

Learning Case Study: “Jack”

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1. Background

Jack was 14 years old when he was seriously injured by an adult household member. His injuries were serious, but he made a full recovery.

He is of White and Black Caribbean heritage. He lived with his mother and siblings. There was a history of domestic violence in the family with one of mother’s previous partners.

On admission to secondary school, Jack was identified as a vulnerable pupil and he was involved with the school’s mentoring team. Jack was an able pupil who had the potential to achieve well at school. Jack liked school and had good relationships with most children and adults. He was not a child in confrontation with adults or children. There were regular letters home about minor incidents of poor behaviour. In year 9, these increased and there were more examples of internal exclusion and fixed term exclusions. How Jack wore his hair was a frequent source of difficulty and of internal exclusions at school. From Years 8 and 9 Jack had increasing contact with the Police on the streets near where he lived.

2. Jack’s perspective and what we can learn from this

He did tell professionals he felt under threat from the man who injured him and there were serious difficulties at home. These were not effectively picked up on.

When Jack was at his least cooperative and most disengaged, he was at his most vulnerable and unhappy. Lack of cooperation and engagement needs to be seen as a symptom and carefully reflected on and responded to with persistence and care.

School had been a positive for Jack, but this was undermined by school’s response to his hair and what appeared to him an arbitrary and unexplained decision about not being able to leave school early which made him feel less safe

Mentors and a YOS worker built positive relationships with Jack and undertook work with him which he carried with him. This illustrates the value of such work in the longer term. It may be difficult to capture in specific outcomes at the time the work is completed the value of this kind of work.

3. What can we learn from the agency response to Jack's experience?

Delays and weaknesses in the YOS processes did not help Jack's engagement when first referred to YOS.

Children's Social Care missed important information in its consideration of whether Jack's case should be closed and whether his situation should have been escalated to address the safeguarding concerns in his care.

Jack was not recognised as a sufficiently vulnerable adolescent, possibly reflecting a view that boys can better fend for themselves. For example, the meaning of his staying with a friend and his mother for several weeks was neither recognised nor explored. The impact on him of the family history of domestic violence was not sufficiently recognised or considered.

The limitations of what schools can offer a vulnerable but poorly conforming child within structures which require certain standards of behaviour designed to ensure the maintenance of group norms.

There was little if any consideration of how his dual Black Caribbean and White British heritage affected how he saw himself and how he was seen.

There was no visibility of the man who injured Jack in any agency's records. This further weakened any consideration of what threat he might pose to Jack and why Jack was frightened of him.

A negative relationship and culture of working between the YOS, Education and Children's Social Care got in the way of any of these agencies looking for a collaborative approach to working with Jack and each other and deciding that they needed to meet, share information and reflect on what was happening for this child.

No agency took it upon themselves to say there needed to be a multi-agency discussion about Jack. Any of the agencies involved with Jack and his family could have initiated this, but none did.

The difficulty of developing an approach to engagement of a family, which did not want to be engaged, in a system which is geared to either consent and or quick interventions and has no capacity for persistence outside a statutory framework. Consequently, the family received episodic attention which offered them little they saw as useful, combined with rapid escalation to punitive approaches.

Little other than the work with the mentors was offered directly to Jack until after he was stabbed when a YOS worker developed a relationship with him. Though there are many youth agencies in the Borough where Jack lived, he was not in contact with them.

Jack's primary contact with adults outside family, mentors and school seems to have been negative encounters with the Police. There was no follow up to these negative encounters from any service which might have tried to engage Jack and his peers where they were in their neighbourhood.

Were assumptions made about Jack being less vulnerable because he was a boy?

Recommendations

Recommendation	Rationale
<p>1. Given the decision not to publish this SCR there is a need to develop a case study from the SCR which reflects Lambeth SCB work on contextual safeguarding and work with vulnerable adolescents.</p>	<p>A case study is an effective mechanism to disseminate the learning from the SCR to the wider community of practitioners. It provides the opportunity to locate the case study within current practice on contextual safeguarding.</p>
<p>2. LSCP to undertake a review of “working together” relationships between Children’s Social Care, YOS and Education services</p>	<p>The SCR has evidenced that at the time of the injury to child M working together between Education, Children’s Social Care and the YOS was poor or ineffective. Those agencies have reported that relationships have improved since that time - early 2018. The LSCP needs a mechanism to evidence the improvement and that this has been sustained.</p>
<p>3. The development of a multi-agency means for Police street encounters with young people to lead to an offer of positive activities and relationships to those young people.</p>	<p>Child M had a significant number of street encounters with uniformed Police which led to no action. There was no follow up on these encounters which might have helped engage Child M in positive activities and relationships.</p>
<p>4. Lambeth Education Services to review the offer to permanently excluded children with the aim of providing a more diverse and engaging offer to the child and their family.</p>	<p>Child M was offered alternative education quite promptly after he was permanently excluded but he did not engage with this offer. It appeared difficult to provide an alternative offer which might have been more attractive for Child M.</p>
<p>5. The LSCP to provide additional support and input to what is being done in Lambeth by the education services, schools and education partners in leading a discussion on engagement with vulnerable and disaffected pupils and how to reduce the number of permanent exclusions and changes of school.</p>	<p>Child M was excluded from school for carrying a knife - a decision the school felt it had no choice but to make. However, school exclusion made child M more vulnerable. Prior to exclusion he was already on a downward path with mixed messages about whether he was wanted in school. He received significant additional support in and through school, but this was not enough to change his behaviour and his engagement in education. What would have been enough to engage Child M in school?</p>