

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

February 2018

An invitation to be a critical friend

A narrative I have become much more aware of lately is one which focuses attention on what we *haven't* done. My sense is that this can, on occasions, become the predominant framework through which we receive feedback. I was reading an article by Dr Katrina Bannigan in *Occupational Therapy News* (*Should we make more use of the critical friend role in occupational therapy? – November 2017*) about her use of this approach in support of a conference event and wondered, could we also use it within Norfolk's safeguarding adults work?

How we give and receive feedback is a skill. A good critic can help improve how we do what we do, including safeguarding adults.

Bannigan notes that critical friends (CFs) are widely used in education but less so in other settings. She quotes the Association of Colleges, describing the role in this way:

'The critical friend is a powerful idea, perhaps because it contains an inherent tension. Friends bring a high degree of unconditional positive regard. Critics are, at first sight at least, conditional negative and intolerant of failure. Perhaps the critical friend comes closest to what might be regarded as 'true friendship' – a successful marrying of unconditional support and unconditional critique'.

Friendship might not be quite the right word when thinking about our professional relationships (for safeguarding adults), but setting that to one side I think this could still be useful to support our work.

She goes on to outline a further number of useful points:

- A critical friend is invited by another person, team or organisation (eg concerned with safeguarding adults) to ask provocative questions
- A critical friend could be used to review performance (particularly useful at this time as Norfolk SAB is developing a new strategy - see the October 2017 blog [Mapping Adult Safeguarding for Norfolk](#))

- A critical friend provides a perspective at a particular juncture in a person, team or organisation's history – and coming up to three years since the introduction of the Care Act seems an opportune time

Now, I do accept that asking the question – *how could Norfolk do adult safeguarding better?* – opens the board up to scrutiny, but that can only be a good thing in my view. See the December 2017 blog – [What is our safeguarding 'cadence'?](#)

The interesting part of using this approach is that a CF will not always agree with us, may question our thinking and perhaps offer alternative solutions. A CF helps us think critically about our work and so improve the quality of what we do. A CF can comment on the difference between what people say they do and what they actually do.

So here's an invitation. Can you offer something to our safeguarding adult work as a CF? If so, please get in touch. Alternatively we will be attending a number of events during 2018 where you can talk to us, including:

- **Friday 9th February**, Great Yarmouth Adult Social Care Event, St George's Theatre, King Street, Great Yarmouth
- **Monday 11th June & Monday 8th October**, Carers information day at the Forum Norwich
- **Saturday 28th July**, Norwich Pride, the Forum Norwich

If you would like to see more about CF, see the [Critical Friend Toolkit](#). It was developed for people working in schools, but easily translates to health and social care, housing and police.

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