

*Mind the Gap: Developing a transitional
safeguarding approach*



Dez Holmes

Director, Research in Practice

@dez_holmes

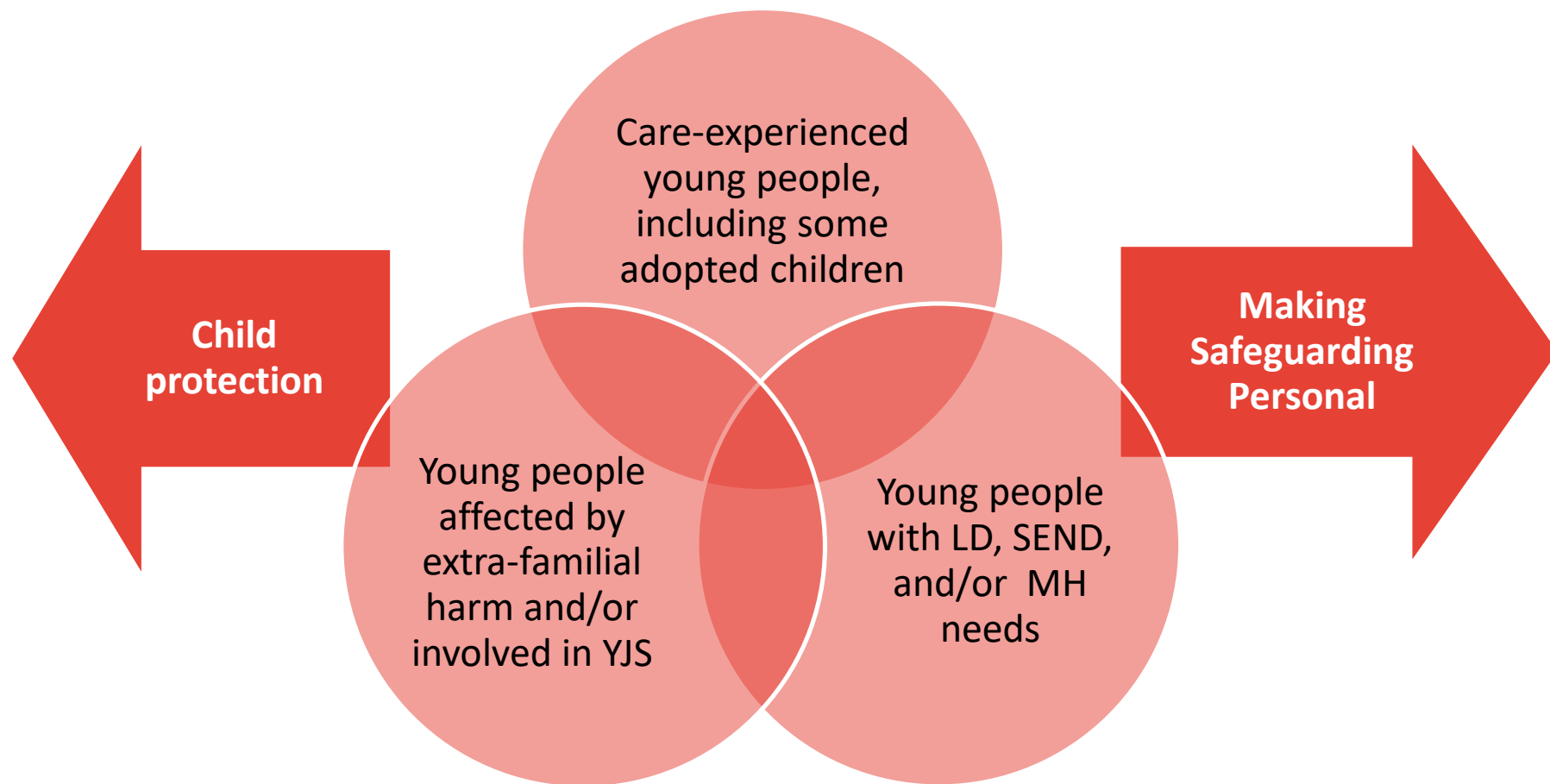
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The case for change

