

Contextual Safeguarding in Safer London

This case study was written by Delphine Peace, Research Fellow in the Contextual Safeguarding programme, in partnership with Safer London. It shares how Safer London is adopting Contextual Safeguarding and the difference the approach has made to safeguarding young Londoners from extra-familial harm.

How is Safer London implementing Contextual Safeguarding?

[Safer London](#) is an organisation supporting young Londoners, families and communities affected by exploitation or violence.

Reviewing exploitation services

In early 2019, Safer London undertook a review of one of its strands of work to adapt how exploitation services were delivered. This provided an initial opportunity for the organisation to build contextual approaches into its services: at Level 1 of Contextual Safeguarding (CS), by building contextual approaches into its direct work with young Londoners, as well as trying to move towards Level 2, to target and offer interventions in the contexts in which harm happens.

Updating referral and case recording systems

During the winter of 2019, the team which supports young Londoners affected by exploitation reviewed and updated their form for referring Londoners people for 1:1 support. The revised referral form has distinct sections guiding the referrer to consider the spectrum of contexts that might offer relevant information to understand a young person's exposure to harm. Within each section additional questions are asked about the strengths and protective factors within that context, whether harm has occurred in that context and whether anyone or anywhere else in that context could benefit from support; such as parents or carers, peer groups, the school or a place or space.

Safer London has also developed a new case recording system. As part of this development, peer groups and/or places can now be referred. It is intended that all referral forms will feature questions about the context where harm has occurred and this can be linked to actual places on the recording system; i.e. a school, a park or a business address. In addition, places themselves can be referred for support and once recorded will be searchable on the system so that it is possible to see who or what is already linked to them. This will allow analysis of patterns and emerging issues and for different contexts to be viewed as a standalone safeguarding issue requiring support or intervention.

Exploring peer interventions

Moreover, in 2019, Safer London partnered with the Contextual Safeguarding team on a research study exploring opportunities for safeguarding interventions with young Londoners' peer networks. Findings from the study are available [here](#). Following this piece of work Safer London has supported staff to use peer mapping and to consider peer relationships when supporting young Londoners. The organisation is currently considering how to develop different peer interventions, both structured and bespoke.

Launching a new strategy

In April 2020, Safer London launched its new five-years [strategy](#), which structures services for reaching 'People, Peers and Places', largely influenced by Contextual Safeguarding principles. The development of a Contextual Safeguarding approach features explicitly as one of the key strategic activities. Under this new strategy, Safer London is bringing its exploitation and violence teams to work more closely together. Safer London is further embedding Contextual Safeguarding across the organisation by reviewing assessment forms, safeguarding policies and service manuals to make them consider contexts more explicitly. This has been supported by the introduction of a single 'front door' service for all referrals (regardless of harm-type).

Alongside these strategic developments, Safer London designated a number of staff as Contextual Safeguarding champions. The champions received a half day training facilitated by members of the Contextual Safeguarding team, which also supported a webinar series organised by Safer London on place based interventions. These champions have introduced various contextual approaches to practice, such as safety and peer mapping, using and adapting tools from the CS Network through internal training and practice development sessions.

Further development is underway to ensure that Contextual Safeguarding is a golden thread running through Safer London's referrals, assessments, work planning and interventions. With the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions gradually easing, place-based interventions will be explored further. For example, the organisation has recently received a referral for an estate following a number of stabbing incidents and reports of anti-social behaviour on the estate. Safer London is currently developing a piece of work aiming at creating safety on the estate through various strands of work, such as engaging with peer groups, parents, the local housing association, community safety partners and local businesses.

What difference has Contextual Safeguarding made to Safer London's work?

- **Informing Safer London's new strategy:** Contextual Safeguarding was useful as a framework to help Safer London shape its new strategy and broaden its remit to consider extra-familial harm more widely. The organisation created a front door team and adapted its referral criteria to consider wider types of risks and harm, including: missing; criminal exploitation; peer on peer abuse; trafficking and modern slavery. As part of this widened focus, Safer London is gradually merging its exploitation and

violence services.

- **Broadening opportunities to build safety in contexts:** As an alternative approach to individualised responses to child exploitation, Contextual Safeguarding provides a lens to consider where the harm is happening, the social conditions allowing the harm to happen in this specific context, and how safety can be created in this space. Safer London is now better equipped to proactively reach out to different contexts when emerging needs are identified.
- **Considering contexts at referral:** Revisions made to its referral form have been well received by external partners and has helped to identify universal services that could benefit from support around embedding contextual approaches in their practice.
- **Sharing learning across the sector:** Safer London is coordinating a community of practice through which it shares its experience of embedding Contextual Safeguarding with a range of VCS organisations, including smaller community-based organisations.