

Case study: effective multi-agency working in ROTH child protection pathways

This composite case study draws upon real examples of where multi-agency teams have collaborated to keep a young person safe via a Risk Outside The Home (ROTH) child protection pathway. It highlights some of the key ways in which the partners who participated in meetings for a child on a ROTH pathway set shared values and goals, worked together to target contexts, and challenged one another where necessary.

What was the case?

A decision was made to support Rob (16) via a ROTH plan when he was assessed as being at risk of significant harm in public places due to his experiences of criminal exploitation and recent arrests for carrying a weapon. Professionals were concerned that he was at risk of violence from others and also being violent towards other young people. He was cautioned for carrying drugs, and was arrested for carrying a knife while on his way to work. After a strategy discussion, enquiries were undertaken and an initial assessment completed by social care. A multi-agency ROTH meeting was then convened for professionals from social care, education, health, community safety and the police, along with Rob and his mum, to discuss the findings of the assessment and agree a plan. The meeting was 'hybrid' – it was done in person while also streamed across Microsoft Teams to ensure everyone could join. Rob's mum was in attendance online, and Rob himself joined her for the about 15 minutes midway through the meeting.

Creating shared aims

Before the meeting started, the chair talked through a 'Key terms and agreed language' document, which had been developed by the social workers. He asked anyone who did not understand a term or wanted to question the use of a certain word to do so before the start of the meeting. The document was grounded in care, concerned with the welfare of a young person and their needs.



Example of creating shared goals, culture, and values at the start of the meeting. Can be referred back to throughout the process to remind professionals of the purpose and goals of the ROTH pathway.

Previously, ROTH meetings had begun with the police sharing any intelligence about the young person. Parents and the young person were normally asked to leave the meeting for this part, or it was done prior to them joining. This had recently changed, so instead, they began with the social worker talking about Rob's strengths, interests, and relationships. The chair asked Rob's mum to share his likes and dislikes. The chair encouraged partners to contribute to this part of the meeting and share anything about the young person that wasn't included. The social worker shared that Rob is very bright, confident, and cares deeply about his family.

Managing conflicting values

Next, professionals talked about their concerns. The chair mapped out all the concerns they had about Rob on a whiteboard so everyone could see, and this was used to help record the meeting. They were especially concerned with some of the places where Rob was spending time and where there had been escalating violence and tensions between young people.

Choosing how to start a multi-agency meeting sets the tone for the rest of the process.

Centring the young person in the meeting, and encouraging professionals to not only hear about their strengths and interests but to share their reflections on this means the meeting, begins from a place of care and welfare.

It's useful to create a shared document and encourage more collaboration. Professionals were able to ask questions, gain clarity and challenge the approach more easily with the whiteboard there for all to follow. For parents, this also gives transparency as to what is being recorded.



At one point, an anti-social-behaviour (ASB) youth worker from community safety asked whether Rob could be restricted from going to a specific bench where other young people who might be a risk to his safety are known to spend their time. The bench was known locally as an unofficial memorial to a young person who had been killed. There were concerns that there were many young people from out of the area who had started congregating there, as well as the young people who lived locally. They reflected that a lot of residents in this area had expressed being 'fed up' with young people hanging around and causing trouble, so asked whether moving all the young people on, or perhaps removing the bench, might be in everyone's best interests.

The youth worker pointed out that while these concerns from the residents were valid, the immediate goal was to keep Rob and other young people safe while ensuring they could spend time in the community without being at risk. He also noted that finding ways to allow young people to grieve the individual who had died was important. The social worker then mentioned that, in the aftermath of this death, there had been some outreach support offered around the area by the youth worker, and a plan was made to explore reinstating this to provide guardianship. The youth worker suggested they talk to some of the young people about what provision might be useful to have in the area, or what they'd like to see happen to make them feel safer. This was planned to be done in collaboration with Rob's school, who offered up spare spaces on the school premises and to facilitate consultations with the young people. In the meantime, the youth worker, who had a strong relationship with Rob, agreed to continue engaging with him at the youth club and to inform his colleagues that Rob was at risk so they could provide guardianship when he attended the youth club.

A good example of where different approaches and values among multi-agency partners can be managed – the youth worker reminded the ASB worker that the goal is to make the contexts safer for the young person/people, rather than trying to control the young person and their movements. A plan was developed collaboratively to increase guardianship.



Considering how partners are perceived by young people

The police offered to join some evenings and daytime sessions with detached youth workers to build relationships with young people in the area. The youth worker suggested that while this sounded like a great idea, they would need to go and ask the young people if they felt comfortable with this first, as it might make young people less likely to engage with any professionals if they thought it might get them in trouble. They agreed this was probably the best idea, and the police and youth worker would discuss whether to implement this at a meeting outside this one.

Drawing on existing relationships

Rob's mum pointed out that Rob's cycle route to work is potentially risky, as he had to go through areas where young people who were a risk to him spent their time, and these areas had limited foot traffic and were badly lit.

The social worker added to the plan that he would speak with local businesses and community members on the route to let them know what to do if they thought a young person might be at risk or violence. The chair suggested the young person sit down with the social worker to map out the route to work so they could plan to approach all the different businesses and community members beforehand. Rob's mum said he might do this, but he would probably prefer to do it with her or the youth worker instead, who could then share it with the social worker. This was agreed as the best approach and it was added to the plan as an action for Mum, Rob, the youth worker and the social worker.



Partners must consider the relationships young people (not just the young person who is subject to a ROTH plan) have with professionals, such as police, and factor that in to planning.

It's sensible to draw on existing relationships rather than make the young person engage with professionals he doesn't yet know/ trust.

Challenging each other

At one point, one of the professionals from community safety suggested Rob be enrolled in a knife-safety awareness programme, so he could learn more about the risks of carrying a weapon.

The social worker pushed back against this, agreeing with community safety that ideally Rob would not be carrying a knife, but that this wouldn't solve the problem of why he feels unsafe to begin with. Mum pointed out that Rob knew the risks of carrying, but he would rather be arrested than risk not being able to defend himself.

The police officer agreed, and provided some statistics on how weapons-carrying in the local authority had increased in recent years. Him and the social worker discussed doing some joint work with young people to explore their reasons for carrying and what would make them feel safer. This idea was then taken to a contextual panel meeting outside the ROTH process to be developed.

Collaborative working can continue outside the ROTH process, with professionals using their combined knowledge and expertise to think about how to make changes to the contexts where young people are at risk, and engage with young people in the process.

