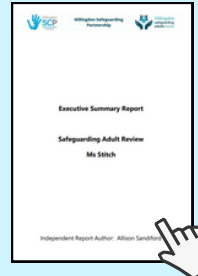


'Ms Stitch' Safeguarding Adults Review

Ms Stitch suffered serious physical harm due to abuse perpetrated by two adults who were known to her. This abuse took place in a context of cuckooing and adult exploitation. The perpetrators have been convicted and are serving custodial sentences. Ms Stitch is recovering from her experiences.

A Safeguarding Adults Review was undertaken to understand what had happened, and to identify areas of learning to improve future practice.

Ms Stitch has an uncommon degenerative health condition, she was provided with a package of care and support, and was supported by a complex network of health professionals, and a specialist voluntary group. Ms Stitch was also known to housing services.



The SAR was led by an independent author, and included contributions from Ms Stitch and her family.

Key Lessons for Practice

Professional Curiosity

By the time the perpetrators of Ms Stitch's abuse moved into her home, the presence of 'friends' for support and 'missed' or 'cancelled' appointments had become Ms Stitch's 'norm'. This effectively stifled professional curiosity into Ms Stitch's circumstances and professionals accepted her withdrawal from their services, which granted space and opportunity for the perpetrators to conduct their horrific abuse.

Over reliance on telephone communication can make it harder to understand an individual's experiences. Where there are concerns about exploitation, or any suspicion that an adult may be being coerced or influenced, ensure that you see the adult in person, and alone.

Coordination of Care

Professionals identified that assessments were often conducted in silos and would have been stronger and more robust if they had included information about Ms Stitch's history and if they had included the expertise of other agencies working with her. This is particularly important when supporting an adult with an uncommon condition, we need to understand the nature and impact of health conditions in order to support and safeguard adults where necessary.

As a result of agencies not sharing information, or of understanding Ms Stitch, no agency ever gained full awareness of her lived experiences, nor the barriers she faced to accessing support.

Quality Assurance and Management Oversight

Managers have a core role in ensuring that frontline practitioners have access to reflective supervision. This is fundamental to good practice especially when responding to complex and challenging circumstances.

Managers should quality assure the content of assessments and plans, providing support, and give guidance to frontline practitioners, and encourage professional curiosity. Managers also need supervision, guidance and training themselves.

Language

The Ms Stitch SAR highlights the importance of language choices, and consideration of how these influence relationships with adults, relationships and understanding between agencies, and risk assessment. Unfortunate choice of wording can reinforce victim-blaming narratives, creating additional barriers for adults to access support.

All exploitative and abusive relationships feature an inherent power imbalance, there is a need for greater care and attention to language choices in adult safeguarding practice to mitigate the risk of reinforcing victim blaming cultures. Also highlighted is the potential for the creation of a false narrative that undermines the ability of practitioners to identify risks, for example the use of the term 'carer' carries with it positive connotations that can influence future interactions.

Appropriate
Language Guide
for Safeguarding
Adults



Mental Capacity

When someone lacks capacity to make specific decisions, they might make decisions they do not really understand, causing potential harm or an increase in risk. Timely and thorough assessments of capacity are an important intervention to safeguard people. SARs often find that professionals do not recognise when they need to assess capacity and this increases risk.

People living with neurodegenerative illness may be viewed as targets for exploitation and abuse because of their care and support needs, and the impact of the disease on their ability to protect and defend themselves. Ms Stitch's increasing dependence on others for support with her healthcare needs and daily living, created opportunities for exploitation to take place which her cognitive ability and memory problems made it challenging for her to understand.

Understanding of Cuckooing and Exploitation

The professionals working with Ms Stitch did not recognise the signs and indicators that she was being harmed through cuckooing and adult exploitation.

Exploitation is typified by a power imbalance, which perpetrators use to force, coerce, entice, and/or manipulate victims for material, social or other gain. This offence can be committed by individuals and/or groups. The perpetrator usually, but not always, provides something a victim needs. These needs can include money, clothes, food or be relationship-based including assertions of affection, friendship, and support. The victim is then 'indebted' to the perpetrator and forced, coerced and/or manipulated into harmful situations. Victims often do not realise that they are being exploited and can feel responsible for what is happening.

Cuckooing is the term used to describe a situation where someone's home is taken over, the motivators can include for the purposes of criminal activity, and for financial or other gain. In some cases, perpetrators rely solely on the power imbalance using force and fear to control the victim.

Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership Team has developed a checklist to assist you to recognise, and respond to signs and indicators that an adult is being harmed in this way. This checklist can be used to inform your assessment and actions to safeguard the adult you are working with. The checklist is included in the London Borough of Hillingdon's Cuckooing Protocol which is applicable to any organisations working within Hillingdon.

If you are concerned that an adult is being cuckooed please use the checklist and make a referral to Community MARAC. If they have care and support needs of any kind you need to raise a safeguarding concern with Adult Social Care.

Follow the Cuckooing Protocol.

