

Watching Over or Working With: Guidance from test sites

Applying the Watching Over Working With (WoWW) framework to social work innovation in response to extra-familial harm

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Learning from test sites

What kinds of relationships do sites who have tested Contextual Safeguarding hold with young people? Does Contextual Safeguarding enable relationships of trust, or lead to relationships centred around surveillance? This section of the toolkit provides an overview of what we have learnt when applying the WoWW framework to activities undertaken by local authorities.

We applied the Watching Over Working With framework to work that was carried out by local authority children's social care teams and their partners who took part in the National and

London Scale Up project local areas. They were asked to pilot Contextual Safeguarding, or aspects of a Contextual Safeguarding approach, and this was tracked by the research team.

What did we find out?

We found that most interventions into extra-familial risk in peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods featured some element of trusted relationships being formed with young people, their families, and communities, alongside some element of surveillance and monitoring, i.e., through the use of mapping exercises or increasing professional presence in community areas.

The extent to which interventions were grounded in trusted relationships, or relationships characterised more by 'watching over' young people and their communities, tended to reflect the extent to which local areas were delivering interventions in line with both the domains of Contextual Safeguarding and the values.

Using the framework, we asked a number of reflective questions about the interventions to establish what kinds of relationships were central in local authorities:

Questions we asked

Did the work **target contexts** or individuals and was the focus changing the **social conditions** in which harm happens or changing young people's behaviour (i.e., did it align with the 'target' domain and with the 'ecological' value?).

Was the work grounded in child welfare legislation (domain two) and **children's rights** or did other agencies take the lead, or were young people criminalised?

Was the project **collaborative**, working with the **strengths** of young people and their families and forming creative **partnerships** those who have reach into spaces where young people experience harm, drawing on these **lived realities** to **evidence** need and impact? Or was the choice of where, when, and how to intervene largely informed by professionals and professional datasets?

Finally, were **outcomes** achieved and measured that demonstrated an increase in safety in the places and groups in which young people had been harmed?

Findings from applying the framework

The table below summarises what we learnt when we applied the WoWW framework to data from the Scale Up pilots. It includes some important reflections for Contextual

Safeguarding work going forward and for us all to consider as we continue to engage with Contextual Safeguarding ideas and practices.

Relationships of trust

Focus and rationale

- Best interests and welfare of young people are paramount. Led by social care/child welfare agencies.
- Focus is increasing safety in groups and locations (as opposed to crime reduction or behavioural management).
- The promotion of children's welfare and health is the legal threshold for doing an assessment or intervening, not the prevention of crime.
- Grounded in rights to protection, participation, and privacy.
- Intended to increase positive relationships with young people, parents, and communities and decrease punishment.
- Addresses young people's social and economic vulnerabilities, i.e. poverty, poor housing, exclusion from education.

Relationships of surveillance

- Rationale is prevention of ASB and crime. Crime is used as a 'proxy' for harm: reduction of crime by any means is thought to mean the reduction of harm.
- 'Intelligence gathering' is primary focus.
- Motivated by a desire to 'showcase' multi-agency partnership work and protect or promote organisational reputation.
- Prompted by concerns about 'future' or 'possible' risk with actual need overlooked.
- Disproportionately targets or excludes on the basis of class/race/gender.
- Does not acknowledge or seek to address inequality - i.e. the unequal experiences of harm and care depending on a young persons race, gender, sexuality, disability, class or faith.
- Target is context but is reduced to profiling individuals within the context.
- Interventions are based on 'suspected' risk and 'associated' individuals resulting in a net-widening effect.

Legal and ethical parameters

- Practitioners monitor the scope and reach of interventions keeping them in line with safeguarding objectives.
- Practitioners consider what the legal threshold is for subjecting people or places to a statutory assessment – what threshold of harm has been met?

Strengths-based

- Work with young people is collaborative and consensual not coercive or conditional.
- Senior professionals are committed to a non-punitive, non-stigmatising approach to safeguarding.
- Strengths-based, reflective, and open to complexity (i.e., working with non-traditional partners).

Participation and co-production

- Led by young people's, families and communities' views about safety and risk (i.e., through surveys/consultations).
- Young people, parents and community members are provided with options to engage that meet access, communication, and trust needs.

Working with young people

- Professionals are open and curious about young people seeking to understand and support.
- Existing relationships of trust in the young person's network are recognised and supported.
- Young people are honoured with time, trust, and transparency.
- Professionals continue relationships with young people placed out of area.

Legal and ethical parameters

- Expansive and extends the usual remit of child safeguarding work. This is not communicated to young people, parents and partners and consent is not sought.
- Threshold, reach and purpose of mapping and assessment is un-defined.
- Data and images of people and places are shared across multi-agency partnerships without clear legal, ethical or data protection justification.
- Led by the police/solely or largely based on police intelligence.
- Information sharing is automatic (i.e., shared case management systems or reporting sites). Lacks consent and transparency.
- Young people turning 18 automatically become subject to criminal rather than welfare response.

Deficit/risk-based

- Risk assessment is escalated without evidence (all adolescent behaviour is understood as exploitation/crime).
- Young people or places are included in assessment or deemed 'at risk' due to their association with others without substantial evidence, and without their knowledge
- Professionals view young people as 'bad' or to be 'tackled' because they engage in 'criminal' or 'anti-social' behaviour.
- Assumption that arresting those who harm creates safety.
- Adversarial relationship with young people, parents, and community (i.e., increased professional visits/presence in area).

Structural Inequalities

- Impact of marginalisation or disproportionality is recorded but no action is taken to address it.
- Assessments inform individual plans not interventions with structures/context that create vulnerability.

