

Case Study - Child D

Context to Case

D is a young man who has been known to Safeguarding for over three years. He was initially brought to the attention of the department at the request of his mother who was finding it increasingly difficult to manage his aggressive behaviour within the home. D would have regular “kick offs” within the home, and during these incidents would become physically and verbally aggressive to his mother and younger step-brother, would cause significant property damage and would refuse to comply with rules within the home.

D’s mother was offered significant support from Safeguarding via a Social Work Assistant to help her develop her skills in meeting D’s needs. She was provided the support of the Connecting Families Service (prior to the development of the Early Help service) to help her develop her parenting skills, and attended a structured parenting programme provided through Action for Children and was given specific support in developing her non-violent resistance skills to help her manage D’s aggression. Despite this input, D continued to act aggressively both within the family home and in the community, and D’s mother feared that D would require either accommodation by the Local Authority or would end up within the criminal justice system.

The situation reached a “head” in March 2015 when D’s maternal grandfather physically intervened in an altercation between D and his mother, resulting in him physically chastising D in the home. D informed his school of this incident the following day, and Child Protection procedures were initiated. S.47 enquiries concluded that an Initial Child Protection Conference was required, and D’s name was placed on the BCBC Child Protection Register.

As a result of D’s registration, the case was reallocated to a Social Worker, who was able to further assess the situation and identify that the root cause of D’s aggressive outbursts was his feelings of anger towards his father. D, who had idolised his father for his entire life, would be regularly let down by his father who would promise presents and holidays, and then not follow through on these promises. In response, D, who was unable to manage his feelings of frustration and disappointment with his father, would respond through aggressive outbursts towards his mother and half-brother.

Actions Taken

Recognising that D’s actions were caused by his frustrations towards his father rather than his mother’s lack of parenting skills, an intervention was developed to support D. Integral to this intervention, was a support worker from the Early Help Team (EHT) who would develop a relationship with D to help him explore his anger

issues and build strategies to manage this anger more appropriately rather than directing it towards his mother and half-brother.

A referral was made to the EHT directly after the initial Child Protection Conference, and a worker was identified after six weeks. It should be noted that the timescales for the allocation of the worker was longer than would normally be expected, as due to D's specific need the allocated social worker requested a male worker to allow D to develop a positive male role model. D was kept fully informed throughout the process, and discussions were held with his allocated social worker throughout the statutory Child Protection visits to help D understand why a worker was allocated to him, and what work they would be undertaking. D was initially reluctant to engaging in direct work due to previous experiences of workers not attending appointments or not following through on promises, however agreed to the work taking place with encouragement from his social worker and assurances that these concerns would be fed to his EHT worker.

Once an appropriate worker had been identified, an initial case discussion was held between the social worker and the EHT worker. This initial case discussion was an essential step in the process as it allowed the social worker to elaborate on the context of the case and provide details that were not contained within the referral form, such as D's anxiety about being let down. Through these discussions the social worker was able to elaborate on the specific details of the work required as well as the best ways to approach D and his reticence due to his previous experience of being let down by workers.

Following this meeting a joint visit was arranged between the social worker, D and the EHT worker to facilitate introductions and agree the work that would be undertaken. The EHT worker then undertook sessions with D on a fortnightly basis, supported by D's mother school to allow sessions to take place both in home and in school. Supported by the social worker who undertook statutory visits and arranged and attended Core Group Meetings, which the EHT worker was a key participant in, the work was undertaken with D for six weeks before a Review Child Protection Conference was undertaken in July 2015.

Ongoing Work

The professionals at the conference felt that D was no longer at risk of significant harm, and while his name was removed from the Child Protection Register it was identified that further work was required with D to help him explore his feelings towards his father and develop the skills he would need to manage his anger. While it was acknowledged that D's EHT worker was the appropriate professional to complete this work, it was identified that the support of Safeguarding would remain essential for the short term to continue to support the EHT worker and help manage any further complexities in the case.

As such, the case remained open to both Safeguarding and the EHT, with the EHT worker completing direct work with D on a fortnightly basis. After a further period of three months, all professionals who remained involved with D and his family – the social worker, EHT worker and education – agreed that the case no longer required social work involvement and the case was “stepped down” to the EHT for further work. At this point, the case was closed to Safeguarding, and the EHT worker became the keyworker for the family, offering ongoing support to D and general case management to address the outstanding issues.

Challenges and Benefits

The case of D has highlighted a number of benefits of the integrated working approach:

- D’s needs were both complex and long standing, and it was clear from the social work assessment that they stemmed from his anger towards his father, compounded by feeling “let down” by other professionals promising more than they could deliver. By assessing this need quickly and appropriately, an appropriate worker from the EHT was able to become involved with D and complete work that had previously been overlooked, thus helping address the root cause of his aggression and improve his situation for himself, his mother and his half-brother.
- D’s case was open to both Safeguarding and the EHT for approximately 4.5 months, meaning that he had the dual input of both a social worker and an EHT worker. While both professionals had differing roles throughout this time, this cross over period allowed D to build up a relationship with his EHT worker while his social worker remained in place, ensuring that D did not feel “pushed from pillar to post” by professionals.
- The EHT worker was a key part of the core groups that took place as part of the Child Protection Plan and was well known to all other professionals and D’s mother. As such, when the case was eventually closed to Safeguarding, the EHT worker was able to effectively transition to D’s keyworker with minimum of disruption to the management of the case.
- D’s social worker and EHT worker were based in adjoining offices, meaning that communication between them was easily facilitated. As such, the flow of information was both continuous and timely, with D the subject of regular face to face discussions and informal reviews, with advice provided from both parties about the developing situation at home as and when incidents occurred or difficulties were encountered.

While these benefits remain key, there were a number of challenges to this approach that needed to be overcome:

- It was identified early that D needed a male worker to not only undertake the work with him, but also help him develop a positive male

role model. It took longer than would have been ideal (six weeks) to identify a suitable worker due to a lack of suitable workers within the North Hub of the EHT.

- D's case was one of the first cases to be "stepped down" to the EHT from Safeguarding, and there were some uncertainties around process, and whether or not the family needed to be formally closed to safeguarding before work could begin with Early Help. Since this time the process has been streamlined markedly and smoother transitions are now the norm.

While these challenges will need to be addressed in the future, the process appears to have worked well for D, and he has benefitted from the support of agencies who were able to work closely and effectively together to provide him and his family targeted support.