(Holmes, 2021)

- > Adolescents may have **distinct** safeguarding needs - often 'contextual' / extra-familial and underpinned by complex social and biological drivers
- > **Harm and its effects** do not abruptly end at 18; **the brain** may continue developing until mid-20s...(Sawyer *et al*, 2018); Prior *et al*, 2011) but support may stop at 18
- > People don't fit into neat boxes! Different types of needs and harm; vulnerability / resilience are situational and dynamic
- > **Transition** to adulthood is process not an event, we may need care and support without having Care & Support needs™.
- > Promoting **resilience** and dynamic **developmental** needs
- > There are **moral** and **economic** drivers for a reimagined safeguarding system which is contextual, transitional and relational
- > **Boundary-spanning**: practice, policy, mindset

Mind the gap...



What we mean by Transitional Safeguarding

(Cocker *et al*, 2021)

- › ***‘an approach to safeguarding adolescents and young adults fluidly across developmental stages which builds on the best available evidence, learns from both children’s and adult safeguarding practice and which prepares young people for their adult lives’*** (Holmes and Smale, 2018)
- › Not simply transition planning for people moving from CSC → ASC. It refers to activity that has often fallen **outside of the traditional notions of both ‘transitions’ and ‘safeguarding’**, where these have sometimes been interpreted through a lens of eligibility, rather than in the wider sense of human experiences and needs.
- › **Extends far beyond statutory duties** - highlights the holistic nature of effective safeguarding. This involves engaging commissioned services in a way that allows them to work creatively and flexibly.
- › Not a prescribed model. A **principles-led approach** to policy and practice, being developed in different ways according to local circumstances.

How Transitional Safeguarding connects with the justice system

- > Justice professionals and researchers have repeatedly highlighted the high levels of trauma, neurodiversity, learning needs and impaired mental health amongst the young adult custody population (House of Commons Justice Committee, 2016).
- > Recent analysis regarding sentenced young people (YJB, 2020) found:
 - 88% had safety and wellbeing concerns
 - 75% had substance misuse concerns
 - 71% had speech, language and communication needs
 - 71% had mental health concerns
 - 56% per cent were a current or previous Child in Need.
- > Criminal exploitation, peer-violence, ‘gang’ association... all highlight how binary approach to safeguarding reinforces the way people are viewed as either vulnerable or culpable, depending on their age. Criminal exploitation guidance (Home Office, 2018) acknowledges ‘vulnerable adults’ may be victims... But vulnerability is presented as an individualistic construct, rather than situational and/or contextual. Can mean many young adults without formal care and support needs may be punished rather than protected.

Systems leadership and boundary-spanning

- > Boundary-spanning - reaching across borders, margins, or sections to build relationships, interconnections and interdependencies in order to manage complex problems. (Williams, 2002)
- > *systems leadership is characterised by two key attributes: it is a **collective** form of leadership, ... 'leadership as **participation**' rather than 'leadership as performance', and although it is individuals and not systems that produce change, systems leadership by definition is the concerted effort of many people working together at different places in the system and at different levels, rather than of single leaders acting unilaterally. Secondly, systems leadership **crosses boundaries**, both physical and virtual, existing simultaneously in multiple dimensions. It therefore extends individual leaders well beyond the usual limits of their formal responsibilities and authority.* (Ghate et al, 2013)

I was in care all my life and you did keep me really safe. You wrapped me up tight in bubble wrap... but I'm 19 now and I kind of feel like I can't move my arms.

