

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

A view from inside the washing machine – a few reflections on safeguarding adults in 2020

None of us would have thought we would have ended 2020 like this.

You may be reading this before the Christmas break or on your return in the new year. Both can be useful moments to reflect on our adult safeguarding work: what we have been through and what is still to come.

As we finish a challenging year, it feels to me like I am *inside a washing machine on spin speed* (I did read somewhere that the modern washing machine has more computing power than the Apollo 11 spaceship, a great fact if true). The pace of safeguarding does not seem to be easing. Each day bring a new development and I guess that's the point: we are still in a very dynamic safeguarding environment.

We are doing so many things differently now:

- wearing face masks
- keeping 2m from others, with new messages on the pavements to help remind us
- the elbow bump

We have become very familiar with words and concepts like:

- lockdown and furlough
- the R number, algorithms, lateral flow tests
- hand san, PPE, test and trace
- bubbles, tiers and circuit breakers

We have new names in our collective conversation, like:

- Whitty, Rashford, Vallance, Captain Tom

If someone had said to me back in March, ...*'Can you hear me?', 'Oh ... you've frozen ... now you're back'* and *'Is that an old hand you have up?'* - I would have looked at them blankly. These phrases have now become so familiar.

Writing in the Guardian supplement *The Lost Year*, Jonathan Freedland's article [The magnifying glass: how Covid revealed the truth about our world](#) set out with a sweeping eye how the pandemic has accelerated changes already underway – which in Freedland's words:

'[magnify] the blemishes on the skin of our society, showing up the deep lines that divide it'

He considers the Coronavirus through a number of lenses – regional, gender, generational, race - and he highlights how these have

'magnified a pattern of British life that predated the disease, a pattern indeed that predates us all: to those with much, more shall be given.'

Reading Freedland's article made me think about the pandemic through a safeguarding lens. Since mid-March our partnership has continued to try and protect those with greatest vulnerability to abuse, harm and exploration while having less 'eyes on'.

I wrote about in July about how *'the lockdown has acted like a shock to our safeguarding circuits, shutting them down: a sudden change to how we do our safeguarding business, the interruption to those vital face-to-face relationships, the emerging unforeseen new risks needing consideration and response.'* ([See the August blog: Cleaning out the toaster: A shock to our system and the need for a safeguarding 'PAT test'](#))

This systems shock switched NSAB's activity online so it could continue to deliver its statutory functions, at times striking a fine balance between seeking assurance from partners that they continued to fulfil their safeguarding roles while acknowledging the ever growing demands they were responding to.

We stepped up safeguarding advice to support those who volunteered to help their communities. Getting clear safeguarding messages out has been critical and I would continue to ask all readers of the blog to use NSAB's [See Something, Hear Something, Say Something materials](#). These last nine months have underlined to me value of social media for channelling information to reach wider networks in a largely rural county. In March and April 2020, the number of safeguarding concerns being raised to the local authority dropped, and subsequently there was a drop in the number of concerns going through to section 42 enquiries. As we finish the year, we are now back to pre-lockdown figures. However, in the [Personal Social Services Adult Social Care Survey](#) (published 10 December 2020), 1.8 % (10,650) of service users surveyed reported they do not feel at all safe.

The phrase *'working from home'* I think insufficiently describes the scale and reach of the change to our safeguarding work practices.

As a colleague pointed out, this was not normal 'working from home', this was '*at home, trying to work through a crisis*'.

And we must not forget the impact that this 'spin speed' pace has had on us. My sense is that people are tired; the adrenaline used during the first lockdown is not there in such a strong dose. Talking with colleagues in the last few weeks, many have said how the shorter days of winter are playing into a feeling of fatigue. This new(ish) way of working and lack of face to face social contact is taking its toll. As a good friend said to me at the start of December – '*my bins have been out more than me!*'

And still the pace gets quicker: back-to-back MS Team meetings, extra activities added to the collective safeguarding calendar. We can now arrive into meetings *literally* as they start (having looked at the clock and thought, '*Oh, I have still got five minutes for before the meeting starts, I can just answer one more email*'). Those few minutes before and after physical meetings used to be productive moments for colleagues to talk informally and maintain and strengthen our safeguarding network.

I think the experience of the last nine months has exposed both the strengths and weaknesses of our current arrangements, while presenting new concerns to those at risk of abuse, harm and exploitation. As we move to the next phase of the pandemic (the creation of a Tier 4 and a new strain of the virus), the board's focus is to maintain key safeguarding relationships, better understand the impact on the workforce, and ensure that our local and national safeguarding networks emerge stronger.

But as effective as we have been, new safeguarding threats continue to emerge. A rise in reported targeted scams and financial exploitation has been a significant concern, and most recently an increase in courier fraud – see [Monday 07 December 2020 | Increased threat of Courier Fraud - help raise awareness](#).

It feels rather superfluous with everything that has happened during this year, but I want to say thank you to everyone who has taken any sort of action to safeguard an adult from abuse and harm during 2020. Have as restful break as you can and see you in 2021.

Best wishes, Walter
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