

CYP Scrutiny Commission

27th January 2020

Contextual Safeguarding Project

Hackney Children and Families Service & University of Bedfordshire

1. Background

Since a successful bid to the Department for Education's (DfE) Social Care Innovation Fund in March 2017, the London Borough of Hackney have been working in partnership with the University of Bedfordshire to jointly develop and implement a whole system approach to Contextual Safeguarding, encompassing both social work practice and wider partnership interventions.

This innovative approach to safeguarding children and young people from extra-familial risk is in the process of being embedded across the London Borough of Hackney's Children and Families Service and partnership agencies, involving large-scale system change. The project is funded to operate in its current form until the end of March 2020.

2. The Challenge

As individuals move from early childhood and into adolescence they spend increasing amounts of time socialising independently of their families. During this time, the nature of young people's schools and neighbourhoods, and the relationships that they form in these settings, inform the extent to which they encounter protection or abuse. Evidence shows that, for example: from robbery on public transport, sexual violence in parks and gang-related violence on streets, through to online bullying and harassment from school-based peers and abuse within their intimate relationships, young people encounter significant harm in a range of settings beyond their families.

Peer relationships are increasingly influential during adolescence, these relationships are, in turn, shaped by, and shape, the school, neighbourhood and online contexts in which they develop. Therefore, if young people socialise in safe and protective schools and community settings they will be supported to form safe and protective peer relationships. However, if they form friendships in contexts characterised by violence and/or harmful attitudes these relationships too may be anti-social, unsafe or promote problematic social norms as a means of navigating, or surviving in those spaces.

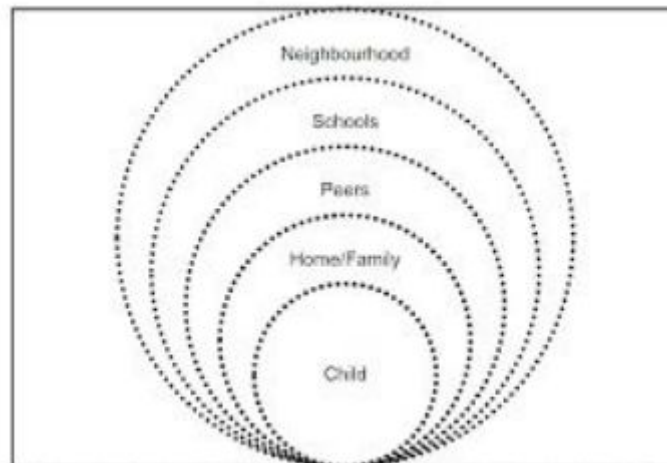


Figure 1: Contexts of Adolescent Safety and Vulnerability| Firmin 2013:47)

3. **What is Contextual Safeguarding?**

Contextual Safeguarding theory was developed by Dr Carlene Firmin MBE to understand, and respond to, young people's experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships that young people form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse, and that parents and carers have little influence over these contexts, and young people's experiences of extra-familial abuse can undermine parent-child relationships.

The approach provides a framework to advance child protection and safeguarding responses to a range of extra-familial risks that compromise the safety and welfare of young people. The approach identifies the need for children's social care practitioners to engage with individuals and sectors who do have influence over/within extra-familial contexts, engaging them in creating safe spaces and recognises that assessment of, and intervention with, these spaces are a critical part of safeguarding practices for which all agencies are responsible.

Contextual Safeguarding, therefore, expands the objectives of child protection systems in recognition that young people are vulnerable to abuse in a range of social contexts.

4. **Hackney Contextual Safeguarding Project Key Activities to Date**

The focus of the Contextual Safeguarding project has been to develop and prototype interventions to safeguard children and their families from extra familial harm, rather than direct delivery as part of a piloting approach. With a longer term focus on embedding Systems Change across the Children and Families Service.

To this end, the Contextual Safeguarding project team has spent two years developing ways to translate contextual safeguarding theory into practice, piloting and testing a range of assessment, intervention and planning approaches.

4.1 **Development and Dissemination of Contextual Safeguarding Tools and Resources**

A range of resources and tools have been developed and published as part of the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding principles, including a revised [Hackney Child Wellbeing Framework](#) (equivalent to a Thresholds document) now incorporating

extra familial risk and an [Assessment and Intervention Planning for Young People at Risk of Extra-Familial Harm Guide](#) has also been produced as a reference document for practitioners across the service (and wider partners) to support them in working with children, young people and families experiencing extra-familial risks. These will both serve as key vehicles to disseminate our learning and the Contextual Safeguarding (CS) approach within the service and with wider partners in the coming months.

An [online toolkit](#) has been developed in partnership with and hosted by the University of Bedfordshire which is being utilised by local authorities and partner agencies across the country. The CS team has also developed a suite of [Toolbox Cards](#) to help practitioners across the Children and Families Service (CFS) in implementing resources and tools developed to support the approach in their day to day work.

