



*Action for
Children*

A man with glasses and a blue t-shirt is sitting on a rug, pointing at a colorful book. A young girl with white bows in her hair is sitting next to him, looking at the book. They are in a living room with a brown sofa and green cushions in the background.

The Future of Safeguarding in the Voluntary Sector



Addressing Issues in Workplace Culture to Improve and Tackle Challenges In Safeguarding Practices

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Action for Children

One of the largest national children's charities. Primarily a service delivery charity with over 450 services across all four nations of the UK, for ages 0-25 and from early help to intensive family support to child protection to homelessness support, emotional and mental health services, fostering, adoption and children's homes.

Safeguarding team responsible for QA and promotion of best practice; Safeguarding Board led by CEO; quarterly reports to trustees and regular serious incident reporting

Context

- Impact of Covid-19 pandemic- isolated workforce, use of technology, growing needs, hidden children
- Funding is in decline and worse may yet be to come
- Economic outlook is very poor
- Need is rising- increasing poverty and inequalities, shrinking early help provision and limited capacity in statutory services
- Digital
- Increasing interest from Charity Commission in safeguarding in charities

Addressing Issues in Workplace Culture to Improve and Tackle Challenges In Safeguarding Practices

Challenges to Safeguarding Culture

Culture- best viewed as the behaviours of those in a charity and characterized by responses to a number of key challenges:

- Funding
- Skills and knowledge- Workforce
- Skills and knowledge- Trustees and Leaders
- Digital
- Control and Trust
- Openness and Defensiveness
- Understanding quality and risks

Funding- donors and commissioners are unable to provide funding to provide enough resources to run services

-Need to hold onto strong notion of quality – running unsafe services is worse than running no services at all for charities.

- Can charities ensure they run services with the staff levels needed and can they scrutinise and challenge their safeguarding in future or will a focus on the bottom line win the day at the expense of quality?

Skills and Knowledge- Workforce- Staff in charities need to be able to deal with higher levels of need

- Safeguarding services need to include workforce development in terms of practice. Action for Children has:
 - Increased provision of learning through using online tools and facilitation for more staff
 - Introduced a new Development Centre approach for children's homes staff and managers
 - Introduced regular live safeguarding Q & A sessions for all practitioners and managers
 - Used Apprenticeship Levy funding and donated income to support qualifications
 - Developed mandatory learning activity on dealing with concerns and allegations about staff, volunteers, etc. and whistleblowing

Addressing Issues in Workplace Culture to Improve and Tackle Challenges In Safeguarding Practices

Skills and Knowledge- Trustees and Leaders- Senior leaders and trustees need to know enough to make informed decisions

- Regular reporting and focus at Board level needed on safeguarding challenges and issues
- Safeguarding training and development and clear trustee leadership
- Clear accountability- officers manage, trustees review and determine strategy
- Recruitment of trustees with knowledge and willingness to learn

This remains a key work in progress for much of the sector- see Charity Commission Regulatory Alert further to RNIB investigation. The challenge of financial concerns increases the importance for trustees ensuring that quality and quality assurance remain in place

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Understanding Quality and Risks – not knowing clearly the risks and strengths in delivery will lead to the wrong decisions

- Audit and Review- regular, undertaken by and with operational managers, focus on conversations with staff and managers as well as file records
- Ensure corporate processes are reviewed regularly, e.g. safer recruitment, procurement, contracting with other parties
- Review health safety and well-being considerations too

Understand what is changing, what is becoming more difficult, any internal process challenges and use the information to support continuous improvement and conversation

Control/ Trust- Openness/Defensiveness- organisational or personal barriers to honest discussion restrict safeguarding improvements

- Organisational-wide ownership- led by Directors and leaders across the whole organisation, e.g. Safeguarding Group and led by CEO
- Ensure safeguarding specialists build solutions – identifying problems for others to solve is only half the job
- Structured and regular conversations with all levels of manager around achievements and risks
- Adopt open approach to whistleblowing and safeguarding concerns about those working with beneficiaries- the two will go hand in hand

Digital- Over-focus on digital solutions will likely limit delivery to those in most need and access for those who are not digitally enabled

- Development of technology has enabled reach to many more children and families- a very significant and rapid change in the field of delivery
- Charities are maintaining services to many children and families during the pandemic
- Those with the greatest needs might choose not to receive contact

The digital revolution in service delivery has reached the point of blended service provision with increasing focus on in-person delivery where needs are greatest

Equalities- Equalities is a safeguarding issue both for service users and staff and volunteers

- Ensure leadership development so that managers can lead change in a way which is not perceived to be bullying
- Ensure safeguarding standards apply to all groups and lead open discussions about the challenges of safeguarding when working with diverse communities
- Understanding of significance of privilege is critical

Like so many other safeguarding culture questions, this is an ongoing and repeated focus and never a 'one-off.'

Summary

- Use specialist safeguarding skills and knowledge to influence at all levels
- Make structured ways to ensure discussions of safeguarding challenges and solutions
- Build broad ownership
- Be very clear on dealing with concerns and issues about staff, volunteers etc and link to whistleblowing
- Understand the quality and risks in service delivery
- Pay attention to the skills and knowledge development needs of trustees and senior leaders

Ensure that concerns about financial viability do not get in the way of commitment to quality and safeguarding - the money will follow the performance but the performance won't follow the money.

Thank you

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