(Max, care-experienced young adult)

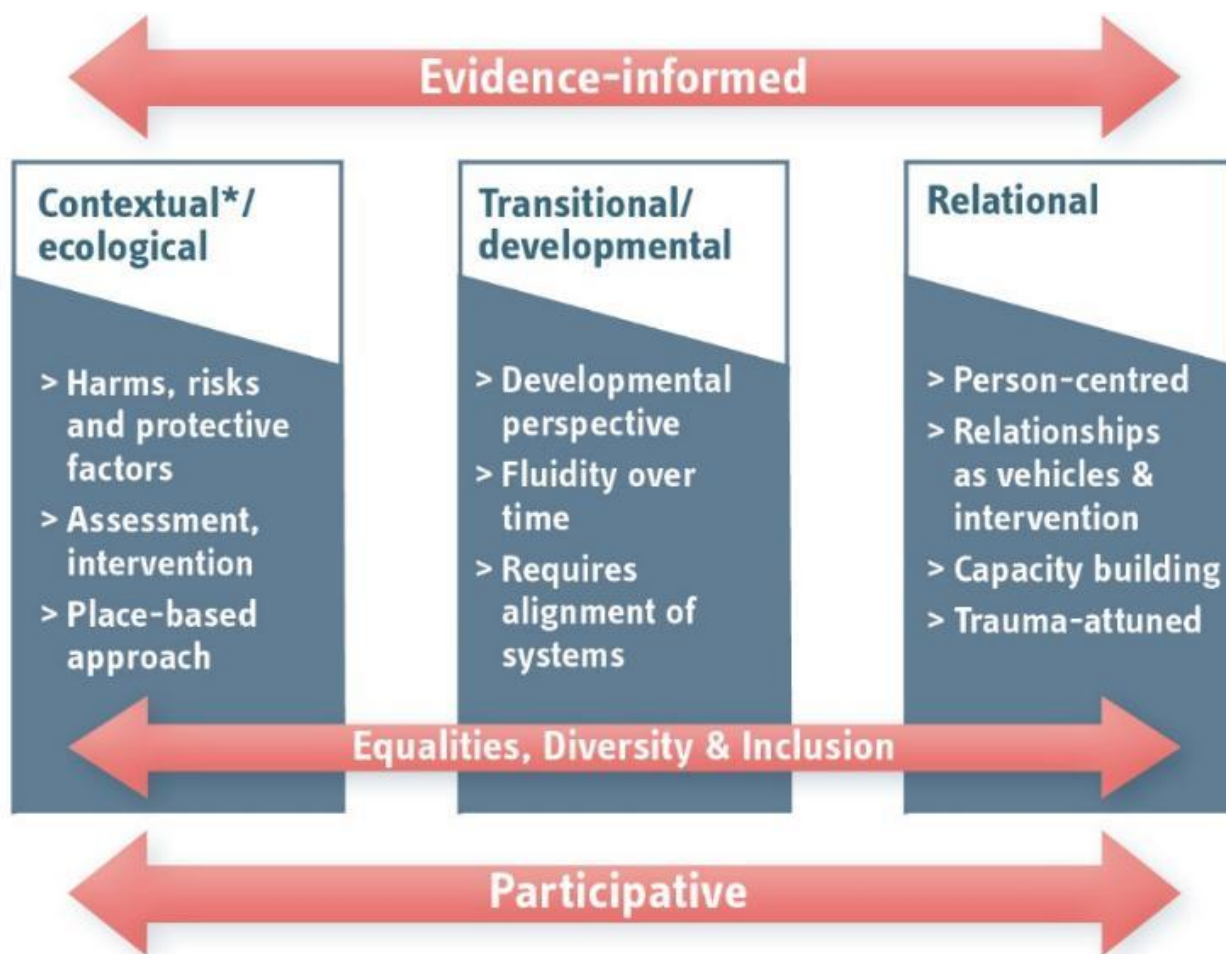
Now I've left care I get really lonely. That's a big thing for my safety I think, but no one talks about it as safeguarding. Unless you're worried about my child, I won't hear from you [children's services] again.

(Aisha, care-experienced young adult)

I couldn't wait to get to 18, I thought that once I was an adult everything would change. It hasn't worked out that way. I really wish I was a kid again so that you could lock me up.

