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Background

The CPR involves the placement of 2 young people, Child X and Child Y, with Foster Carer (FC) Adult Z. Both reported they had been sexually abused by FC Adult Z. The review timeline covers a split period of approximately 3 years, encompassing an overlapping 3-month period when both were placed with FC Adult Z at the same time.

FC Adult Z was found guilty in respect of the reported abuse against Child Y, and not guilty in respect of charges relating to abuse against Child X. In the interests of consistency of language, the words “report” and “statement” are used to describe the reports of sexual abuse made by Child X and Child Y.



CYSUR 6 2021

Extended Child Practice Review

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Context to the CPR

Multiple placements of children with complex histories and profiles were made with FC Adult Z. This included a high turnover of placements and amendments made to terms of approval to accommodate high demand. Placement decisions were reactive, and risk assessments were not undertaken to consider the risks and complex histories of other children in placement, alongside the needs of Child X and Child Y. Several incidents in placement should have triggered an early assessment of continuing suitability to foster by the Fostering Panel, including concerns regarding alcohol and inappropriate visitors to the house and police attendance. These incidents were not always included in FC Adult Z’s annual review, and safeguarding procedures including for those in a position of trust were not instigated.

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Improving Systems and Practice

- LA Learning and Development Services to ensure the availability of role specific training for Fostering Services and the Fostering Panel, with a particular focus upon triggers and thresholds for Section 47 enquires (including the application of these procedures to children looked after when safeguarding concerns are identified) and safeguarding allegations/concerns about practitioners and those in positions of trust.
- The Police and Social Services to review together the criteria and threshold for referrals for sharing information between the Police and Social Services in relation to fostering households where Police have attended an incident.

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Child’s Voice

FC Adult Z was held in high regard by professionals, as were his accounts of events in placement. It was clear that in the case of Child X, a contrasting narrative was developed of him being untruthful, leading to his voice and views not being taken into account as much as they should and ultimately, his versions of events not being believed. This occurred within a context of a number of events occurring within placement that could have raised concern amongst professionals and led to further professional curiosity and challenge as outlined above.

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Improving Systems and Practice

- LA Fostering Services to review their processes in respect of recruitment, review and supervision of foster carers, focusing on supervision, record keeping, the management of allegations, placement planning and matching, and the annual review process including “continuing suitability”.
- Fostering teams to ensure robust processes and procedures are in place in respect of Individual Safe Care Plans, Foster Carer Agreements and Delegated Authority Agreements.
- Fostering teams to ensure mechanisms are in place to facilitate children and young persons looked after’s voices and views being captured as part of placement supervision and annual reviews, including channels through which they can communicate with trusted professionals.

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Identified Good Practice

- There is evidence of advocacy being offered and positively used.
- Child X attended Child Looked After reviews, with his views recorded.
- The Health Board took multiple positive steps to support Child X in light of his identified vulnerability.
- Practitioners sensitively considered matters affecting Child Y as they strived to meet his care and support needs.
- Education maintained Child X’s place on his school roll to support continuity for him. In respect of Child Y, his college was identified to be a point of strength and support for him.
- The Police sought to build rapport with and support Child X following his report of abuse, and Child Y’s report was dealt with in accordance with procedures.

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Foster Carer Role

FC Adult Z appears to have had a disproportionate amount of control/exercise of delegated parental responsibility and influence in respect of Child X and Child Y’s day to day care, not akin to the children’s legal status. This resulted in a corresponding blurring of boundaries, roles, responsibilities and accountability, placing him in a perceived and actual position of control. This served as an additional barrier to reports or expression of concerns by the young people in placement and any corresponding professional challenge. More robust supervision and oversight may have highlighted the need to realign expectations and provided more robust clarity regarding the legal parameters of FC Adult Z’s role and responsibilities.