

Case Summary

Adult Q died in Blackpool in 2019 after an acute asthma attack. He was 19 years of age. Severe obesity was also a factor which also contributed to his death.

Key Themes and Learning Points

Assessing risks when care leavers 'return to their parents'

Adult Q was a care leaver in the Trafford area of Greater Manchester who left his long term foster care placement and moved to live with his father and stepmother just after his eighteenth birthday. Trafford Council treated this move as a 'return to parents' which is not an uncommon event when 'looked after' children reach the age of 18. However, Adult Q had never lived with his father and step-mother or maintained contact with them. His father – who had chronic health needs himself - and step-mother struggled to support Adult Q. Trafford Council acknowledge that they didn't fully understand the dynamics of the household to which Adult Q moved and need to introduce a 'returning home procedure' which includes a risk assessment.

Cross border working

Adult Q moved to Blackpool from Trafford with his father and step-mother. He continued to receive support from Trafford Aftercare service who did not contact services in Blackpool until ten months after the move took place. Whilst there was some promising joint working with Blackpool Young People's Service, no multi-agency meeting took place or was considered.

Effectiveness of assessments

Adult Q's capabilities and the positive persona he projected may have masked his vulnerabilities to an extent. The assessment undertaken by Blackpool Adult Learning Disability service highlighted several interrelated needs but did not consider the impact of obesity on Adult Q's life. No Care Act assessment was considered by either Trafford or Blackpool. Shortly before his death, his step-mother requested a mental health assessment for Adult Q but this was not treated as a 'nearest relative' request under the Mental Health Act and advice was not sought from an Approved Mental Health Practitioner (AMHP).

Support to address obesity

Adult Q's weight doubled from 84kg to 178kg over the last two years of his life. His weight gain was subject to specialist investigations after his move to Blackpool but he wasn't referred to weight management services until shortly before his death. The SAR was advised that this approach was consistent with expected clinical practice but Adult Q's lived experience may not have been given sufficient attention. Asthma is harder to control if obese, attacks are more likely and if an attack takes place it can be more severe. His weight gain may have been a factor in his asthma returning.

Safeguarding concerns overlooked

No safeguarding referral was considered at any point although there was growing evidence that Adult Q was neglecting himself.

Mental Capacity

The SAR took the view that there was reason to doubt Adult Q's 'executive capacity' in terms of his ability to act on his understanding of the risk to his health from obesity in his daily life.

Lived experience

Professionals tended to perceive Adult Q's presentation through the eyes of his father and step-mother, and record their views rather than those of Adult Q.

Deficits in the Leaving Care Offer

There were some key omissions from the Trafford Local Care Leavers Offer, including ensuring that Adult Q knew what services were available to him in Blackpool, helping him to develop independence skills, ensuring he accessed the additional support he needed, offering a family group conference when he moved to live with his father and step-mother and helping him to maintain his relationship with his former foster carers.

Supporting care leavers

Stein (1) places care leavers in three broad categories

- The '**moving on**' group who experience attachment, stability, continuity, gradual transitions and move from specialist to universal services.
- The '**survivors**' group who have experienced placement instability, need more formal support, require substantial leaving care support which often makes a big difference for them and who 'move on' later.
- The '**strugglers**' group who have suffered severe maltreatment, have complex problems, instability and attachment problems and can become trapped within specialist services.

Adult Q benefitted from many of the positives of the 'moving on' group, but the upheavals he experienced in the year in which he left the care of the Local Authority put him in the 'survivors' group and in the months prior to his death he was in the 'strugglers' group in that his needs, which required more leaving care support than was provided, became increasingly complex.

(1) Stein, M. (2012) Young People Leaving Care: Supporting Pathways to Adulthood, Jessica Kingsley, London.

Learning Brief – Adult Q: May 2022