Safeguarding across Transitions

Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice and Research in Practice for Adults

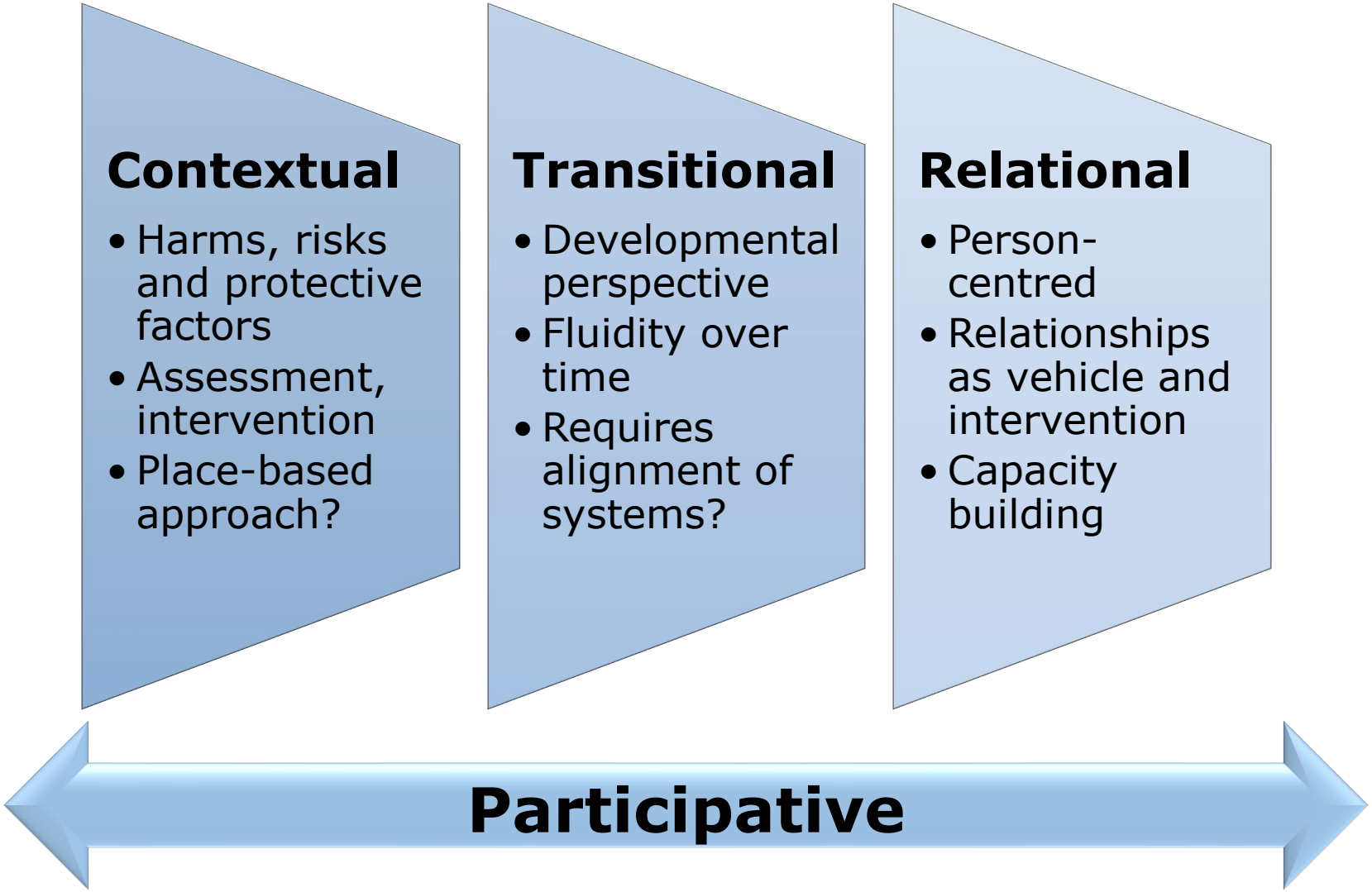
Carlene Firmin, Principal Research Fellow Contextual Safeguarding, The International Centre, University of Bedfordshire

