice provided is helping care leavers navigate the trials of young adulthood. (Roach, October 2018)

In November 2019, The Cocoon won the Leaving Care Award at the Children & Young People Now Awards.

The independent evaluation lists a number of 'key messages', which include how LBH's transformation work included a focus on 'the environment in which relationships flourish', and how The Cocoon 'was an enabler of more relational ways of working with young people' (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 8). A key feature of The Cocoon's co-productive working model – its Youth Management Board (YMB) – works operationally by meeting monthly to discuss and plan young people's input into areas such as policy and group-based activity (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 35). The work of the YMB has influenced a style of professional practice at The Cocoon that involves 'a commitment to co-produce pathway plans based on mutually agreed goals and co-created solutions' (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 22). The evaluation report cites descriptions of The Cocoon by young people themselves as 'peaceful' and 'relaxed', a 'home from home', a 'safe haven', and 'a chilled environment and there's no stress' (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 35). These comments about The Cocoon can be contextualised within views on transitions expressed by other care-experienced young people (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019).

The evaluation report also quotes an unnamed Havering Leaving Care worker commenting that:

....complete co-production is quite difficult. There is a level of boundaries we need for health and safety for staff but equally for young people because The Cocoon is a place for everybody to feel safe. So what level of co-production is possible in a statutory setting? (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 23).

However, even this careful consideration of the competing demands involved in this work demonstrates that the co-production with young people through which service provision was designed has translated into a co-productive mode of working through which key workers deliver with young people on these premises. In other words, form has helped to shape function and this has driven improved and adaptable service delivery to this group of young people.

Transitions Panel

Another innovation in Havering's multi-agency safeguarding arrangements prompted by the SAR about Ms A was the introduction in January 2018 of a Transitions Panel, an ongoing collaboration between LBH's CS and ASC. This multi-agency discussion and planning forum evolved directly from the SAR recommendations as a way 'to improve the shared responsibility, joint working and collaborative practice' required to deliver effective transitions services' (Dooley, 2019, p. 1). Objectives of this collective discussion and planning include improving not only agencies' level of responsiveness, but also the 'intuition and empathy to care experienced young adults' that informs the delivery of these services' (Dooley, 2019, p. 1). Dooley's conceptualisation of the transitions experienced by these young adults as 'life in motion' (Dooley, 2019, p. 1) invokes a dynamism that acknowledges the volatility of such lived experiences, informing professional approaches to meeting these acknowledged needs through using the Transitions Panel as a vehicle for proactive discussion and planning.

The Transitions Panel meets monthly to enable discussion of three to four cases by a membership drawn from a range of agencies and support services across the local safeguarding partnerships for both adults and children. Its stated aims and objectives include creating opportunities 'through which information is shared to influence safe planning, options considered and a learning environment promoted for all' (Dooley, 2019, p. 2). During the panels held between January 2018 and May 2019, 29 individual cases were presented for collective discussion and planning, with eight of these later resubmitted for review. An indicator of the effectiveness of this work is that, at May

2019, there had been no evictions of care-experienced young people in Havering within the previous 12 months (Dooley 2019, p. 8). This is significant given that one third of care leavers are reported as experiencing homelessness within two years of leaving care (Stein and Morris, 2010) and 25% of homeless people are care-experienced (MacKie and Thomas, 2014).

The seniority of representation on the panel adds to the efficiency of its planning, with particular agencies such as the DWP taking a more prominent role (Dooley, 2019, p. 8). Other key stakeholder agencies include NELFT and the Police. The evaluation of the F2FP programme observes that 'smoother transition to adulthood was enabled by [...] timely decision making by Transition Panel members' (Bostock et al., 2020, p. 24). In addition to increased efficiency in planning, this work has resulted in an increased visibility of care-experienced young people across both multi-agency partnerships and an 'opening up of opportunities that will serve over time to minimise risk' (Dooley, 2019, p. 8). The multi-agency working model of the Transitions Panel proactively enables collaboration between individual member agencies that adds value by promoting integration and driving co-ordinated improvements in the quality of services provided to these young adults. Alongside the local authority's transitions work with young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), the Transitions Panel enables the local authority to consider care-experienced young people's 'likely need' for care and support beyond the age of 18. This contributes to meeting its statutory obligation under section 58 of The Care Act 2014, outlined in chapter 16 of the Care Act 2014 guidance (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020), to provide transitions assessments for all children likely to have future eligible needs for care and support.

Discussion

LBH's improvement journey has seen the transformation of the services it delivers to young people who have experience of the care system moving into adulthood. This has involved much closer working relationships between CS and ASC, as well as other Council departments and many agencies across the local safeguarding partnerships. Young people's participation in the design of The Cocoon has been critical to its success, and to the quality of services delivered on its premises to care-experienced young adults (Bostock et al., 2020). The involvement of young people in service redesign is valuable both to services and to young people themselves (Jobe and Gorin, 2013; Warrington, 2016). There has been much learning from this journey in terms of young people's representation at the Cocoon, but there is more to do. For example, young people are not currently represented in the membership of the Transitions Panel. Given the effectiveness of The Cocoon's YMB, and how other panels used routinely in CS – for example, Fostering and Permanence Panels – include care-experienced young people as independent panel members, similar means could be utilised to achieve engagement in that context. Consultation and co-production with people with lived experience of services takes place in different ways (Arnstein, 1969), and a reluctance of professionals to share power is an ongoing challenge for maintaining a co-production approach (Think Local Act Personal, 2021). At both a strategic level and individual level, young people should be involved in safeguarding, in keeping with the Making Safeguarding Personal (MSP) approach that underpins adult safeguarding practice. As both the Cocoon and the Transitions Panel are services that involve risk assessment and management for young adults, MSP applies. They both have further work to do in learning from MSP to develop their services for young people (Cocker et al., 2021).

