

Serious Case Review fact sheet – Young Person X

Following the death of Young Person X, aged 16, in May 2017, Greenwich Safeguarding Children Board commissioned a Serious Case Review. The full report can be found on the GSCB website.

Background: Young Person X was a white 16 year old boy who had lived his whole life in Royal Greenwich. He had one older brother and two younger half siblings. Young Person X had been known to services at different points during his life, mainly in relation to the domestic violence he witnessed between his parents and the subsequent impact on his behaviour and emotional well-being.

Following chronic difficulties in his family, Young Person X had entered the care system in late 2016 and was fostered. It later became apparent that he had significant mental health difficulties. He had been provided with voluntary and involuntary child and adolescent mental health services (community and hospital-based) in the 3 months preceding his death. At the time of his death, Young Person X was moving between his foster carer and family members.

In May 2017, Young Person X fell from the 9th storey of a building. The inquest in March 2018 concluded that he had taken his own life.

Key learning:

The impact of exposure to domestic violence: Practitioners need to be alert to the longer term trauma that young people may suffer when they have witnessed domestic violence in their families. In this case Young Person X's experiences undermined his sense of self-worth and rendered him insufficiently resilient to cope with the demands of personal relationships.

Challenges of working with adolescents entering the care system at a late stage: Young Person X's parents retained parental responsibility for him and he was of an age where he wanted to make his own choices. Practitioners, in partnership with Young Person X and his family, needed to work better together to set clear expectations about contact and where he should be living.

Adolescent self-harm and suicidal thoughts: Psychiatric services provided to Young Person X responded well to his symptoms but did not, in the time available, facilitate his ability to enable him to cope better with his emotional difficulties once back in the community. However, while the risk of self-harm was high for Young Person X, the fatal event itself was not judged to be preventable or predictable.

Safety Plans: When working with vulnerable adolescents, the importance of clear safety plans that are informed by and owned by multi-agency partners and families. These plans must be reviewed by managers in the individual agencies.

Discharge planning: When children move from psychiatric in-patient settings to the community, there should always be a multi-agency discharge planning meeting, including schools, and for children in care a Looked After Review.

Safeguarding adolescents: It is important that practitioners explore and understand significant relationships for adolescents outside the immediate family and the impact these may have on risk.

Education is a key protective factor: Young Person X was academically able and school provided a high level of support. As a result of his challenging behaviour in school, linked to his worsening emotional resilience, Young Person X was appropriately excluded. Agencies did not have a shared understanding of the impact of this on his well-being.

Key recommendations:

There is specific learning for individual agencies which can be found in full in the SCR report. Key points include:

- The need to ensure that multi-agency responses are able to be sufficiently adaptive when the circumstances of vulnerable adolescents are changing frequently.
- Children's Social Care need to ensure that the assessing, planning and reviewing processes are fully utilised and recorded well for looked after children.
- CAMHS should ensure "in-reach" during in-patient treatment and ensure that practitioners are confident in escalating safeguarding concerns.
- Hospital Emergency Departments need to make clear that self-harm or a suicide attempt is to be regarded as a safeguarding issue