



Learning Lessons Briefing 'Jack'

The Review

Background Summary:

Jack was a Wolverhampton care leaver. He experienced significant early childhood difficulties, including domestic abuse, parental mental health issues, and unstable living arrangements. Jack's life was marked by trauma, poor mental health, substance misuse, and involvement in criminal behaviour. Tragically, Jack took his own life in 2023 at the age of 20.

Learning:

1. **Family Time for Children in Care:** The importance of maintaining safe and meaningful family contact for children in care was highlighted. Contemporary social work practice now ensures thorough assessment and integration of family time recommendations into care plans.
2. **Kinship Care:** Jack's kinship care arrangement ultimately broke down, highlighting the need for early assessment of sustainability and support for kinship carers. Wolverhampton has since developed a Kinship Care Panel, and a formal Kinship Offer is in process.
3. **Transition and Care Planning:** The importance of matching semi-independent placements to the needs of young people leaving structured care was emphasized. Wolverhampton has now established panels to oversee transition planning and has strengthened the home finding and commissioning offer to improve matching.
4. **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic intensified Jack's circumstances and limited access to support. The need for comprehensive planning for future incidents and consideration of mental health vulnerabilities during risk assessments was identified.
5. **Engagement:** Persistent non-engagement with services was identified as a potential indicator of vulnerability. A trauma-informed approach and alternative engagement strategies are recommended.

6. **Response to Perpetrators of Domestic Abuse:** The need for specialized support for perpetrators of domestic abuse was highlighted. Wolverhampton is addressing this through enhanced support services.
7. **Sharing of Information:** Challenges in sharing information about adults were identified. The need for processes to explore a young person's care leaver status during unscheduled health attendances was recommended.

Recommendations:

1. **Psychological Assessments:** Psychological assessments should be routinely integrated into care planning for children in care, ensuring support and interventions are clearly tailored to their identified needs.
2. **Risk Assessments During Emergencies:** During national emergencies, risk assessments for in-person visits should consider mental health vulnerabilities and include mitigation strategies.
3. **Engagement Strategies:** Persistent non-engagement should prompt thorough assessment of underlying needs, with flexible, trauma-informed support and creative engagement strategies regularly reviewed with input from the young person.
4. **Information Sharing:** Develop information sharing processes to explore care leaver status during unscheduled health attendances and ensure joined-up care.

How can you make a difference?

Key messages from the learning to ask yourself for your practice are: -

- *Can I make changes to improve my own practice?*
- *Do I need to seek further support, training, or supervision?*