Youth Work & Contextual Safeguarding Community of Practice

Background

Contextual Safeguarding is a conceptual, strategic and operational framework being used to develop safeguarding responses to extra-familial contexts and relationships in which young people experience, or at risk of, significant harm. In 2025 the team behind the concept launched the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS), based at Durham University[1], to facilitate the ongoing development and implementation of the idea.

The GCCS is the world's first research centre dedicated to Contextual Safeguarding. Bringing together expertise from across disciplines, it aims to transform how societies understand and respond to harm beyond the home by developing systems that look beyond parental capacity and make safeguarding a shared responsibility.

The centre is committed to reshaping how safeguarding is understood, researched and practiced. It does this by advancing interdisciplinary research, influencing policy, education and practice and building partnerships that extend beyond traditional safeguarding sectors to support lasting change. We support the strategic and practice take-up of Contextual Safeguarding via our Local Area Interest Network (LAIN), which brings together over 100 local authorities across England, Wales and Scotland. Additionally, we convene a range of communities of practice.

The Youth Work & Contextual Safeguarding community of practice (COP) is part of our efforts to increase the support from the GCCS to the youth work sector and help us better understand and evidence the role of youth workers in the development and delivery of Contextual Safeguarding. This document outlines the terms of reference for the Youth Work & Contextual Safeguarding COP.

Terms of Reference

1. Purpose

This community of practice aims to:

[1] Previously known as the Contextual Safeguarding Research Programme.

- Connect youth workers (in youth work organisations and local authorities) who are actively using Contextual Safeguarding to facilitate peer learning
- Support youth workers to familiarise themselves with GCCS resources and share learning on how they are used
- Identify challenges and support needs faced by youth workers when implementing the Contextual Safeguarding framework
- Inform the development of new resources and training to support the take-up of Contextual Safeguarding across the youth work sector

2. Governance arrangements

- The COP will meet quarterly. Meetings are held online on MS Teams and hosted by the GCCS.
- Interim communications will be made over email
- The contact from Durham University is: gccs.enquiries@durham.ac.uk

3. Accountability

- Members are accountable to their own organisations only.
- Member commit to:
    - Attend meetings
    - Actively using the Contextual Safeguarding framework in their work, using resources published by the GCCS and share learning via the community of practice
    - Accurately reference Contextual Safeguarding principles and support its development
    - Update on how their organisation is adopting Contextual Safeguarding principles and resources at meetings
    - Complete an annual short survey from the GCCS to support development and learning
    - Keep the GCCS informed of any changes to membership
    - (Where appropriate) Lead group discussions on specific interest themes that might emerge over the course of the group's work and/ or present about their work
- Should individual members undertake engagement work with the GCCS, separate contractual agreements for such delivery will outline specific accountabilities in that regard.
- The COP is grounded in the following key principles:
    - Psychological safety
    - Trauma-informed practice
    - Reflective practice
    - Respectful engagement
    - Non-hierarchical participation
    - Non-identifiable case discussion
    - Anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice

4. Information sharing and confidentiality

- Members' names, professional roles, organisations or local authorities, and work email addresses may be used and shared with the GCCS to administer the COP, facilitate communication with members and support COP activities. Information will be used in accordance with Durham University's privacy notice.
- Members must use other members' contact information only for COP-related purposes.
- Members must not share or circulate another member's contact details outside the group without that individual's permission.
- Members will uphold confidentiality unless prior agreement has been given to share outside the group.
- Personal information about young people and families should not be discussed.
- Online meetings will be recorded and transcribed using the in-built functions on Microsoft Teams
- Any information held and recordings will be safely recorded on password protected work computers and on Durham University secure servers
- Everything discussed will be kept confidential, unless: a) members consent to their name and/or organisation being identified (e.g. in a case study); b) members disclose something which suggests that a young person or practice is unsafe. If this happens, members of the GCCS have a duty to pass this information on to relevant professionals. Members will be informed if this happens.

5. Complaints

- For any complaints about the GCCS team please contact Professor Nicole Westmarland, Director of Research in the Sociology Department at Durham University: nicole.westmarland@durham.ac.uk