

## **Serious Case Review Learning Bulletin**

**This learning bulletin outlines the learning from the Overview Report for Young Person Mark that was published by SSCB on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The SSCB expects that this bulletin will be used by every team in every setting to review the team's practice against the learning, identify what the team needs to do and engage actively in transforming practice.**

**Serious Case Review Learning Bulletin  
Young Person Mark (YP Mark)**

<b>Theme of SCR</b>	Risk taking behaviours/numerous care episodes/missing from care/drug and alcohol misuse/self-harm/sexual exploitation /domestic violence/bullying via social media/suicide
<b>Date Published</b>	Wednesday 8 <sup>th</sup> November 2017
<b>Case details :</b>	
<p><b>Family History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The family is White British with English being their first language</li> <li>• YP Mark’s parents separated and absent Father</li> <li>• Mark seen as the “problem” in his family</li> <li>• Difficult relationship with Mum</li> <li>• Came to attention of Social Care when 12 years old</li> <li>• No concerns or issues with older sibling</li> </ul> <p><b>Young Person Mark</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born 2000</li> <li>• Drug use by Mark from 11 years of age</li> <li>• Risk taking behaviour including drug misuse and sexual activity</li> <li>• Marked deterioration in health and appearance due to drug use</li> <li>• Limited Social Care involvement with YP Mark until almost a teenager</li> <li>• Young Person Mark made subject to child protection plan for neglect but it was not related to care he received, it was due to his “informed decisions” placing him at risk</li> <li>• Periods of low mood and issues with anger</li> <li>• Did engage with professionals on occasion</li> </ul>	
<b>Key Points of Learning:</b>	
<p><b>Indicators of risk and vulnerability:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of school moves due to drug use</li> <li>• YP Mark’s risk taking behaviour ie episodes of drug misuse, sexual activity, offending behaviour</li> <li>• YP Mark going missing from home</li> <li>• Males viewed by some professionals as less vulnerable and better able to protect themselves than females</li> <li>• Drug misuse seen as a cause of his vulnerability rather than a symptom of it</li> <li>• School friends expressed concern about him</li> <li>• Mum not always consistent in parenting</li> <li>• Inconsistent multi agency support provided to family</li> </ul> <p><b>Findings from the Review</b></p> <p><b>Finding 1</b> - Without analytical assessments, multi-agency collaboration and challenge, the harmful behaviour of some adolescents may be too easily viewed as ‘just what teenagers’ do’ and this perception can prevent early intervention for those adolescents at greatest risk. Training and workforce development, including quality supervision, must ensure practitioners have the skills to work with adolescent choice and complex behaviours and have opportunities to develop their understanding of the adolescent world, including substance misuse and other forms of risk</p>	

**Finding 2** - There was a lack of **professional curiosity** about Mark's background, what had happened, and what was happening in Mark's life, which meant that his behaviour and substance misuse were regarded as 'the problem', rather than being symptomatic of other stressors in his life

**Finding 3** - Many practitioners are not always clear what they should be doing in relation to substance use and their role, expectations vary according to their specialist area of practice, their knowledge of substance use, and their levels of confidence. Whilst adolescents who use and misuse substance require specialist services that function as an integrated part of a broad range of support, professionals who work with adolescents in a wider range of services need to develop their skills and knowledge base about substance misuse

**Finding 4** - Without a purposefully designed multi-agency risk assessment tool, embedded within all organisations and accessed through a single point of access, professional judgment about risk is more likely to be flawed and this will reduce the likelihood of effective interventions leaving some young people vulnerable. Such tools are known to be most effective when and if the practitioners and managers who will be using them are engaged in their design and implementation

**Finding 5** - When concerns are raised about a child, a clear chronology of events can show agencies where risks lie but unless practitioners understand how to build and maintain purposeful chronologies and without clear systems to gather, record and share this information, the use of chronologies to inform good assessments and decision making is less likely to happen

**Finding 6** - There remains a significant national shortfall in placements for children and young people with complex needs who require placements that can keep them safe and manage their vulnerabilities without needing to deprive them of their liberty

**Finding 7** - Assessments should be comprehensive addressing physical and emotional needs as well as risk of self-harm and sexual exploitation. This requires close collaboration between agencies and inevitably raises the question of who takes responsibility of coordinating this work. Multi-Agency collaboration did not work as well as it should have done with Mark and this left him vulnerable

**Finding 8** - The range and nature of adolescent risks are different to those facing younger children and the traditional response to such risks does not necessarily fit with young people's lived experience and research. The identification of a multi-agency framework with clearly defined underpinning principles would support better practice for those professionals working with adolescents at risk of harm

**Finding 9** - If authentic and sufficiently intensive long term relationships are not part of the service response to young people and professionals are not actively supported to invest time in establishing these relationships, then interventions to reduce risk and promote resilience in young people is likely to be ineffective

### **Recommendations for SSCB**

In order to improve the effectiveness of multi-agency practice with adolescents who are at risk due to substance misuse, other forms of risk taking behaviour and/or abuse/exploitation, the SSCB should work with the Children's Strategic Partnership, the Safer Sunderland Partnership and the Sunderland Safeguarding Adult Board to develop a multi-agency framework to support the development of resilience and improve outcomes for vulnerable

adolescents. This framework should include:

- a) A strategy, robust systems, protocols and tools for working with vulnerable adolescents and
- b) Workforce Development opportunities to support staff to engage effectively with young people, better assess and understand issues of risk such as CSE, substance misuse and transition etc.

This will be implemented by June 2018.

The Overview Report was published on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2017 alongside two other SCRs, one regarding neglect and the other regarding serious harm to a teenager. The report and accompanying documents can be accessed at [SSCB SCRs and Documents](#)