Voluntary sector: learning from case reviews

What case reviews tell us about the involvement of voluntary agencies

July 2014

This briefing is based on case reviews published since 2011. It pulls together and highlights the learning contained in the published reports.

Most of the findings from our series of briefings on “learning from case reviews” are relevant to practitioners in voluntary agencies. This briefing focuses on learning that specifically relates to the voluntary sector.

Introduction

Serious case reviews tend to fall into 2 categories: cases where a family’s problems are known to local services and where a number of different agencies are involved in supporting the parents and/or children; and cases where local services are not aware of any particular problems.

Cases that involve the voluntary sector almost always fall into the first category: highly complex cases, often with long-standing problems where multiple agencies are providing services to the family.

Learning for improved practice

See parents, think children
Voluntary agencies are often providing services to adults who are parents. It is therefore vital that practitioners consider the impact of a parent’s problems on their ability to care for and safeguard their children.
• Always report concerns about a child’s safety or welfare to the relevant agencies.

Sharing information about concerns and making referrals to statutory services
Serious case reviews often highlight the good practice of voluntary agencies in sharing their concerns with statutory agencies. There are many examples of the persistence of individual practitioners in making referrals.
• Whilst telephone and face to face conversations can be more immediate, they should always be followed up with formalised referrals of concerns to relevant services.
• If it seems that no action has been taken, practitioners should follow-up to check that the referral was received and appropriately dealt with by the relevant team.

**Receiving referrals, take up of services and missed appointments**
When statutory services refer children and/or adults to services provided by the voluntary sector, this may or may not be part of a formal care or support plan. But other organisations are not always familiar with specific referral criteria for individual services.
• Clarify with the referrer exactly what service will be provided and to which family members
• Tell the referrer if the client is not engaging with the service (including refusing to attend or missing appointments).
• Consider how to overcome barriers to client engagement, such as clients not having the bus fare to attend centre.

**Working with other agencies**
Case reviews highlight that there was often confusion, misunderstanding or assumptions about which agencies were involved in and who was doing what.
• Clarify which organisations are taking which roles. Do not rely on implicit understandings or assumptions.
• Continue to report concerns with all relevant agencies. Do not assume that other agencies are sharing information between themselves.

**Recording information and confidentiality**
Voluntary agencies often have different relationships with their clients than statutory agencies. This difference in culture can mean practitioners do not always follow good safeguarding practice.
• Information about families, safeguarding concerns, services provided and action taken should be recorded in detail.
• Information about family arrangements should be gathered so that it can be used to inform risk assessments. (This includes where children live and information about any men visiting, staying or living in the home).
• Robust and timely assessments should be undertaken and progress and developments recorded.
• Information about safeguarding concerns should be shared with relevant agencies even if the clients do not consent to this.

**Training**
• All staff should receive relevant training around safeguarding including understanding the risks that are related specifically to the work they undertake and client group they work with.
Management and supervision

- There needs to be clear management structures to enable the escalation of concerns where appropriate.
- Practitioners need appropriate supervision to enable information to be analysed and safeguarding risks to be identified.

Contact the NSPCC Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:
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