

## Editorial:

### **Transitional Safeguarding: Opportunities to improve safeguarding practices with young people.**

We are delighted to introduce this Special Issue on Transitional Safeguarding. This is an emerging area of practice in England for practitioners working in both children and adult services. The Special Issue provides insight and examples of developing practices in this area of safeguarding work with young people.

Transitional Safeguarding is a term used to describe, '*an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children's and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives*' (Holmes and Smale, 2018, p3). Transitional Safeguarding has developed in response to the 'cliff edge' that many young people experience at 18 years where they are no longer able to access children's services safeguarding support and are instead referred to adult services. Their needs may not have changed overnight, but their ability to access services has.

This is not a new issue. In the English context, there is learning from developing transitions services for young people with special educational needs or disabilities, where planning begins at around age 14. This enables children and adults services to tailor education, care and support to meet the individual young person's needs despite the boundaries between services. Health colleagues use Frazer guidelines to assess the age at which young people are able to make decisions about their health needs without the need for parental consent. This acknowledges that young people vary in their knowledge and abilities to make decisions about their health. Some children's services, (e.g. those for care-experienced young people), extend until age 25, recognising that on-going support may be needed into young adulthood. However, we know that services for care-experienced young people have often fallen short compared to young people who have not been in care, who have the support of families and friends. In family life, transition to adulthood is understood as a process, not a single event and the individual needs of a young person are responded to by their families and friends in whatever ways might be required.

Safeguarding has its own challenges. The current safeguarding systems in England are binary: young people under 18 are subject to child protection processes defined by the Children Act 1989, whilst young people over 18 receive a different safeguarding adult response, underpinned by the Care Act 2014. Neither of these safeguarding systems has been designed to meet the developmental needs of young people. Children's safeguarding developed predominantly to address intra-familial harms experienced by younger children (Corby et al., 2012) and adult safeguarding developed predominantly to protect older people and mostly works with adults over the age of 75 (Cooper et al., 2018). In addition, the legal environment is challenging, with young people assumed to have mental capacity at age 16 (Mental Capacity Act 2005). Criminal responsibility begins at age 10 (Children and Young Persons Act 1933, s. 50 as amended by Children and Young Persons Act 1963, s. 16(1)). The age of consent is 16 years across the United Kingdom. However, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 states that domestic abuse can occur to anyone over the age of 16, and it also says that someone under 18 years cannot consent to their exploitation. These differences in age boundaries engender confusion for young people and also create tensions between services aimed to support young people and the people working in them.

The Transitional Safeguarding approach argues for a system change that addresses these legal and policy gaps. This would apply in other countries in different ways, depending on the legal and policy frameworks that govern practice. In some areas of safeguarding practice in England, changes have

been made that acknowledge the nuance and diversity of experience and circumstance of young people to avoid 18 as the 'cut-off' (Cocker et al., 2021a). Our safeguarding systems also require some re-alignment to be able to ensure that young people do not fall through 'the gap' as they get older (Holmes & Smale, 2018; Holmes, 2021). For young people themselves, they are just getting older. The risks and harms they face continue, and their ability to keep themselves safe whilst becoming adults means that the nature of support that is appropriate will change. In parallel, the way in which professionals involve young people in decisions that are made about them needs to be nuanced and negotiated.

It is essential that when we are considering adopting a Transitional Safeguarding approach, work is done together across children and adult services. As editors, we bring together our experience and expertise in children's (Christine) and adults' (Adi) social work and safeguarding in our writing, teaching and training. We aim to model the joint working that we see as necessary to take a Transitional Safeguarding approach forward. Learning from the other and working together has to be core to improving and changing services and systems, people and practice, to transform the ways in which young people can get support to keep themselves safe. This is transferable to other national contexts where approaches to safeguarding children and adults are not conducive to responding to young people's safeguarding needs.

This issue brings together a range of contributions exploring Transitional Safeguarding as a developing area of work, across adults and children's safeguarding practices. Whilst there are initiatives that can be led by one or the other, partnership and learning across adults and children's services is fundamental to challenge current practices and enable the safeguarding needs of young people to be effectively met.

The special issue includes six articles. The first of these is authored by Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice, who coined the phrase 'Transitional Safeguarding'; she has developed an analysis and understanding of what this term means. Holmes sets out the case for why Transitional Safeguarding is needed, and how we might think differently about how safeguarding works and to whom it applies. Her article provides an overview of the six key tenets that should underpin a Transitional Safeguarding approach. Transitional Safeguarding should be: participatory, ecologically and contextually located, developmentally informed, relational, evidence-informed, and have equality, diversity and inclusion considered in every way at every stage. Holmes does not avoid the contradictions or complexities of practice when setting out the case – she concludes that the cost of doing nothing is wrong given the effect that this has on young people's lives and on costs for the public purse throughout people's lives. She highlights that *the interconnectedness of both structural and interpersonal harms requires a highly integrated system of support, not a discrete service governed by age-bound eligibility criteria*. It is this challenge that many of the other contributions to this Special Issue go on to address.