(Kelly, young adult)

Key (non-negotiable) principles



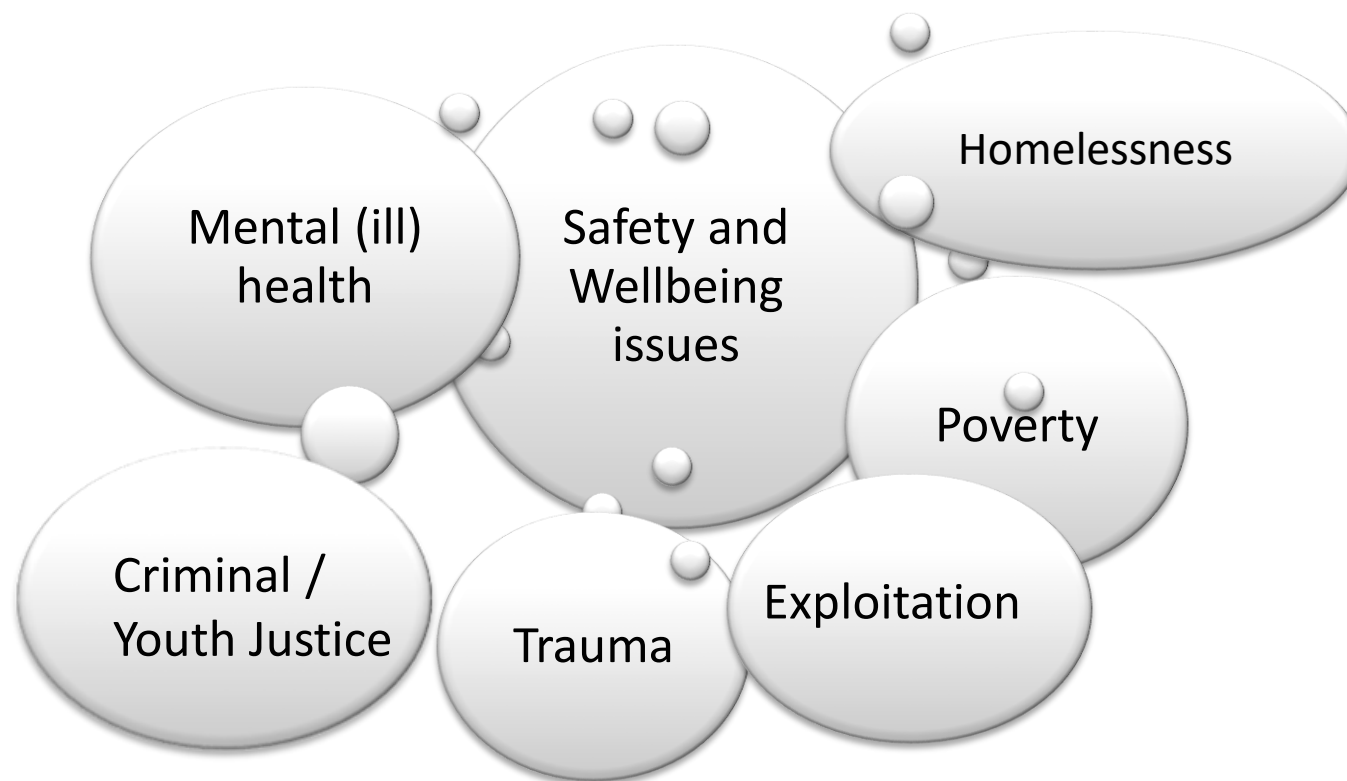
See Firmin's work:
www.contextualsafeguarding.org.uk

(Holmes, 2018)

Busting myths and misconceptions

- › *If an adult says they don't want safeguarding support, we can't act...* This doesn't mean we 'walk away' (Cooper, 2019). Making Safeguarding Personal and Transitional Safeguarding both emphasise curious, tenacious, relationship-based practice.
- › *The CA2014 stops us from working with a person unless they have Care & Support needs...* The prevention and wellbeing principles are key here (DHSC, 2020). Not all support to be safe = statutory Safeguarding
- › *But in the eyes of the law...* The law reflects common understandings at a given point in time. See CSE / marital rape.
- › *We can't afford to do different... We can't afford not to...*