A comprehensive communications and engagement strategy was subsequently developed to: disseminate the CS approach; update staff on key revisions to existing Hackney social care policy documents; introduce new tools and resources across the directorate and with partners.

4.2 Piloting CS approaches and Partnership Working

The project has implemented five peer group assessments and produced two peer group intervention plans, reaching approximately 60 children. The team has engaged and supported schools to undertake three school context assessments and supported with interventions such as providing 'Mentors in Violence Prevention'¹ bystander training to staff and students and supporting a review of school safeguarding policies.

An Extra Familial Risk Panel (EFRP) was established in November 2018 (taking over the former process of Multi-Agency Planning (MAP) meetings and pre-Multi-Agency Sexual Exploitation (MASE) meetings) following the work of the Contextual Safeguarding Project, which brings together analysis and develops multi-agency plans for young people at risk of sexual exploitation, criminal exploitation, harmful sexual behaviour, affected by gangs, serious youth violence and modern slavery. Taking this contextual approach, multi-agency plans seek to reduce risk and increase safety within peer groups, school and neighbourhood locations

Neighbourhood location assessments have been undertaken in response to emerging concerns around significant harm affecting young people, resulting in two multi-agency, Context Safeguarding Conference reviews² working closely with partners to develop an intervention plan to reduce harm. This has included changes to the local landscape/layout through work with colleagues in Partnership Tasking,

¹ **Mentors in Violence Prevention (MVP)** is a peer mentoring programme that gives young people the chance to explore and challenge the attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that underpin gender-based violence, bullying and other forms of violence.

² **Context Safeguarding Conferences** aim to provide a coordinated multi-agency response to addressing the risks to vulnerable adolescents in a neighbourhood setting - reducing the risks to a larger cohort of young people and the wider community. Akin to a traditional Child Protection conference, these focus on a particular location (such as a school, or a neighbourhood). Participants include: Safer Neighborhood Teams; leads from community organisations; local businesses; Schools; Health; Area Regeneration and Housing Teams; local youth provision, Hackney Learning Trust; Voluntary and Community Services. Conferences are led by an Independent Chair and framed through a Child Protection lens.

the provision of outreach youth work and activities and engagement of local residents in 'Community Guardianship Training' supporting local people to recognise and respond safely to harm using bystander approaches.

Following concerns raised in the local community around increases in anti social behavior and criminal activity, the team are currently in the process of undertaking an additional key piece of work on a specific location. Bringing together a range of lead agencies to help in information gathering and sharing, planning and assessment activities of the area. A full assessment of the area will be produced at the end of January 2020.

A specific piece of work is currently in development in conjunction with Hackney Council for Voluntary Service (HCVS) and City and Hackney Safeguarding Children Partnership (CHSCP) to cascade a community guardianship awareness for parents across the borough, planning to be launched by March 2020.

The team continues to deliver an Introduction to Contextual Safeguarding Training course, attended by CFS practitioners and representatives from a wide range of partner agencies. To date over 500 individuals have attended the course.

4.3 Current Embedding Plans and Activity

The focus of the project now (to end March 2020) is to embed Systems Change across the Children and Families Service, Hackney Council and with wider partner agencies. A well attended Systems Transformation Group (STG) was established in Summer 2019, comprising management and senior management colleagues in CFS. This forum is being used as the primary vehicle for embedding the approach across the service.

Our embedding approach is also underpinned and supported by a programme to develop Contextual Safeguarding Champions (staff volunteers who will help embed the approach), launched by the Deputy Mayor/Lead Member for Children and Families in May 2019. Contextual Safeguarding Champions are playing a critical role in helping to embed the Project across the service through supporting the translation of this approach into practice and contributing to the development of interventions across each of the CFS service areas. There are currently 34 champions in place in teams and Units across CFS.

Productive partnership working has been integral to the approach and effective relationships have been developed with colleagues in health, the Metropolitan Police Service, Housing, Hackney Learning Trust, Secondary Schools and Academies, HCVS, Community Safety, Adult Social Care, local councillors and Ward Forums. There has been significant successes particularly in terms of new structures being developed with colleagues in Community Safety and through Partnership Tasking, specifically in relation to improved information sharing and coordinating responses to serious youth violence and extra familial risk.

In the short term partnership working is supported through the Contextual Safeguarding Partnership Embedding Forum (CSPEG), established in October 2019 to bring key partners together to clarify and agree roles and responsibilities in relation to effectively embedding the approach across the partnership.

In terms of wider policy developments across the council, there are plans in development to seek corporate policy support to assist with championing and sharing good practice and securing change across the wider council beyond the lifespan of the project (March 2020).

Specific policy developments remain to be followed up going forwards relating to the work of contextual safeguarding, examples include: the role of Housing in responding to critical incidents and identifying a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) in relation to the relocation of at risk individuals involved in an incidence of serious youth violence; the role education can play in reducing the links and impact of school exclusions increasing vulnerability to exploitation and wider extra familial risk.