

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

September 2018

The first female journalist's safeguarding message

On Saturday evening I was sitting in Dragon Hall on King's Street, Norwich. I had come to hear Stuart Hobday talk about **Harriet Martineau** as part of the Heritage Open Days. I confess my ignorance here: all I knew was that Martineau is the name of the street that county hall is on. What had caught my eye was the description in the brochure – *Harriet Martineau was a pioneering journalist, radical thinker and citizen of Norwich.*

Indeed she was an extraordinary woman. Born into a middle-class, Unitarian family in Norwich, Harriet Martineau (1802-1876) was unique in her time. She championed women's rights, racial equality, scientific progress, economic fairness and cooperatives. She was also an ardent and committed campaigner against slavery. Martineau shot to fame through her series of stories which explained for a popular audience the ideas of philosophers and political thinkers of the day, such as James Mill and Adam Smith. The stories appeared in monthly instalments and sold more copies at the time than the novels of Charles Dickens! Later in her life Martineau collaborated with Florence Nightingale to publicise evidence about better hospitals and the need for well-trained nurses.

Between 1834 and 1836, Martineau travelled through the United States. She made lasting friends among anti-slavery activists in Boston. In 1837 her book *Society in America* was published, reviewing the state of the nation 60 years after its birth. She argued that the institution of slavery made a 'mockery' of American stated ideals of freedom. Martineau demolished, one by one, the pro-slavery arguments that were promoted in the United States, and questioned whether '*social virtues are possible in a society of which injustice is the primary characteristic.*'

Martineau went further, stating there was a moral requirement to speak out against slavery and to speak out against abuse. Listening to Martineau's arguments against slavery, it struck me how important and relevant they still are to us today (see [Kidd & Manthorpe 2017 *Modern slavery – the adult safeguarding interface. The Journal of Adult Protection, Volume: 19 Issue: 3*](#) and [Craig & Clay 2017 *Who is vulnerable? Adult social care and modern slavery. The Journal of Adult Protection, Volume: 19 Issue: 1*](#)).

The Care Act (2014) identifies modern slavery as a new form of risk and lists it as one of the ten categories of abuse. Slavery is now included in the remit of adult safeguarding in England, and as such it requires practitioners, their organisational and safeguarding adults boards (SABs) to understand these issues and respond. For resources on modern slavery see the [NSAB website page](#).

The importance of everyone speaking out against abuse is the central message of Norfolk SAB and one that lots of partners have been promoting this week as part of [Norfolk's safeguarding adults awareness week](#).

We are starting to get this message across. According to the NSAB 2018 survey (1,203 returns of which 887 were fully completed and 316 partially completed), 89% people said they would report adult abuse if they saw it. [Click to see more of the headline findings](#).

But many still do not speak out. This can be for various reasons, for example, they:

- do not know who to speak to,
- do not know what can be done,
- think that no one will believe them, or
- just do not want to get involved.

And the victims themselves may not tell anyone about the abuse, because they:

- are afraid of retaliation,
- think they will be put in an institution,
- are ashamed that a family member mistreats them,
- think that the police and social services cannot really help them, or
- think that no one will believe them.

This supports studies that show only a small proportion of abuse is currently detected and at least one in four elders may be at risk of abuse ([Hannah Bows & Bridget Penhale in their editorial to the special issue of the British Journal of Social Work on elder abuse – July 2018](#)), [Cooper et al \(2008\)](#)).

What can we do to tackle this challenge? There's isn't one single answer - it is more likely to be combination of actions that changes our culture. One action is talking about it: with colleagues and with people who we come into contact with through our work. Every organisation and service needs to give a clear signal in a variety of formats (posters, information on website, social media platforms, etc)



that abuse of an adult is completely unacceptable. And I'm not just talking here about big organisations: it is also the corner shop, the garage, the pub.

Here's a suggestion to help speak out against abuse. If your organisation or service sends out letters to those who use your services, is there a blank space where you could print the Speak Up against abuse message?

Just as Harriet Martineau spoke out and campaigned against the abuse in her time, we must do the same.

Walter Lloyd-Smith
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See the [Martineau Society](#) website to find out more about this remarkable woman.