Nathalie Huegler and Gillian Ruch, from the University of Sussex, provide an article that is drawn from their work on an Economic and Social Research Council research project, looking at the role of 'innovation' in social care systems and practices when working with young people who face extra-familial harms. Huegler and Ruch's conceptual paper explores how psychosocial ideas can help us understand concepts such as safeguarding, risk, vulnerability, harm and transitions in different ways. They discuss how, *from a psychosocial perspective, the emergence of Transitional Safeguarding provides an ideal (but not uncomplicated) opportunity to reframe organisational and professional mindsets and render more flexible existing system and service configurations*. Their contribution articulates the ways in which individual and organisational anxieties and defensiveness can affect

whole system service responses and provides us with a challenge and opportunity to embrace this complexity when seeking solutions.

The next four articles are drawn from local practice. Authors demonstrate how local authorities and local partnerships have responded to the challenges of taking a Transitional Safeguarding approach, focusing on a particular area of practice or across the system. These articles illustrate and underline an important factor or feature of Transitional Safeguarding: Transitional Safeguarding is not a model, it is an approach. There is no manual that outlines what Transitional Safeguarding should look like in practice. As Holmes explains in her article, each area can apply the six principles that underpin a Transitional Safeguarding approach to services, systems and practices according to their own local context. Therefore, each area's response will be different and we wanted this Special Issue to show case a range of examples.

This work has emerged following a number of national workshops about Transitional Safeguarding organised by Research in Practice that took place in 2019 (see: Cocker et al., 2021b for further information). When we talk to people all over the country about Transitional Safeguarding, one of the common requests is to share examples of Transitional Safeguarding initiatives in practice. It is also important to say that many places are working hard on their response to this challenge – through the local authority or partnerships. No one local authority, place or partnership has got this 'right' for everyone. Each focuses on what is needed locally.

The paper from Raynor Griffiths (Safeguarding Adults Board Manager in the London Borough of Hackney), outlines how Transitional Safeguarding is being taken forward on behalf of three Partnerships: the Safeguarding Adults Board; Community Safety Partnership and Children's Safeguarding Partnership in the London Borough of Hackney. Building on and across from the Contextual Safeguarding work in children's services, Haringey have begun an ambitious programme of change for adolescent safeguarding. The article describes the processes adopted in Hackney to understand the fundamental safeguarding issues for young people living in Hackney. It presents key findings from a consultation exercise and how these were subsequently used to influence developmental work on Transitional Safeguarding.

Amanda Johnson (Business Lead in the Adult Social Services Promoting Independence Programme Team for Norfolk County Council) and Corinne Avery (Head of Social Care – Adult Learning Disabilities for Norfolk County Council) present the development of the 'Preparing for Adult Life' service in Norfolk County Council. This is a service that does not require people who access it to have 'care and support needs' as defined by the Care Act 2014. Johnson and Avery outline the strategies that were used to develop effective partnership working across Children's Services, Education and Health, showing how a shared understanding and learning enabled a different approach to safeguarding young people to be introduced and embedded.

There are many ways in which practitioners and organisations can learn from current practice, most notably where a young person has died. Where a care-experienced young person receiving social care support has died, a Safeguarding Adult Review (SAR) can be commissioned. The article by Martin Wallace (Safeguarding Adults Board Manager in the London Borough of Havering) and Christine Cocker present the learning and changes in practice that occurred in the London Borough of Havering, following the death of Ms A. This is an excellent example of where Adult and Children's Services have worked together to strengthen support to a group of young people who are care-experienced.

Finally, innovation and change are not only about front-line services. If we are to consider whole-systems changes, then it is important to think about changes at different levels in and between organisations that work with young people. Sian Walker-McAllister (Chair of Bath & NE Somerset Community Safety & Safeguarding Partnership) and Adi Cooper provide an overview of innovation in the strategic safeguarding governance arrangements in Barnes and North East Somerset (B&NES). Using a life-course approach, B&NES merged the governance of its Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB), Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) and Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to create a joint Board, independently chaired by Walker-McAllister. The authors review the impact of this innovation, the influence this is having on practice changes in local safeguarding arrangements and implications for Transitional Safeguarding.

A key challenge raised in all the articles in this Special Issue is the role that young people's participation plays in the development of a Transitional Safeguarding approach and the development of safeguarding services to be able to support young people more appropriately. Involving young people in the design and delivery is an essential pillar of Transitional Safeguarding (Holmes & Smale, 2018) and is explored in the article by Holmes in this Special Issue. Co-producing change has become even more challenging during the Covid pandemic, but remains essential if we are to achieve the outcomes that young people want and need.

Our wish is that this Special Issue raises the profile of Transitional Safeguarding as a practice and research issue, and contributes to an emerging narrative about why adopting a Transitional Safeguarding approach is essential. The examples of practice in this Special Issue illustrate what some places have done and show the progress that has been made. In addition to these four articles that provide examples of local initiatives, the Transitional Safeguarding Knowledge Briefing written by Dez Holmes for the Chief Social Worker for Adults office and other partners (Holmes, 2021) contains further examples of Transitional Safeguarding developments that local authorities and other organisations have undertaken. All of these examples can inspire us to consider how change can be achieved for young people across the sector.

#### References:

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