

Contextual Safeguarding in Abianda

This case study was written by Delphine Peace, Research Fellow in the Contextual Safeguarding programme, in partnership with Laura Price, Young Women's Associate at Abianda. It shares how Abianda is adopting Contextual Safeguarding and the difference the approach has made to safeguarding young people from extra-familial harm.

How is Abianda implementing Contextual Safeguarding?

[Abianda](#) is a London-based social enterprise that works with young women affected by gangs and county lines, and the professionals who support them. Abianda works alongside young women to enhance local practice through training and case consultation as well as providing 1:1 support to young women affected by these issues.

Abianda started to engage with Contextual Safeguarding (CS) in the early developments of the Contextual Safeguarding programme, seeing the links across participatory youth work practice and Contextual Safeguarding approaches. Abianda began integrating contextual approaches in 1:1 work with young women, particularly through using and adapting the safety mapping and peer mapping tools from the CS Network. These tools have been designed to encourage conversations with young people about their perceptions and experiences of risk and safety across various contexts, and thus lend themselves well to Abianda's underpinning participatory ethos. In 2018 Abianda's CEO, Abi Billingham, recorded a [podcast](#) for the CS Network in which she reflects on the value of contextual approaches in the voluntary sector and how they resonate with the organisation's participatory ethos. Abianda also amended the safeguarding chronologies in its case file recording system by including a section to record contexts in which risk is occurring.

Abianda joined the 'Contextual Safeguarding VCS Collective' when it was created in 2019. The same year, Abianda received a organisation-wide training on CS delivered by Dr Carlene Firmin. Moreover, one of Abianda's Young Woman's Associates became a member of the CS Champions Network. Abianda's CS champion has played a key role in implementing the approach across the organisation: firstly by helping to embed contextual approaches in practice and then by gradually incorporating them into organisational policy and documents. They champion CS in various ways:

- Using and adapting the case consultation tool from the CS Network to hold a series of consultations with colleagues and training them on using the tool, which is now used across the organisation
- Bringing a contextual perspective to regular group reflective practice sessions
- Running specific practice session on CS and related topics

- Reviewing the organisational risk assessment by separating risk factors into different contextual categories

This first stage of embedding CS in Abianda centred on individual work with young women, corresponding to Level 1 of CS. According to Abianda's CS champion, this was a fairly straightforward process as Contextual Safeguarding resonated with Abianda's organisational values and culture. More recently, Abianda has begun to explore Level 2 interventions to target the contexts themselves, which requires a more significant strategic and practice shift. Here too Abianda's CS champion is instrumental in developing this new way of working. At present, Abianda is trialling this new approach through two interventions:

- An intervention with a peer group in a local youth club – key learnings from this piece of work are shared in this case study and podcast available [here](#) on the CS Network.
- An intervention (currently being planned) that will bring a contextual lens to a whole-school approach by conducting safety mapping with students. This will be fed back to the school to help improve safety in the school.

In addition, Abianda plans on involving young people in the development of contextual interventions at Level 2. A member of the Contextual Safeguarding programme who is currently working on developing participatory tools for engaging young people in shaping contextual approaches has shared a number of tools that they had developed with Abianda's CS champion to support this work.

What difference has Contextual Safeguarding made to Abianda's work?

- **Supporting safety planning for young women:** Tools such as safety mapping and peer mapping are adapted to support safety planning with young women and improve their access to support networks and services in their community.
- **Framing Abianda's advocacy work:** The Contextual Safeguarding framework has helped Abianda to frame its advocacy work with young women more explicitly within a contextual lens and to better articulate its approach to partners and funders.
- **Developing new interventions to target the contexts of harm:** The peer intervention at a local youth club, corresponding to Level 2 of Contextual Safeguarding, represents a new way of working for Abianda that is much more embedded in the local community. While Abianda usually works with young women who train their peers, this was the first time that the intervention targeted a peer group at a local youth club, led by youth facilitators who were from the same community as their peers. It was young women from this peer group who came up with the idea of becoming mentors, as they thought that their younger peers would have been reluctant to engage with this intervention otherwise. This approach required Abianda practitioners to spend a significant amount of time getting to know the peer group, the youth club setting, and understand the wider community context – but ultimately it was seen as having real value in engaging this peer group and developing trusted relationships. This new way of working provided a community lens through which Abianda could develop its participatory work. Similarly, Abianda will adopt this contextual lens further through

developing a whole-school intervention.

- **Influencing partners at a strategic level:** Abianda shares its knowledge of Contextual Safeguarding with its partners at a strategic level. For example, as the VCS partner of one London borough, Abianda is currently championing the approach with the borough's Youth Community and Youth Offending services by sharing insight, learning and signposting to resources on the CS Network.

Find out more

A case study and a podcast about the peer-led intervention that Abianda trialled at a local youth club, both available [here](#).

In this [podcast](#) Abianda's CEO, Abi Billingham, reflects on the value of contextual approaches in the voluntary sector.