

**Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Lancashire Children's Safeguarding Assurance Partnership
Ryan, Nathan and Amelia Child Safeguarding Practice Review Practitioner Briefing**

This child safeguarding practice review considers the response of partner agencies to a family of three children, the older two of whom had substantial additional needs. The review considered the multi-agency response to the family over a three and a half year period, prior to one of the children being taken into the care of the local authority. Their mum was a single parent who had her own learning needs, and understandably found parenting a considerable challenge. The elder boys had been open to the children with complex needs team for a significant number of years and were educated in a special school. A number of other statutory and voluntary agencies also supported the family, although it was not always clear how they co-ordinated their work.

The review considers the need for practitioners working with children with additional needs to remain aware of the potential for their being abused or neglected; the need for consistent use of neglect, parenting and pre-birth assessments; the delivery and review of Education, Health and Care plans, the use of escalation processes when plans are not progressing as envisaged, and the role of charities in safeguarding.

Safeguarding Children with Complex Needs

The majority of practitioners working with the family were focussed on Ryan and Nathan's additional needs and the parenting support that mum needed to meet them. This resulted in Amelia's own needs and the safeguarding risks to all three children being overlooked (and when concerns about Amelia arose they were treated in isolation from Ryan and Nathan's). Significantly, assessments did not consider the impact of each child's behaviour on their siblings and the potential for harm to be caused.

The emphasis on providing support and preventing family breakdown was at the expense of exploring and understanding the lived experience of the children, including Nathan who was largely non-verbal. The review therefore highlights the importance of considering what the behaviour of non-verbal children tells you, how the needs of one child impact on others in the household, and of maintaining a focus on safeguarding all children in a household, irrespective of the child with whom you are primarily involved.

Good Practice

The review identified a number of good practice points including:

- ⇒ Two nurseries that Amelia attended documented concerns and made many appropriate referrals for specialist services.
- ⇒ The nurseries worked well together when mum initiated the transfer of Amelia from one nursery to the other. This ensured that safeguarding concerns were not lost.
- ⇒ A clinical psychology report made constructive recommendations to help practitioners understand and respond to changes in Ryan's presentation.

Naming neglect

In practice neglect can be notoriously difficult to define and respond to, with an extra layer of complexity provided when, as in this case, the children have additional needs. The additional needs may serve to make the child more vulnerable, but also make understanding their lived experience more difficult.

All three local authority areas within the CSAP area have neglect strategies that aim to develop practitioners' ability to assess neglect and objectively 'name it', while supporting families to make changes. This is supported through the availability of common neglect screening and assessment tools. These should be completed at the earliest possible opportunity, so that children like Ryan, Nathan and Amelia, do not live with neglect for any longer than necessary.

Denial of access to the family home

When multi-agency timelines were combined as part of the review process, it became obvious that there had been lengthy periods when no practitioner had accessed the family home to see where the children lived and slept. Difficulties with accessing the home were such that a voluntary sector agency had to exercise their powers as landlord to do so and thereby identify significant concerns about home conditions.

Seeing where children live provides a window on their lived experiences, in this case the home was found to be cluttered and dirty, with evidence that Amelia routinely slept in her pram and was locked in her room to protect her from her siblings. Accessing family homes usually requires consent, which may not always be forthcoming. In such situations practitioners should question what the lack of consent is telling them and raise their concerns with others.

Read the full Ryan, Nathan and Amelia CSPR report [here](#).

Read more learning from case reviews about safeguarding children with complex needs [here](#)