Samantha Keith, Safeguarding Adults Manager, Newcastle City Council

The case for change

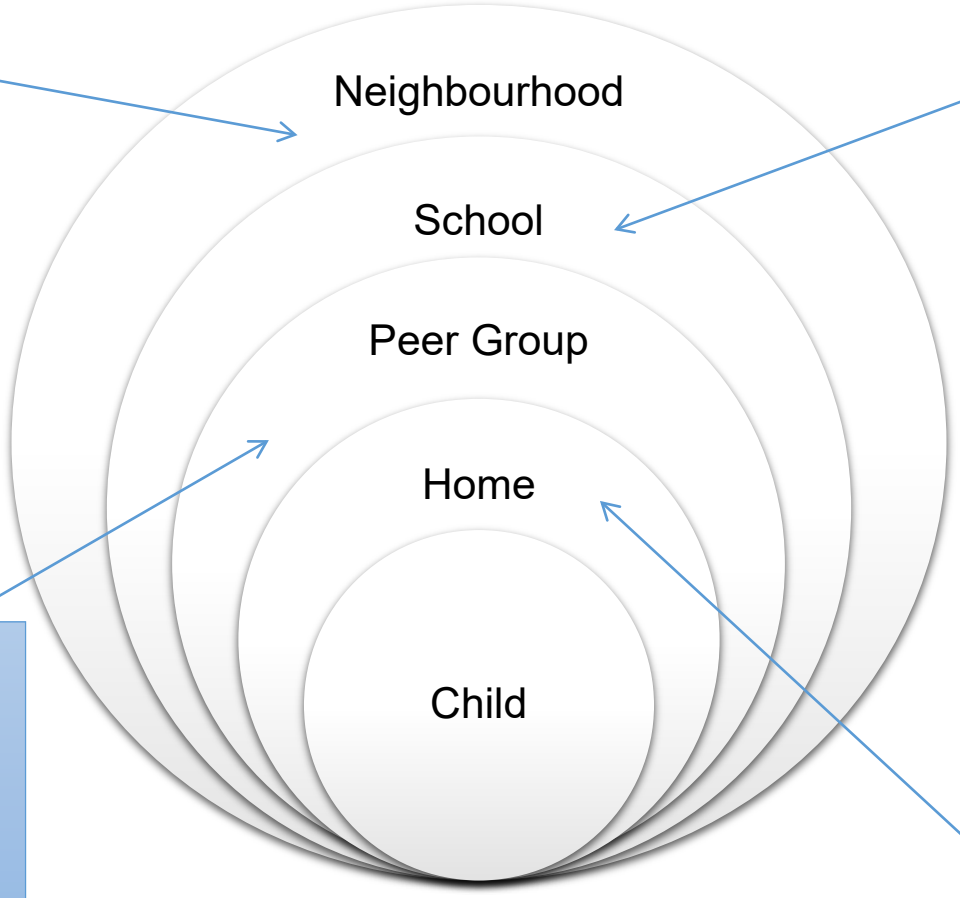
- Adolescents often have **distinct** safeguarding needs, the harms they face - and their routes to protection - are often extra-familial and are underpinned by complex social and biological drivers, and their emerging agency
- Harm and its effects do not abruptly end at 18
- Transition to adulthood is a particularly challenging and vulnerable time for some people, we may need care and support without having Care & Support needs™
- Need to consider promoting **resilience** and their changing **developmental** needs
- There are moral and economic drivers for a reimagined safeguarding system which is contextual, transitional and relational.

If we designed from scratch…?



Why Contextual Safeguarding (1)

Street-based victimisation and grooming
Criminal exploitation routes
Robbery
CSE in parks, shopping centres

