

## Self neglect – a surprising conversation starter

### Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

#### July 2019

Last week I attended the wedding of a good (recently retired) work colleague. Both bride and groom looked stunning, the venue was lovely, weather perfect, it was an all round great day. Knowing only a very small number of the other guests, I had lots of conversations with people I had not met before during the celebrations. Starting conversations is an art and a necessary skill for almost everything in life. Conversations introduce you to people who may go on to be good friends or with whom you go on to build a shared interest or work connection.

Once a conversation gets going, it should be relatively easy maintaining that momentum - it's the opener which can be a little tricky. A lot has been written about the topic of conversations (there are some great [Technology](#), [Entertainment](#), [Design TED talks](#) if you are interested). A key part of starting conversations is small talk. Small talk is not to everyone's liking but is both functional and necessary for conversation. [Larry Alton](#) suggests we think about small talk in the same way that a car must gradually accelerate to a certain speed, rather than hitting 60 mph instantaneously.

As I chatted to guests during the day, I was asked what I did and I would go on to explain, adding that I had just finished coordinating a seminar on self-neglect and hoarding. People were very interested about this topic. So on a lovely warm afternoon we talked at length about the recent seminar and the issues it raised. Away from the wedding, I have also found that to start a safeguarding adult conversation with colleagues (whatever sector they work in – health, housing, district councils, community or voluntary), all I have to do is introduce the topic of self-neglect and/or hoarding. It is a guaranteed conversation generator!

The NSAB seminar was a great success and all the places were fully booked within 32 hours of it being advertised on the website! I would like to record my thanks to all the presenters who made the event possible. We are hoping to repeat the event in the autumn. [Click here to download a copy of the slides](#) (scroll to the bottom of the page).

The key points from the day included:

- [NSAB's self-neglect and hoarding strategy](#), which provides a framework to support partners working with individuals, has been updated and re-launched, and now includes a [short summary video](#).

The key change has been to clarify section 3 about how agencies can bring cases for collaboration and discussions via Norfolk's Help Hubs (also known as Early Help Hubs).

- Summary information was provided by a small task and finish group on the development of a business case for a specialist service to focus work on the most complex cases. These are cases which are known to many agencies, where short-term interventions are not enabling longer-term change, and the idea of this specialist service is to work with the person to get a better understanding of what is driving their behaviour (see below). While the business case is no guarantee of success, if nothing else it adds to our conversation.
- The real and significant fire risks associated with people with hoarding behaviour was graphically demonstrated in the presentation from Norfolk Fire and Rescue.
- Colleagues from Norwich City Council and Adult Social Care's Norwich Community Care Team presented case studies which explored the complexity of working with individuals with self-neglect and/or hoarding behaviour and the challenges staff face in this work.
- The audience was introduced to the work of Norwich and Norfolk OCD support group and a social enterprise called [Lofty Heights](#). From very small beginnings the OCD support group is now providing support to people with OCD, some of whom have hoarding behaviour. Lofty Heights is a Suffolk based Community Interest Company (CIC), a not for profit [social enterprise](#) started 7 years ago to create employment for young people, offering loft clearance and loft insulation. Lofty Heights have developed real expertise in working with individuals who hoard and now provide specialist decluttering, deep cleaning, garden clearance and a range of other services. They also prepare homes to enable hospital discharge.
- A presentation from a coordinator from one of Norfolk Help Hubs illustrated the real added value that multi-agency working brings to this work

We now have a significant and growing body of literature on self-neglect and hoarding. I attended a recent seminar by Professor Michael Preston-Shoot, who highlighted there are now 195 published [Safeguarding Adults Reviews](#) on cases of self-neglect. Professor Preston-Shoot article summarised the thematic learning from these reviews, which will be published in the [Journal of Adult Protection](#).

**Here's how you can start (or continue) a self-neglect conversation:**

- Step 1: Show the video at your next team meeting
- Step 2: Download a copy of the dated strategy (2.1) and keep a hard copy for reference in the office
- Step3: Help to publicise the revised strategy (2.1) with other services you have contact with, if you are less likely to work with individuals

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PS

There a number of very useful journal articles on self-neglect and hoarding published by the [Journal of Adult Protection](#), and [reports and guidance on the Social Care Institute for Excellence \(SCIE\) website](#). Shona Britten and Karen Whitb's book – [Self-neglect: A practical approach to risks and strengths assessment](#) – is a very useful text.