

Child Safeguarding Practice Review

Child A – Learning Brief

Child A's Story

Child A was born in July 2021. For the first ten months of his life, he lived with his mother and was supported via Child Protection Plan with his older sibling. In May 2022 an Interim Care Order was granted by the Family Court and Child A and his siblings were brought into care. He was placed with Foster Carers with whom he remained for nearly nine months. The Social Worker identified his father and makes contact, a DNA test confirmed paternity and his father said would like Child A to live with him. The Father had never had his own home; he had not been registered with a GP practice since he was 18 and had never received benefits or had a bank account.

Between July 2022 and February 2023, Child A was supported by the Family Time Team to have 60 supervised family time sessions with his Father at a Family Hub, these all were positive and his father was committed to spend time with his child. The Social Worker undertook an assessment with the father. The Family Time and Social Worker's assessment informed the Family Court agreement that they could move into a residential assessment setting. In February 2023 Child A and his father moved into a family residential assessment setting, they lived there for 3 and half months. The outcomes of both residential assessments were positive. Child A developed and was thriving, there was consistent evidence of Child A and father building a positive and strong attachment.

As an outcome of the assessments, the child's CAFCASS Guardian and Family Court Judge agreed that Child A and his father could move together into their own home, and in May 2023 they moved to a privately rented flat. A Home Placement Agreement was put in place, setting out that this would be time for a further assessment of the father's ability to care for Child A in their own home and set out the support package that would support them. The local authority had provided funding for Child A to go to a Nursery of the Father's choice two afternoons a week and the Father was signposted to and welcomed at another local playgroup in a Church Hall opposite his home. The Father was also supported by Dad Matters, an organisation that works within national Home-Start Service and provides support to fathers. A Family and Friends Meeting was undertaken with the paternal family members to agree a Family Plan of support. Child A's paternal Grandmother also helped look after Child A and support her son. The Social Worker undertook their statutory visits and the Family Support Worker visited within expected timescales. During the Care Proceedings - My Reviews (LAC Reviews) were undertaken by the IRO regularly and in expected timescales. During the time Child A lived in the residential assessment setting and in their home, the 'My Reviews' were undertaken, more regularly than would be expected. The IRO wanted to see how the father was meeting the child's needs, as he had not had to care for a child or had responsibilities for his own home before.

In July 2023 the Final Court Hearing took place and the Judge agreed a Child Arrangement Order and Supervision Order, which would be supported via a Child In Need Plan.

In July 2023, unbeknown to professionals, Child A's Paternal Grandmother became unwell and was not able to support Child A and his father. On the 19th of August 2023 Child A's father made a call to emergency services. Paramedics attended the family home and Child A was taken to hospital with serious injuries, where he was intubated and ventilated. The father was arrested on a charge of Grievous Bodily Harm with Intent and taken into custody. On the 21st of August 2023 Child A's life support was withdrawn, and sadly he passed away. The father

was charged with murder and child cruelty. In July 2024 the Father was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison, to serve a minimum term of 22 years.

Child A has been described by his paternal Grandmother and the Foster Carers who cared for him for nearly nine months. Child A's paternal Grandmother described her grandson as loving to play and ride his bike. She said Child A had an amazing laugh, she had enjoyed teaching him to count and he would count the buttons on her cardigan. Child A loved his food, being outside, the park and watching television.

What we have learned

How effective are parenting assessment processes?

How realistic are professionals' expectations of an individual's ability to parent when they have never had any involvement with a child?

The review identified that there was one Family Time Worker who undertook most of the family time sessions, this was highlighted as good practice. The residential assessment was deemed to be thorough and comprehensive and appropriately highlighted that the assessment needed to continue as Child A and his father moved to live in their own home in the community. The review identified that a multi-agency plan of assessment and support for families living their own home may be a better test of a parent's ability to meet their child's needs in their usual living context.

Child A's father told the reviewer that he felt overwhelmed by the multi-agency support offered and the expectations. He stated he was repeatedly contacted by professionals, who were individually, and quite rightly, following up, which then caused him more stress.

Do services have a good enough understanding of the role of the extended family in safeguarding and protecting children?

In February 2023, the Government, as part of the national Stable Homes Built on Love report, announced the Families First for Children Pathfinder Programme. One of the four key elements of the programme was *"greater use of family networks, involving the wider family in decision-making at an earlier stage throughout the system"*. Child A's review found that Blackpool Children's Services have had a Family and Friends Service in place for several years. Child A's paternal family were supported via Family and Friends Meeting, as it had been recognised by professionals that ensuring Child A and father's support network was important for when they moved to their own accommodation. What came to light following the death of Child A, which frontline professionals supporting Child A and the Father did not know, was that the paternal Grandmother became seriously unwell in July, and was hospitalised in August, six days before Child A was admitted to hospital, where he died two days later.