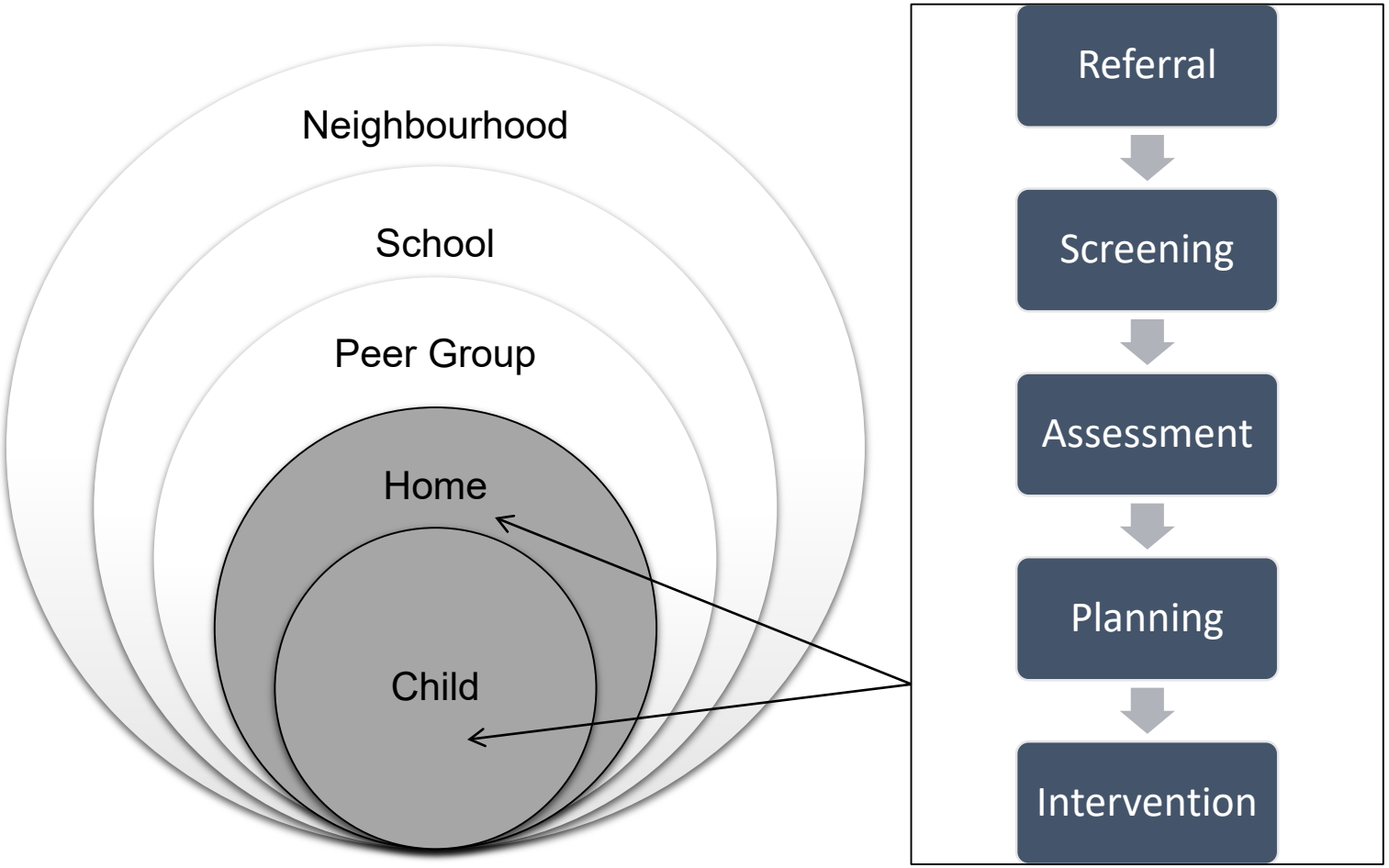


Bullying
Corridor culture
Peer recruitment
Curriculum

Peer association to intimate partner violence
Peer group sexual offending

Domestic abuse
Siblings
Neglect
Parental capacity

Why Contextual Safeguarding (2)



#ContextualSafeguarding

Contextual Safeguarding Network

How: Four domains of Contextual Safeguarding

Domain 1: Target

Seeks to prevent, identify, assess and intervene with the social conditions of abuse

Domain 2: Legislative framework

Incorporate extra-familial contexts into child protection frameworks

Domain 3: Partnerships

Develop partnerships with sectors/individuals who are responsible for the nature of extra-familial contexts

