

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board Manager's Blog

January 2020

Drive the learning

Returning from a cycle ride the other day I pulled up at some traffic lights behind a learner driver. Through the rear window I could see the instructor talking to the driver, who was preparing to move off from the lights. The lights changed and the learner driver needed to move off – to carefully bring the clutch up - gently pressing the accelerator until it met the 'biting point' – and to check their mirrors as the car slowly started to move.

On this occasion it was not the smoothest manoeuvre in the history of driving. The engine screamed as the car moved, then it kangarooed forward 2 or 3 times before the engine stalled. I felt for the learner driver as I could see them desperately trying to reset the task while looking quite flustered with the instructor giving directions to help.

I was suddenly reminded of my struggles when learning that aspect of driving. I was taught to drive while working for the Post Office and have vivid memories of practising for 2 hours in a sorting office car park, slipping the clutch to find that 'biting point' and making the car 'creep' forward in and out of parking spaces. In the end I suddenly got it (much to relief of my instructor).

Cycling the rest of the way home I thought about how we learn.

The short answer is ... in lots of different ways (do watch the TED talk by Barbara Oakley, Professor of Engineering at Oakland University in Michigan, and McMaster University Ontario, Canada – [learning how to learn](#)). A person's styles of learning can be:

- visual (spatial): you prefer using pictures, images, and spatial understanding
- aural (auditory-musical): you prefer using sound and music
- verbal (linguistic): you prefer using words, both in speech and writing
- physical (kinaesthetic): you prefer using your body, hands and sense of touch

We **learn** from gathering information in the ways above and from personal **experience**. We also **learn from other people's experiences**.

Simply hearing a story about something that has happened to another person can set off brain activity that actually mirrors what we would feel if we were having that **experience** ourselves. In January there were two key NSAB events which offered great learning opportunities for adult safeguarding in Norfolk.

The first was listening to the powerful story from Luke & Ryan Hart about growing up with coercive control and domestic abuse. Listening to Luke & Ryan gave me a *learning light bulb moment*. They explained that when a person's life is so completely controlled by an abuser, asking them '*What has he done?*' is such a overwhelmingly big question it does not help the victim to articulate the width and depth of the abuse.

Asking someone a different question – '*What can't you do?*', '*What is missing from your life?*' gives the opportunity to open up a different perspective on their circumstances. It may well be for the professional (working with the individual) to make sense of the answers and draw together a picture of coercive control. For me and many other colleagues in the room that day we learned through reflection on doing (experiential).

The second event for learning (how we need to '*do*' adult safeguarding differently) was the publication of two Safeguarding Adults Review (SAR). Published on 16th January, the [cases of Ms F](#) and [Mr G](#) (a female and male who coincidentally lived in the same care home although their cases were not linked in any way) help us learn how to improve our services for supporting people with challenging behaviours due to dementia. These people's stories show us how and where we need to apply our learning to safeguard those at risk of abuse or harm.

We all like to think we are all open to 'learning and improvement' and I genuinely believe the vast majority of Norfolk's workforce is. But for learning to work, we have to open as an individual to change.

[Helen Bevan in her blog from 2013](#) on the publication of Don Berwick's "[A promise to learn – a commitment to act](#)" setting out recommendation to improve the safety of patients in England, quotes Aldous Huxley:

"There's only one corner of the universe you can be certain of improving, and that's your own self."

Thinking about change Helen reminds us that

*'each of us who leads and/or facilitates change is a [signal generator](#).
Our words and deeds are constantly scrutinised and interpreted by the people around us in our teams, organisations and in the wider system.
The amplification effect of what we do and say is far greater than we imagine.
The most powerful way to inspire others to change is to be the vanguard for that change.'*

This is the amplifying effect all of us can play a part in. Learning and improvement across a 'simple, complicated and complex' phenomenon like healthcare or our safeguarding partnership is really difficult but it can be done. Spreading and embedding learning is a combination of what an organisation does internally and what it does to support others to learn. Safeguarding learning is also about how we hold each other to account for making changes stick. I would discourage anyone from thinking that the measure of an organisation's safeguarding learning is somehow proportionate to the level of public coverage it receives. It is not. Collective effort by all partners can help us achieve this, as partnership learning is just that, collaborative, not solely focused on one organisation.

With this in mind, here is a call to spread our learning.

Please download a copy of the SAR report or the executive summaries and share with a minimum of two work colleagues asking '*what can we learn from this story? And who else can we tell about our learning*'.

[Click here for SAR CASE Ms F | Full report and executive summary](#)

[Click here for SAR CASE Mr G | Full report and executive summary](#)

Thank you

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