Interconnected issues require an integrated response



Interconnectedness of harms and adversities requires a highly integrated system of support, whereby attention is paid to childhood/adolescent experiences. Commissioning may be a key lever for change

research in practice

- Males under 17
- Females under 17
- Males 18 to 24
- Females 18 to 24
- Males 25 to 34
- Females 25 to 34
- Males 35 to 44
- Females 35 to 44
- Males 45 to 54
- Females 45 to 54
- Males 55 to 64
- Females 55 to 64
- Males 65+
- Females 65+

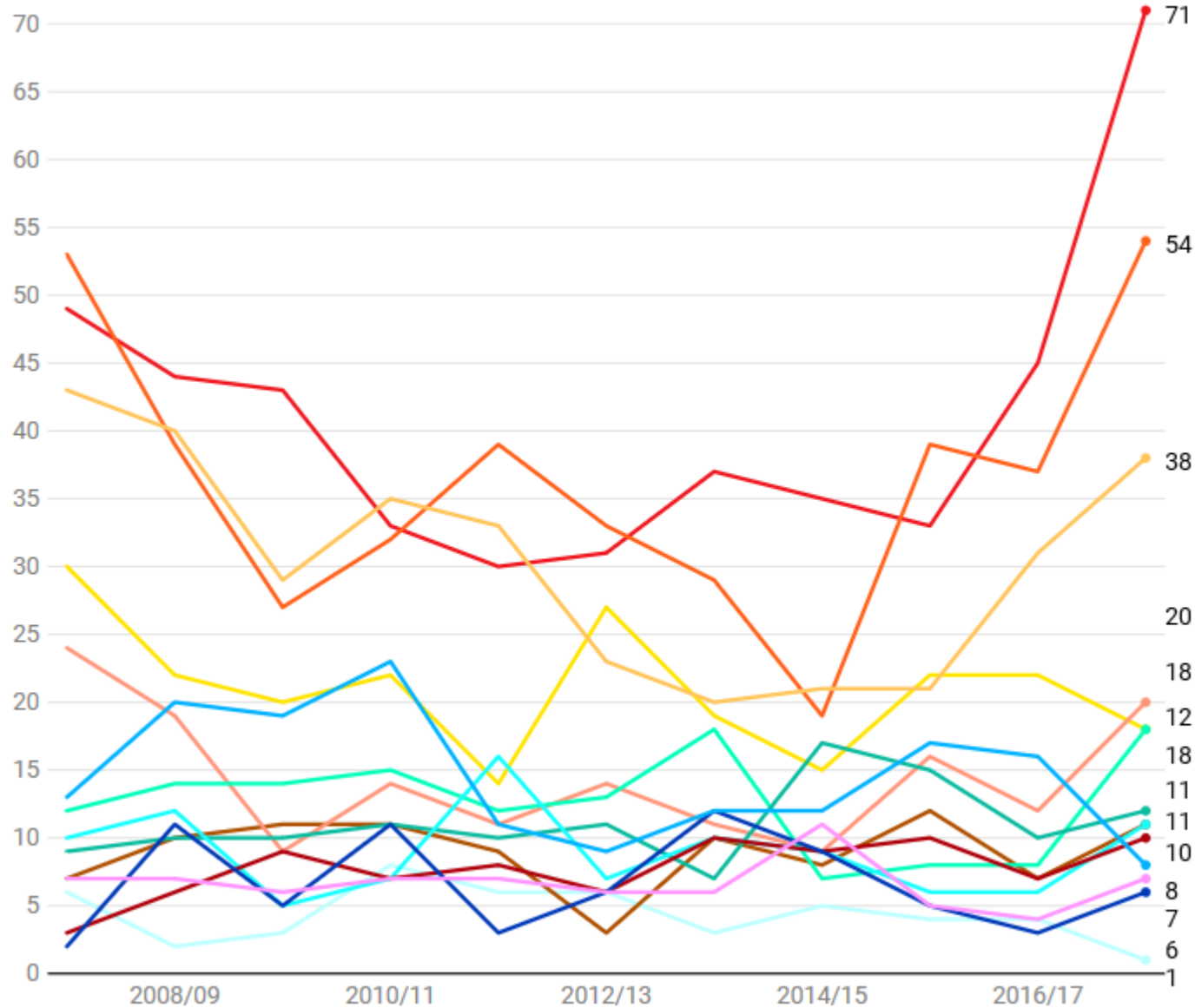


Chart: The Conversation UK • Source: Office for National Statistics • [Get the data](#)

Vulnerability and justice

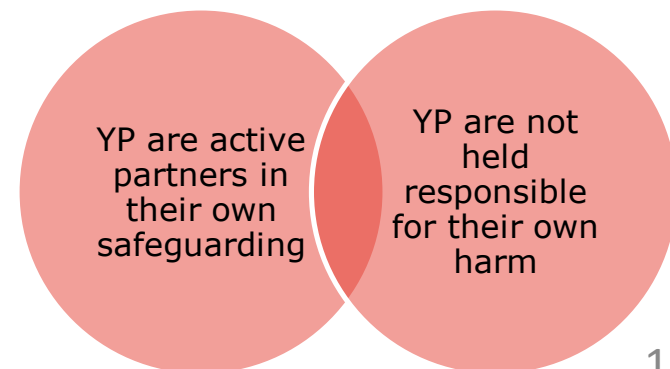
	YP in general population	YP in custody
Learning disability	2–4%	23–32%
Comms impairment	5–7%	60–90%
ADHD	1.7–9%	12%
Autism	0.6–1.2%	15%
Any head injury	24–42%	49–72%
Head injury (LoC)	5–24%	32–50%

Young adults involved in the CJS have often themselves been victims of crime. Many have a history of being exposed to violence, including in the home, abuse, neglect, bereavement relating to the deaths of parents, siblings and other close relatives, and criminal behaviour by parents and siblings. These traumatic events have frequently occurred from a very young age and, the traumatic effects may be raw.

With not to: Resilience and participation

- > **Relationships** are paramount to promoting resilience. (Coleman, 2014)
- > **Self-efficacy** - commonly associated with resilience, is an area that professionals can exercise some influence (positively or negatively!)
- > Children's **rights to protection and participation are mutually dependent and indivisible.** (UNCRC)