Are Child in our Care/Child in Need processes sufficiently robust and do plans align effectively?

Between the Final Court Hearing on 14th July and the emergency services being called to the family home on 19th August, a multi-agency Child In Need meeting had not been undertaken. The need for a Child In Need meeting had been discussed between the Court Team Social Worker and IRO, and the social Worker had drafted a Child In Need plan, however a date had not been arranged for the meeting to take place with father, partner agencies and family members.

The review highlighted learning that the partnership needs to ensure all Family Plans, co-produced with family members, are integrated into Children's My Plans (when in our care), Child Protection Plans, Child In Need Plans and Early Help Plans of support and that family members should be invited to all forms of review meetings.

Are there barriers to a family being honest with services?

The reviewer reflected that a central issue for this family was losing the support of the paternal Grandmother, and father's fears of sharing with agencies that he was starting to struggle to cope, in terms of the possibility of his son being removed from his care. The father informed the reviewer that he had positive relationships with several professionals and that he now wishes that she had been honest with people who had supported him. The review learned that all agencies working with children should continue to undertake professional curiosity, even when things appear to be going well. That all agencies need to have an honest and open relationships with families, seeking to support families to share when they are struggling so we can prevent children from experiencing harm at the earliest stage.

What do I need to do as a practitioner / manager?

1. Use of Residential Assessment Units

- Reflect on an individual child and family basis whether a residential assessment would provide an insight of the parent(s) ability to meet their child's independently in their usual living context.
- Consider if a multi-agency plan of community assessment and support, whilst the family live in their own home, would better reflect the realities the parent being able to meet their child's needs and manage the responsibilities of managing the own home.

2. Ensure expectations of parents are realistic and achievable.

- When developing plans, always fully explore with the parent, their history, background, experiences, capacity, and support networks.
- Ask the question - is what we are asking of this parent realistically too much, or is it too soon? Are we focusing the plan on the main issues we are worried about?
- Co-produce the plan and expectations taking into account the individual's circumstances
- Look beyond surface-level presentations and explore how the parent is truly coping

3. Continue to be professionally curious and questioning, event when things seem to be going well for the family

- Remain curious about what might be hidden or not shared by parents. Reflect with partner agencies about any inconsistencies in what you see and hear, share concerns with colleagues in partner agencies and the lead agency practitioner.

4. Co-ordinate multi agency plans of support

- Co-produce and review plans with the family network and all agencies involved in the plan of support.
- Make sure that Family Plans are integrated into all other forms of plans.

5. Hold a multi-agency meeting before a Child returns home

- Social Workers and IROs should ensure a Child In Need Meeting date is arranged to take place following a Family Court outcome of a Supervision Order – Refer to Blackpool's Supervision Order Pathway Procedure as set out in the Multi Agency Safeguarding Procedures on TriX.
- When a child lives with a parent via a Supervision Order, all agencies should be involved in a Child In Need meeting, with the family to share information and agree on a plan of support. If a Child in Need Meeting has not been arranged, this should be communicated to the Social Work Team Manager.

6. Involve key family members in all relevant meetings

- Ensure the child's voice is heard through wider family members attendance at meetings
- Share names and direct contact details of all professionals involved in the plan with family members, so they know who to contact
- Ensure family members receive meeting invites well in advance, with details on time, location, and purpose.
- Confirm that meeting times, formats i.e. venues or TEAMS meetings, and language are accessible and suitable for family members to support attendance
- If a key supporting family member stops attending meetings and cannot be contacted, explore the reasons for this and consider the impact for the child.
- Ensure Family Plans are taken into account in all review meeting processes
- If a previous foster carer continues to offer a parent support, consider if they need to attend

7. Always hear and act on the child's voice

- Observe patterns of nonattendance at the child's education setting and health appointments - consider what this might be communicating about the child's lived experience and wellbeing
- Observe and interpret children's behaviour and presentation - what might their behaviour be telling us?
- If you don't have access to the child, questions why the parent may not be letting you see them.

Further Reading

Further learning and resources can be found on the [Blackpool Safeguarding Partnerships Website](#)

Children's social care: stable homes, built on love <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/childrens-social-care-stable-homes-built-on-love>

NSPCC Guidance [Disguised compliance': learning from case reviews NSPCC 2025](#) March 2025

For queries or feedback please contact the MASA Partnership Business Unit MASA@blackpool.gov.uk