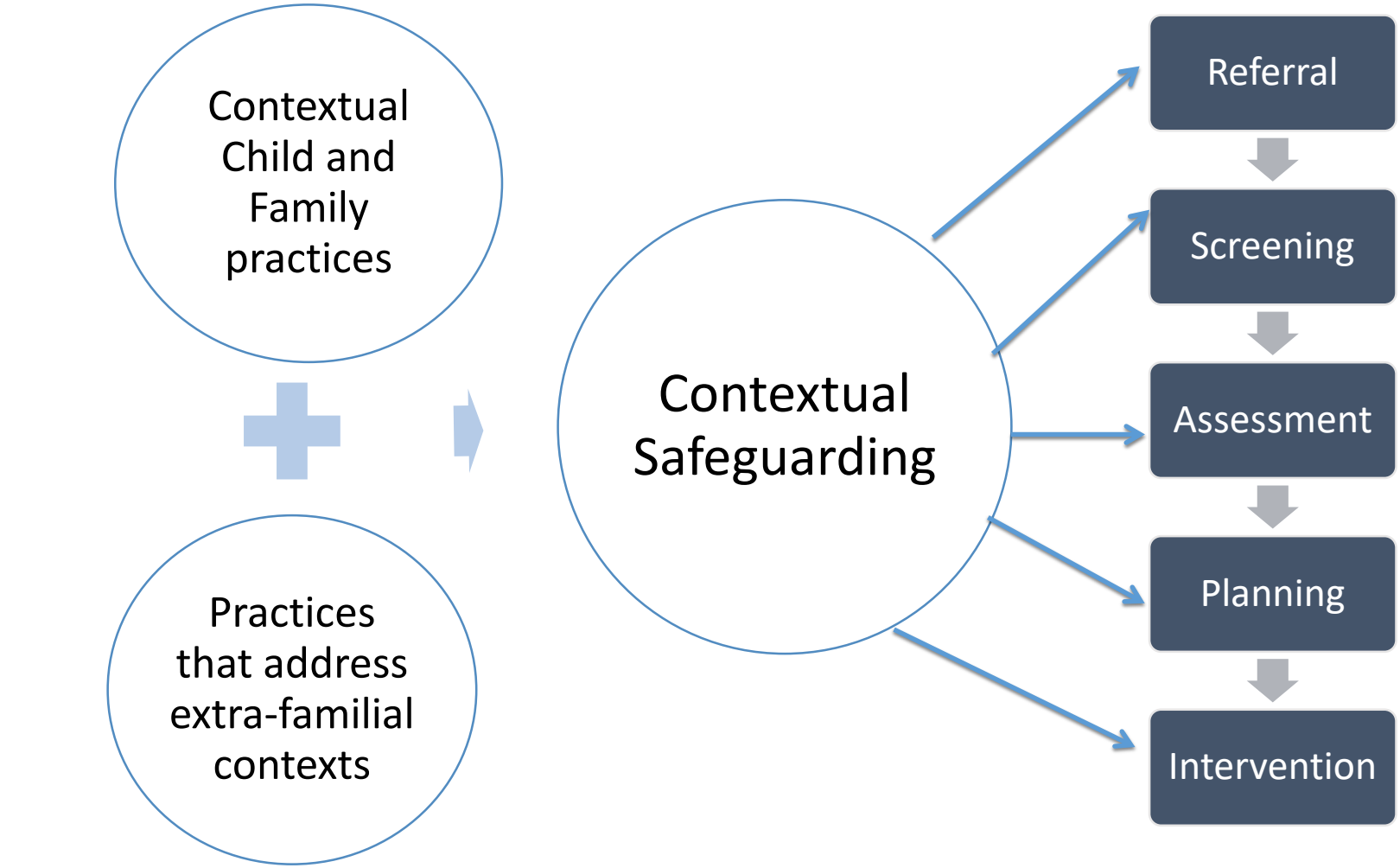
Domain 4: Outcomes measurement

Monitor outcomes of success in relation to contextual, as well as individual, change

(Firmin et al, 2016)

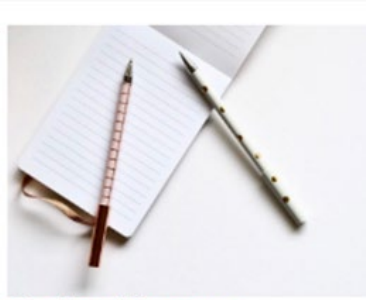
Contextual Safeguarding Network

How: Two-tiered approach



Contextual Safeguarding Network

Innovating in practice – network & test site

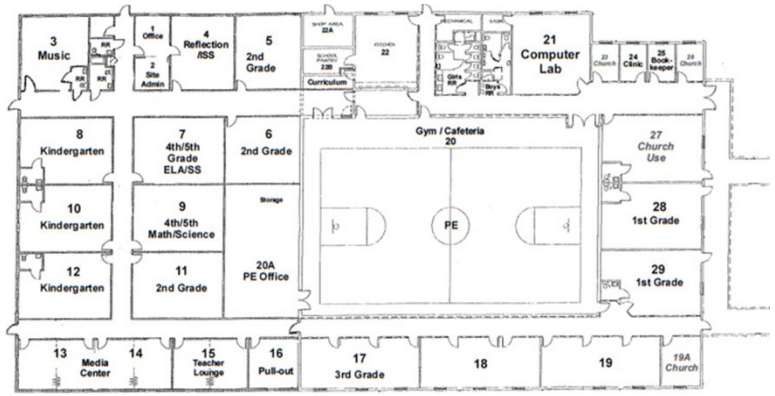


Student Survey

This student wellbeing survey can be used by schools to help understand student experiences of safety and harm. The guidance includes a survey template that can be adapted for different schools and concerns.

