

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

February 2020

Conversations on the stairs

Free gym anyone? The early part of the year might be when we think more about the exercise we all need to keep healthy. One advantage of working on the eighth floor of County Hall is the stairs! Up and down a couple of times a day doesn't half add to the daily steps. It is not unusual I pass a colleague in the stairwell and we stop for a quick catchup.

On this particular day I was going down the stairs and passed a colleague on the way up. We stopped to share news about the recent publication of the Safeguarding Adults Reviews [cases of Ms F](#) and [Mr G](#). At the end of conversation, my colleague said:

'... don't forget Walter, great things in safeguarding are never done by one person. They're done by a team of people'

This phrase has stuck to me like Velcro (see [May 2016 blog | We need more Velcro ... can you help?](#)). I shared this quote with colleagues at our last **PML*** meeting and we reflected on its importance. One minute safeguarding practice is straight forward and the next moment it is not. That's why you need a team.

A person's situation may be complicated. They may have ['complex interpersonal relationships and may be ambivalent, unclear or unrealistic about their personal circumstances'](#) and ['being safe is only one of the things they want for themselves'](#) ([Statutory Guidance 14.7 & 14.8](#)). We may need to work with the person through difficult decisions, balancing risk against autonomy, self-determination, protection (both of the person and of other), human rights and duties to report. Not easy. However, the key starting point is always very straight forward:

- Is something wrong or a problem
- Do you know who to talk to?
- Do I need to raise a safeguarding concern?

Here is where the 'team' comes in. Even some of the most experienced, knowledgeable colleagues I know (and trust) working in adult safeguarding ask others for advice and guidance:

'What's your take on this?' ... 'Can I just run this past you' (while being mindful of your surroundings). This is about shared thinking, about (a degree of) shared decision making and sharing the risk together. As one of my most respected colleagues said to me:

'Walter, if you are doing safeguarding on your own then you are doing it wrong'.

The role of partnership is highlighted as one of the [six adult safeguarding principles articulated in the Care Act guidance, see 14.13](#). **Kaye McGregor, Eileen Niblo and Michael Preston-Shoot's** chapter called *Multi-disciplinary working: Moving beyond rhetoric* in [Safeguarding Adults Key Themes and Issues](#) captures this responsibility well. Set against a clear legal mandate for cooperation McGregor, Niblo & Preston-Shoot note:

'Spending time developing inter-professional relationships and shared understanding can help practitioners to realise the ambitions of the legal rules with respect to multi-agency working by confronting such challenging issues as values, thresholds and definitions of need ...' (p80)

Talking to a colleague, or your safeguarding lead is about taking time for reflection, time to sense check, to be as clear what has happened, to map out the next action to be taken. Remember, you not alone with our safeguarding responsibility, there is always someone you can ask. And, if at that moment, the concern does not require a safeguarding response, this does *not* mean we do nothing. It must always mean we *do* something, whether this is raising the situation as a quality of care concern, a disciplinary concern, a training issue, assessment for support, sign posting to another service etc. We *do* something.

And I got all this from a conversation on the stairs! Keeping fit and reflecting on my practice in one go.

* PML is NSAB's new subgroup structure to bring a broader range of colleagues together to all work on the same safeguarding problem at the same time.
[See August 2019 blog – One small step.](#)

Thank you

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Monday 17 February 2020