Participation and co-production

- Professionals do not bring young people to meetings; they bring information from/about young people to meetings.
- Young people, families and communities are consulted but their views are not meaningfully incorporated into plans or actions.
- Young people have minimal control over how their information is used or on the direction or outcome of assessments.
- The priorities/need of services outweigh those of young people, families, and communities.

Working with young people (continued)

- Limit of statutory assessment and intervention is acknowledged (i.e., recognition that young people might not want to share information about their peers and communities).
- Protections are in place for young people who have shared information about harm to statutory services.
- Steps are taken to safeguard young people in areas where policing activity is taking place (i.e., support with impact of arrests).

Working with the community

- Community members and groups are engaged in decision making and planning not coerced through enforcement.
- Community guardianship involves resourcing community to build safety not just reporting to statutory agencies.

Doing to young people

- Young people are provided with resources as means of/condition of engagement, rather than need.
- Gathering intelligence is main goal of relationship building.
- Information sharing between professionals alienates young people and is prioritised over consent, transparency, and trust.
- Engagement is seen as young people's problem.
- Professional assessment of risk does not consider or reflect young people's views.
- Bureaucratic method and timeframe of assessment (i.e., peer assessment) is barrier to establishing actual trusted relationships with young people.

Doing to the community

- Community guardianship is reduced to 'informing' statutory agencies and reporting potential abuse.
- Surveys and community engagement are about 'getting the most' out of communities not supporting/resourcing.
- Lack of transparency with community about how information from consultations is used.
- Enforcement (licensing/immigration/traffic) used to coerce community into engagement with services.

Doing to parents

- Parents are blamed and punished for harm in extra-familial contexts.
- Stigmatising language used to talk about parents ('criminal families', 'unwilling to parent').
- Lack of transparency with parents about concerns for young people/how young people's information is being shared or stored.

Doing to peers

- Young people and their friends are subject to mapping and assessment without clear legal or ethical justification.
- Young people are asked to share information about their friendship groups and associates and not informed this is for 'mapping' or 'intelligence'.
- Focus on peers is not holistic and is reduced to identifying individuals and their associations.
- Peer-mapping is used to identify culpability through identification of 'leaders' or 'gang members'. This information can be and is requested by the police.
- Peer mapping outweighs peer support.
- Peer mapping serves need of professional agencies not of young people.

Impact

- Young people report feeling safer.
- Young people are decriminalised.
- A 'culture shift' in how professionals view young people (i.e., shift from ASB to welfare lens).
- Improves and repairs relationships and creates opportunities to work in a more relational way with, young people, their parents and communities.
- Young people are informed of the outcome of assessments/interventions.
- Young people can inform future practice and development

- Young people are not safer.
- Interventions lead to increased arrests of young people.
- Outcomes are individualised, punitive and do not address context. For example, child protection plans, relocations and convictions of offenders.
- Young people are dispersed into more marginal areas.
- Results in increased surveillance and enforcement of whole community.
- Outcomes for young people are unclear/are not followed through.
- Outcomes for children are determined by their gender/race/class.
- Contextual and structural drivers of harm are identified and not addressed (i.e., youth provision/built environment).
- Young people, parents and communities are not consulted on impact.
- Assessment, intervention, and monitoring outweighs benefits to young people, families, and community.
- Professionals are uncomfortable with partnerships working and information sharing requirements and about young people will be pursued for convictions

After reading the framework, consider:

What aspects of your work with young people at risk of harm in their peer groups, schools and neighbourhoods features relationships of trust and/or surveillance?

What do you think the impact is for young people, their families, and communities?

What does it feel like for you, as a practitioner?

What is the impact of your/your organisation's work to prevent and respond to extra-familial harm on young people's:

- Right to protection?
- Right to privacy?
- Right to participation?
- Right to association?

Reflection

What features of your local practice and policy context facilitate relationships of trust or relationships of surveillance?

Practice cultures can be risk-averse, we need strengths-based strategies and tools for supporting adolescents

Competing priorities across child welfare and police/youth justice multi-agency partners can make safeguarding adolescents difficult (i.e., protect and/or pursue)

We need to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about adolescents and their ability to make good choices, this includes reflecting on our language, our decision-making, and the extent to which young people are included as decision makers.

There is insufficient funding for community-based and community-led responses to youth safety, yet this is often where trusted relationships are formed

We need greater clarity, guidance, resources, and time to build trusted relationships with the young people we work with

There is a need for clearer local (and national) strategies for adolescent safeguarding to support balancing rights to privacy and interventions appropriate to adolescent developmental stage with the right to protection and support from statutory agencies

We asked practitioners who have been involved in piloting Contextual Safeguarding about local and national safeguarding policy and practice frameworks, we asked them:

What features of the national practice and policy context facilitate relationships of trust or relationships of surveillance?

We need young people's voices at the heart of policy making, shaping services and informing decision makers

There is a national political and policy context that promotes the surveillance of individuals and communities which inevitably frames and informs how we work locally

There are competing child welfare and police/youth justice policy and practice frameworks in relation to adolescent extra-familial harm, resulting in some (older, racially minoritised) young people being pursued as high risk 'criminals'

We see the 'adultification' of Black children across social care, police, education and health settings

There is racism, bias and disproportionality in relational to how adolescents are treated across social care, police, education and health

We need greater clarity about who is the lead agency in countering youth violence? The policy landscape is confusing, promoting both criminalisation and safeguarding of young people

There is a prioritisation of information sharing and assessment over support and this has safety and rights implications for adolescents