<u>Protecting vulnerable homes</u>

- Home identified where peer-on-peer abuse occurring
- Lived in by mother with physical and learning disability
- Lighting and CCTV improved
- Engagement with schools officer
- Peer group engaged through youth service and policing
- Home no longer used for abuse



Contextual Safeguarding Network

<u>Community Guardians</u>

- Australia – urban and rural neighbourhoods
- Community Guardians – Daily reports from litter collectors and police engagement
- Changing landscape – rat runs and increasing visibility
- Changing perception of roles towards recognised guardianship

Transitional Safeguarding - Redefining adolescence

- Some studies into brain development and effects on behaviour show some elements of brain growth – eg development to more mature affect regulation, social relationships and executive functioning - continue into the 20s (Sawyer et al, 2018)
- "An expanded and more inclusive definition of adolescence is essential for developmentally appropriate framing of laws, social policies, and service systems. Rather than age 10–19 years, a definition of 10–24 years corresponds more closely to adolescent growth and popular understandings of this life phase" (Sawyer et al, 2018)
- BUT biological studies to define capabilities of adolescents should be treated with caution, not misinterpreted in reductionist ways (Moshman, 1999).

Transitional Safeguarding

- In safeguarding, binary notions of childhood and adulthood prevail. Learning from SARs and SCRs shows how ineffective transitional planning can contribute to young adults 'slipping through the net' or facing a 'cliff-edge'
- Many of the environmental and structural factors that increase a child's vulnerability persist into adulthood, resulting in unmet need and costly later interventions
- Divergent practice, policy and legislative frameworks can impede a more fluid person-centred safeguarding response
- Resilience, self-efficacy, social connectedness – all key to wellbeing -

I was in care all my life and you did keep me really safe. You wrapped me up tight in bubble wrap… but I'm 19 now and I feel like I can't move my arms

What this can mean for young people / adults

- A YP ensnared in ‘county lines’ may find, upon turning 18, they receive a criminal justice response rather than being recognised as a victim of criminal exploitation.
- A YP may have learning difficulties and/or mental health difficulties that make them more vulnerable to abuse, but as a young adult experiencing sexual exploitation they may not be deemed eligible for a safeguarding response unless they have a formal mental health diagnosis or diagnosed learning disability.
- A YP subject of a child protection plan but does not enter care may find that support stops abruptly as they turn 18, despite their experiences of maltreatment rendering them no less vulnerable than their care-experienced peers.
- A care-experienced YP experiencing domestic abuse and experiencing poor mental health may be offered little or no support for her own safety unless her circumstances become critical; upon becoming a parent she may find that children’s social care deem her child to be at risk.

Money matters

- Financial constraints facing local areas make it difficult to countenance any non-statutory activity
- Investing in preventative and recovery-oriented work to promote people's safety and wellbeing can play an important role in avoiding the costs of later intervention
- Evidence from the UK and international contexts suggests that failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems persist and/or worsen in adulthood, creating higher costs for the public purse (Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman et al, 2015)
- Adults facing multiple problems and adversities can find services are not able to meet their needs effectively, meaning this group of adults 'end up living chaotic and expensive lives' (see MEAM Network)

- Learning from other services and parts of the wider system where transitional approaches are more embedded
- ‘drawing down’ best practice from safeguarding adults into safeguarding adolescents and vice versa
- Reflecting on how safeguarding responses can overlook – even exacerbate – transitional vulnerability. Iatrogenic interventions?

Unless you’re worried about my child, I won’t hear from you [children’s services] again

I couldn’t wait to get to 18, I thought that once I was an adult everything would change. It hasn’t worked out that way. I really wish I was a kid again so that you could lock me up (Kelly, young adult)

Newcastle SE Hub

- WHY
  - Operation Sanctuary
  - We acknowledged that risk & abuse continues
  - We acknowledged the impact of abuse

- WHAT
  - Joint SE Strategy
  - Enabled a shift in thinking on Transition – learning from what works (& what doesn't)
  - Informs wider SW practice
  - Adult safeguarding attendance at Complex Abuse meetings
  - Shared computer system – information sharing key

Newcastle SE Hub & Transitional Safeguarding

- HOW
  - Use of Transition Protocol
  - Person Centred (MSP)
  - Relationship Based – creative, sustained contact, allows development of mutual understanding
  - Responsive to need

- CASE STUDY
  - Secure placement – aged 17 1/2, followed by an extensive support package in the community all to manage ongoing risk
  - Emerging & changing needs as a result of abuse
  - “Handover” of safeguarding from CSC to ASC
  - Outcome

Reflection points

- How effectively does your local safeguarding system recognise and respond to specific needs of those transitioning to adulthood?
- What barriers do you face in striving to innovate in this area?
- How do your local structures, leadership behaviours and professional values enable an approach to safeguarding that reflects the dynamic needs of this group?