

## Contextual Safeguarding: The Next Chapter

Since 2017 a research team led by Professor Carlene Firmin has supported and tracked the adoption of Contextual Safeguarding (CS) approaches to extra-familial harm (EFH). This work has transformed how many children's social care departments, schools, and voluntary sector organisations, respond to significant harm beyond families – and led to changes in statutory guidance in England, Wales, and Scotland. 10 areas have formally tested the implementation of the CS Framework; a further 53 have joined a Local Area Interest Network (and formed regional interest groups), and 20 VCS organisations formed a CS Collective. Uptake has been swift, and resulted in child welfare responses to peer groups, schools, and public places where young people have come to significant harm. The CS team recently consolidated the learning from this progress into a freely available resource library, response catalogue and suite of case studies to support ongoing implementation across the country.

Despite significant progress, the last five years of testing have raised questions about how to embed the CS Framework **safely** and **ethically**. In particular, how to embed the approach within systems, structures, contexts, and practice in ways that work with young people, their families and wider communities, rather than does to or simply/only watches over them:



### Systems

What are the core components of a policy framework to support ethical and safe planning for young people and peer groups affected by EFH?



### Structures

In what ways do structural inequalities shape young people's experiences of EFH harm-reduction responses?



### Contexts

How do interventions in, and with, contexts associated with EFH build safety (and not solely disrupt risk) for young people ?



### Practice

What are the conditions that enable or hinder how social workers use contextual safeguarding in practice responses to EFH?

In response, the Contextual Safeguarding programme will launch ***The Next Chapter (TNC)*** project in July 2022, which is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and The Pocressi Initiative. TNC will run until December 2023 and generate answers to these questions through four workstreams:

**Workstream 1: Planning for Safety:** Led by Professor Carlene Firmin, *Planning for Safety* will generate evidence on child protection pathways and peer group assessments in cases of extra-familial harm. We will support three areas to test a Risk Outside of the Home (ROTH) child protection pathway/category (originally piloted in Wiltshire) and track their progress. We will also capture efforts to co-produce approaches to *assessing* (not mapping) peer relationships with young people. The

results of this work will be used to inform any revisions to statutory guidance in England and Wales.

**Workstream 2: Building Safety:** Led by Dr Lauren Wroe *Building Safety* will consider the ways in which structural inequalities shape young people's experiences of extra-familial harm. Working with multi-agency professionals in one LA site we will collaborate with young people, families, and communities to identify and address the role statutory services have in building safety or creating risk associated to extra-familial harm. The project will co-design with communities an element of a site's Contextual Safeguarding system to target structural factors – and disseminate results to other areas wishing to use Contextual Safeguarding approaches in this way.

**Workstream 3: Schools: Spaces of safety / spaces of harm:** Led by Dr Jenny Lloyd *Spaces of safety/spaces of harm* will identify how the context of 'education' can protect against or contribute to extra-familial harm. Firstly, it will identify the rate of exclusions and managed moves for young people experiencing extra-familial harm. Secondly, working with two local authorities and schools nationally this workstream will capture case study examples of how schools are creating safety for young people.

**Workstream 4: Sustaining social work:** Led by Dr Rachael Owens *Sustaining Social Work* will focus on the extent to which Contextual Safeguarding enables holistic and sustainable social work practice. Working with sites across England, we will engage social workers to co-produce knowledge based on their experiences of delivering social work aligned with Contextual Safeguarding. We will then explore the possibilities that working in this way opens up for ethical practice, its impact on professional motivation as well as what enables and hinders its success. The findings will be used to inform both the implementation of Contextual Safeguarding and contribute to wider discussions about the nature of social work and the needs of the workforce.

We will use the combined results of these four workstreams to produce a framework against which countries, sectors, organisations, and teams can assess their readiness to *ethically* adopt a Contextual Safeguarding approach; as well as use the findings to develop and implement any policy amendments introduced in England, Wales, and Scotland.

### **Getting involved and keeping updated**

The Contextual Safeguarding programme currently hosts a Local Area Interest Network and Regional Champions Network, a UK Advisory Panel, and Voluntary and Community Sector Collective and an Academics Network. All members of these networks will be contacted in July-August to identify opportunities to be involved in revised governance arrangements that will support the delivery of The Next Chapter.

In the interim if you are interested in any of the four workstreams please feel free to contact:

Workstream 1: Carlene Firmin, [carlene.e.firmin@durham.ac.uk](mailto:carlene.e.firmin@durham.ac.uk)

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Updates will also be provided via the Contextual Safeguarding Newsletter. If you would like to sign-up to the newsletter please email [contextual.safeguarding@durham.ac.uk](mailto:contextual.safeguarding@durham.ac.uk)