



Better Together VCS Policy Forum

Safeguarding: through Covid and beyond

A VCS led forum involving VCS organisations and public sector partners held online on Friday 16th April 2021

Introduction

The Forum was chaired by Jo Laverick, Executive Director of [Durham Community Action](#) and the VCS representative on the [County Durham Partnership](#) Board. Jo also chairs the bi-monthly meetings of the [Better Together VCS Forum](#).

Eighteen people attended the Forum from a diverse range of both large and small voluntary sector organisations and public sector partners.

Jo provided some context setting: The Forum was an opportunity for the VCS in County Durham to come together and have some space and time to look at how safeguarding is working to support volunteers, community groups and vulnerable people. It provided a chance to reflect with colleagues about how to manage and plan for better safeguarding for both adults and children. It was an opportunity to share insights in terms of how safeguarding is working in practice during these most extraordinary, and most definitely not normal times.

Safeguarding is Everybody's Business [link to presentation](#)

Lesley Jeavons, Independent Chair of Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership

The presentation provided an overview of:

- What Adult Safeguarding is and of equal importance what it isn't
- The legal framework for managing safeguarding and how that happens
- The linkage between the County Durham Partnership, Area Action Partnerships, and safeguarding adults
- The support offer from the County Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership for VCS organisations

Lesley emphasised the importance of working together to get things done and that through relationships improvements can be made to create better services. By getting the quality right we can all reduce the incidence of abuse and give vulnerable adults greater choice and control of their own lives.

She recognised the work and value of the VCS in supporting and protecting vulnerable adults and urged organisations to take up the offer of support through bespoke online sessions on key topics and feel confident to ask for advice and guidance as needed.

Contact Information

Website: [Durham Safeguarding Adults Partnership](#)

Email: sabbusinessunit@durham.gov.uk

Tel: 03000 268 870 / 268 871

If you are concerned that an adult is being abused or neglected report your concern to [Social Care Direct](#) on 03000 267 979.

Safeguarding Children Partnership

Dave Pickard, Independent Chair/Scrutineer of Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership

Dave gave a verbal overview of the Safeguarding Children Partnership which provides the safeguarding arrangements under which the safeguarding partners and relevant agencies work together to coordinate their safeguarding services, identify and respond to the needs of children in County Durham, commission and publish local child safeguarding practice reviews and provide scrutiny to ensure the effectiveness of the arrangements.

The three Statutory Safeguarding Partners in Durham are: The County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group; Durham County Council (Children and Young People's Service); Durham Constabulary. These three Safeguarding Partners are charged with supporting and enabling local organisations and agencies to work together to keep children safe and help prevent harm through early intervention.

There is a wealth of information and resources on the DSCP website to equip practitioners to be the best they can. Training is free for VCS organisations.

Contact Information

Website: [Durham Safeguarding Children Partnership](#)

Email: dscpsecure@durham.gov.uk

Tel: 03000 265 770

If you have a concern about a child or young person's welfare who lives in County Durham, call First Contact on 03000 267 979.

Safeguarding: through Covid and beyond - VCS Perspective [Link to presentation](#)

Abby Thompson, Volunteering Development Manager, Durham Community Action

Abby gave a brief overview of how the VCS has been responding to Safeguarding issues during the Covid-19 Pandemic. She outlined what new measures are in place and the new safeguarding risks and issues which have arisen for organisations and their beneficiaries and volunteers during the pandemic.

She reminded participants that DCA provide information and training on safeguarding for VCS organisations and community groups including community buildings. Information and resources can be found on their [Safeguarding webpage](#). Abby is the VCS lead for safeguarding in relation to the two safeguarding partnerships.

Abby introduced the following two organisations who had been asked to share their insights into Safeguarding through Covid and beyond:

Unpaid Family Carers and Safeguarding [Link to presentation](#)

Jenni Wood, CEO, Durham County Carers Support

Jenni gave a presentation about safeguarding in relation to carers and the people they support and looked at ways we can all work together to prevent situations reaching safeguarding levels. She highlighted that risks had increased with social isolation, and the importance of supporting staff who are dealing with safeguarding issues.

Moving On: A safe home and a fresh start [Link to presentation](#)

Peter Richards, CEO, Moving On

Peter gave a presentation about Moving On's approach to managing safeguarding in relation to care leavers and homeless young people (16-25). He referred to the [Leaders in Safeguarding Quality Mark](#) which Moving On are currently undertaking. He shared some top tips taken from their audit to improve their approach to safeguarding.

Facilitated Discussion

Participants were encouraged to consider the question - When does safeguarding work best for staff, volunteers, and beneficiaries? In the ensuing discussion the following key points were made:

- Safeguarding needs an appropriate resource to carry it out effectively.
- Early intervention is key.
- Covid has in some instances been used as an excuse to bypass certain procedures.
- Importance of reassuring staff and volunteers that they need to take safeguarding seriously.
- Sometimes trustees believe safeguarding is an operational issue not a governance one – there is a need for trustees to undertake bespoke training available.
- Online support has been crucial for some services but also highlights the risks and threats of the internet e.g. scams & digital fraud.

To summarise: Safeguarding training remains important for both practitioners and Trustees. We need to ensure continuing and developing training is available for the sector, and it is appropriately targeted.

Understanding any gaps in practice and awareness which may have opened up as a result of remote working will become more important as lockdown eases and front-line staff are able to resume some of the reach which has been restricted because of Covid. The same will apply with respect to awareness, information, and support in response to scams and increasingly sophisticated forms of fraud which targets vulnerable people and those who care for them.

Next Steps

- Circulation of this report to members of the Better Together Forum, Safeguarding Partnerships, and other relevant partners.
- DCA to track what is happening to VCS services as lockdown eases.
- Circulate information on Trustee responsibilities in relation to safeguarding and the training which is available.
- Develop safeguarding training in relation to the digital space.
- All members of the Better Together Forum are encouraged to make good use of the wealth of resources and training available through the Safeguarding Partnerships and the [Safer Culture North East](#) partnership of which [DCA](#) is the local provider.