



**Hillingdon Safeguarding
Partnership**



Executive Summary
Exploring Practice: Voice of the Person
2022-2023

Exploring Practice: Voice of the Person

Listening to children and adults at risk is key to effective child- and adult-centred safeguarding practice. Hillingdon Safeguarding Partnership, as part of our role in quality assuring local safeguarding arrangements, sought to understand how effectively and consistently the voices of children, and adults with care and support needs, are captured during their contact with safeguarding partners. This report summarises these findings, in addition to an exploration of what ‘good listening’ means for those individuals in receipt of services.

Methodology

Adults and children with lived experience of safeguarding support were supported to co-produce the audit tools used.

Adults and children were interviewed one to one using a short, structured interview format to capture the views of the highest possible number of respondents. Round table discussions were held with children and young people from the Children in Care Councils which produced qualitative data.

Findings and Analysis

The respondents gave detailed answers to questions about what professionals did that helped them feel listened to, what could have been done differently, and about what “good listening” means to them. These answers provide important learning about the lived experience of adults and children receiving support from local services and what best practice looks like in terms of really listening to the voice of adults and children who need help to stay safe. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data gathered shows us key components of good listening, as identified by children and adults using services:

- Making dedicated time and space to listen
- Tailoring communication to individuals and families
- Relationship and rapport building
- Acting on what people say and communicating what is being done

Running throughout these themes is an overarching theme of care and compassion. When people felt that professionals genuinely cared about their situation, often at times of crisis in their lives, they felt markedly more listened to. The ways that professionals conveyed this was mediated in part by whether they made dedicated time and space to listen, whether they made efforts to find ways to communicate meaningfully, and whether they acted on what was said.

Overall, the findings paint a positive picture that most of the adults and children who responded felt listened to by professionals from whom they had received support. Most also felt they had received the support they needed to facilitate their communication with professionals. The positive accounts have related to encounters across the professional network: social care, health professionals, and police officers as well as direct providers of care and support.

The findings do indicate that only a minority of adults and children receive reports about them. Even when reports were received not everyone could make sense of the detail and the language. The importance of getting facts right and thinking carefully about how children and adults are represented in reports was evident.

Showing care and compassion, tailoring communication and building relationships are hugely important in enhancing the extent to which people feel listened to by professionals who are supporting them at times of heightened emotion. Timely and clearly explained actions in response to the things people say is also crucial to the experience of being listened to.

There were accounts of people struggling to contact professionals, being “*passed from pillar to post*” within the professional network, not getting feedback on what has been done in response to their concerns or requests and feeling like their views are not given sufficient weight and meaning in professionals’ decision-making processes. There are also accounts of people struggling to understand jargon, processes, and the reasons for decisions being made, or feeling excluded from discussions about their lives. There was a parent whose English was not fluent who struggled to understand what had been said and asked of her child even with an interpreter being provided on the telephone.

One of the respondents held Lasting Power of Attorney for health and welfare decisions for her spouse but felt excluded by professionals’ discussions about his medical issues. This indicates a lack of awareness on the part of the professionals involved in this situation about the rights and powers of donees of Lasting Power of Attorney.

There was a concern from adults’ representatives that their voices and views are not given sufficient weight compared to those of professionals and they are not consistently provided with the support they need to navigate the safeguarding network on behalf of their loved ones.

What comes through from all the responses is that adults and children, their representatives and parents have insightful, thought provoking and valuable things to say both about their own lives and families, and about professional practice. Incorporating their voices routinely into quality assurance audits by safeguarding partners is a valuable activity that can help organisations to feed learning from recipients of their services into practice improvement work.

Recommendations

- Single agency quality assurance schedules should proactively seek the voice of children and adults who are receiving services and routinely feed findings back to managers and practitioners. This is already the case within LBH Children and Young People's Service.
- Sending out accessible, sensitive and clear jargon free reports should be routine, and people should be invited to provide feedback on reports to check accuracy. This should be audited by agencies.
- Awareness raising is needed about the rights and roles of Lasting Power of Attorneys for adults.
- Awareness raising is needed about what good listening looks like according to the people receiving services.
- Working with interpreters: Professional interpreters should be readily available and used for all conversations with adults and children and families for whom English is not fluent or readily understood. Professionals should also be supported to develop skills and expertise in working with interpreters.
- The professional network around a child or adult should consider which professional is best placed to have difficult conversations with the person at the centre of the work.