How has the development of the Cocoon and the Transitions Panel helped to address the safeguarding needs of care-experienced young people in Havering? Up to now, this article has focussed on transition, and the care and support needs care-experienced young people have as they

move from adolescence to adulthood. Those who are leaving care are likely to have some transitional arrangements made for them when they turn eighteen years and can continue to receive support from the Local Authority until they are twenty-five years old. This support may or may not address their safeguarding needs, although it may contribute to preventing, mitigating or addressing safeguarding risks (Cocker et al., 2021).

Experiences in LBH illustrate the positive impact of a SAR on service redesign and improving outcomes for care-experienced young people. Significantly, this has been achieved by ASC and CS working together with young people, and The Cocoon is an example of a positive response to identified gaps in service provision for care-experienced young people. There are questions about the extent to which this has promoted broader cultural change throughout the system, as Transitional Safeguarding is an approach where whole system change is required (Cocker et al., 2021). Safeguarding adults, and safeguarding young adults in particular, is both about prevention of safeguarding risks, as well as protection when abuse and neglect have occurred, as reflected in the six key principles listed in the Care Act 2014 guidance (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020). In this context, the developments in Havering can be considered as contributing to preventing safeguarding risks through addressing a range of needs of care-experienced young people. These are a key group who may have a range of general safeguarding needs, due to their experiences of care and the reasons why they have been in care, compared to other people of the same age and can therefore fall through the 'safeguarding gap' when leaving care services are provided (Holmes & Smale, 2018). However, many care-experienced young people may not have needs that are eligible for care and support under the Care Act, and as a consequence not be able to access ASC safeguarding services under section 42(2) of the Act (Department of Health and Social Care, 2020). Local Authorities do have broader powers regarding prevention of safeguarding risks, however a lack of resources and capacity can affect the ability of Local Authorities to respond to young people's safeguarding needs. Recommendations from the Ms A SAR highlight the issue of young people appearing not to meet thresholds, suggesting a broader and more flexible approach to interpreting the Care Act and safeguarding adult duties that does not focus solely on eligibility criteria.

Further, the developments in Havering do not address the safeguarding needs of those young people who are not care-experienced. Even with the development of a new Integrated Adolescent Safeguarding Service, the proposed 'cut-off age is 18 years, and this is where gaps could appear. Safeguarding adolescents and young adults is different to safeguarding children, for example, risk may be external to the family, or contextual (Firmin, 2020). Some risk-taking behaviours may be seen as 'lifestyle choices' rather than safeguarding risks, e.g. becoming homeless, substance misuse. Unfortunately, as with Ms A, possible gaps in the system may not be exposed until something goes wrong.

Legislative frameworks that govern safeguarding practices in CS (Children Act 1989) and ASC (Care Act 2014) are often seen as blocks or barriers to addressing safeguarding issues for young people at 18, but Cocker et al. (2021) suggest that this is not the case. Although there are differences in approaches within these two pieces of legislation, there are many similarities. Both use 18 years as the cut-off age, however other legislation, such as the Mental Health Act 2007, and the Mental Capacity Act 2005, do not, so there is flexibility in how local authorities address Transitional Safeguarding issues. That will involve learning from safeguarding practices in CS as well as from ASC. One strength across both safeguarding areas in Havering is the degree of multi-agency working which underpins all safeguarding work. Joint working forums, like the Transitions Panel, provide opportunities for services to respond to challenges, push against boundaries and be flexible, particularly when young people present with complex needs.

The issue of mental capacity and how it relates to young people aged between 16 and 25 is an area requiring further exploration. The SAR relating to Ms A (Preston-Shoot, 2017) found a lack of clarity about assessing mental capacity and best interests. It recommended training for CS and ASC staff on this issue as well as embedding mental capacity screening questions into all screening tools for young people, given that the Mental Capacity Act 2005 applies to all young people aged 16 years and over. Ongoing work is required to monitor and improve consistency of skills, knowledge and competence in this area of practice at The Cocoon and the Transitions Panel.

The challenge for Havering is to capitalise on this and extend the learning from The Cocoon to consider what else might be required to adopt a Transitional Safeguarding approach to other groups of young people who have safeguarding needs in Havering.

Conclusion

Whilst the learning from the Ms A SAR has resulted in many changes within the service, there is still much more to do for care-experienced young people and for other young people who are not care-experienced, so they do not fall through the gap at age 18 (Holmes and Smale 2018). The transitions work that LBH has undertaken has involved many agencies working together with young people to create a new service to support care-experienced young people into adulthood. This will help reduce potential risks of harm that these young people may experience, and can contribute to developing a transitional safeguarding approach that bridges the 'gap'. This learning should be extended and a Transitional Safeguarding approach be considered to support all young people in Havering.

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