- > “[User] Involvement supports development of effective safeguarding practice, informed by people whose self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience can be developed through that involvement.”
(Droy and Lawson, 2017)
- > ‘Both/and not either/or’ (Lefevre *et al*, 2019)
- > Harm reduction principles?

(Hickle and Hallett, 2016)



What could we do?

- > Deliberative learning from other services and parts of the wider system where transitional approaches are more embedded (SEND?)
- > ‘Drawing down’ best practice from safeguarding adults into safeguarding adolescents: rights-based approaches, MSP, wellbeing focus...**Making Safeguarding Personal for young people?** (Cocker *et al*, 2021)
- > Considering how Contextual Safeguarding and other innovations might inform safeguarding of young adults: place-based, partnership approach.
- > Leverage the opportunities: ICS, probation, CSC review, LPS.
- > Reflect on ‘iatrogenic’ interventions?
- > Build local capacity for system redesign, analysis, cost-benefit.

Money matters

- › The economic context makes innovation as difficult as it is essential.
- › The current approach isn't great value...
- › Investing in preventative and recovery-oriented work to promote people's safety and wellbeing can play an important role in avoiding the costs of later intervention.
- › Evidence from the UK and international contexts suggests that failing to help young people recover from harm and trauma can mean that problems persist and/or worsen in adulthood, creating higher costs for the public purse.
(Chowdry and Fitzsimons, 2016; Kezelman *et al*, 2015)
- › The system (and the spend) is connected... Maternal wellbeing (SM, MH) and CP/care; care and criminal justice; mental health needs, costs Vs funding; family relationships and homelessness; domestic abuse and community violence etc.

What's helping local areas make the change

- > Clear, credible, explicitly owned local leadership of the agenda
- > Expansive definition of 'partnership' – inc communities
- > 'A system not a service'
- > Active knowledge and skills exchange (Cocker et al, 2021)
- > A salad not a soup
- > Culture of innovation ('the soft stuff is the hard stuff')
- > Practice informed strategy
- > Collective, place-based problem solving (rather than problem displacement)
- > Building the local case – data, inc people's lived experience

Thinking critically about our response to complexity (applying learning from CSE)

- › Simplistic ‘risk indicators’ are problematic, inconsistent and counter-productive (Brown, 2016; 2017)
- › Data is part of the solution BUT needs to be sophisticated, ethical and dialogical not dogmatic
- › Boundary-spanning is essential: age, geography, department / sector, victim/perpetrator, specialist *and* generic
- › Trauma-informed is not just ‘doing ACEs’ (EIF, 2020)
- › Tackle contradictions: Policy and criminal definitions; departmental priorities; divergent inspectorates; rhetoric *and* resources
- › Action plans are not the actual work...

Safeguarding – a verb not a noun

- > Binary notions of child/adulthood, victims/perpetrators, vulnerability / capacity can mean some people can 'slip through the net' or face a 'cliff-edge'.
- > Many environmental / structural factors persist into adulthood, resulting in unmet need.
- > Investing in preventative work to promote safety and wellbeing can help in avoiding costs (financial and human) of later intervention.
- > Does *not* propose all young adults facing risk should be protected via statutory means, nor does it propose a paternalistic approach to safeguarding young adults.
- > **This is a systems leadership issue – Complexity, Coherence & Courage**
- > **Make it 'a movement, not just another project'**
- > **If not now, then when? If not you, then who?**

Thank you



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Further reading

- > Transitional Safeguarding (2018) original briefing: <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/all/publications/2018/august/transitional-safeguarding-adolescence-to-adulthood-strategic-briefing-2018/>
- > The role of adult social work & adult safeguarding to the Transitional Safeguarding agenda (2021): https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5420/67346_dhsc_trans-safe-report_bridging-the-gap_web.pdf
- > Transitional Safeguarding and justice: <https://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmiprobation/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2022/03/Academic-Insights-Holmes-and-Smith-RM.pdf>
- > The relationship between Contextual Safeguarding, Complex Safeguarding and Transitional Safeguarding (2019): <https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/publications/2019/january/safeguarding-during-adolescence-the-relationship-between-contextual-safeguarding-complex-safeguarding-and-transitional-safeguarding-2019/>
- > Systems leadership: <https://thestaffcollege.uk/staff-college-research/systems-leadership-research/>

Questions for reflection - leaders

- › What do we really know about our local population of older adolescents, and their lives as they become young adults? How are we planning for their needs?
- › What do / would young people and practitioners say about the needs we are not currently meeting? Who gets turned away?
- › What learning is there (from CSPRs, SARs, DHRs, wider data, people's lived experience) around how our approach to safeguarding across transitions could be improved?
- › What leadership behaviours do we as leaders demonstrate to enable courageous, creative and coherent practice and services for these people?

Questions for reflection - practice

- > How can we move from an individualised approach to safeguarding to one that promotes safe spaces and contexts for young people and young adults?
- > How are practitioners supported (inc role-modelling) to use evidence in their work? What would help?
- > How can practitioners ensure practice is participative – as much voice and choice as possible – in the context of safeguarding?
- > How can we avoid presuming ‘choice’ – and inadvertently victim-blaming - whilst still honouring people’s agency?
- > What support do practitioners need – and from who – to practice in this nuanced and ethical way?