

## Never Assume - The importance of information sharing

This briefing focuses on parental substance misuse and neglect, which led to the death of a three-month old baby. The family was known to agencies in Birmingham, predominantly due to drug and alcohol abuse. Both parents suffered adverse childhood experiences themselves, coming from families in which the use of illegal substances was normalised.

In the two years prior to the baby's death there was a deterioration in the family's circumstances and home conditions, and there were numerous opportunities where practitioners could have intervened earlier to safeguard the children.

The key learning is about the importance of sharing your piece of the jigsaw and never assuming that agencies fully understand the child's lived experience, make sure you share your vital information, so we can make a difference!

### Key Learning

- The review identified the need for better information sharing between the police, prison, probation service, and the GP practice who were working with the father. This led to instances of agencies working in isolation.
- The professional focus was very much on the parents who were well-presented and plausible. Disguised compliance was not recognised, as the parents did not fit the stereotype of heroin users. This led to the parents' explanations being accepted, particularly in relation to non-attendance at health appointments.
- When the family fled their property due to antisocial behaviour, they were placed in inappropriate temporary accommodation.

### Improving Practice

- Never assume that other agencies know what you know, it's essential that you share vital information so everybody understands the children's lived experience, to help coordinate partnership intervention and support.
- When working with families don't take explanations for non-attendance and cancellation of appointments at face value. Professional curiosity is vital – always ask the “why” and the “so what” questions. The [Birmingham Neglect Screening Tool](#) should be used where children are not brought to health appointments to consider whether there is a wider issue of neglect.
- In more complex cases, it's really important to identify a lead professional to help coordinate

partnership intervention, early help and support.

- Professionals working with children and their families need to have some understanding of drug misuse and the impact this can have on parenting capacity and the children.
- It is important when placing families in temporary accommodation that you consider the quality of the provision and its suitability on a case-by-case basis.

### Next Steps

- ✔ Circulate this Briefing Note to all members of your team and discuss the case at your next team meeting or supervision session. Use the PowerPoint presentation to ensure everyone understands and is able to apply the learning.
- ✔ Make sure you and your team understand the importance of information sharing where they are concerned about a child. Please refer to [Right Help, Right Time](#) for further guidance.
- ✔ Make sure you and your team have completed the following:
  - [BSCP Neglect e-learning training](#)
  - [Hidden Harm – Working with Substance Misusing Parents.](#)
- ✔ [GCP2 training](#) is recommended for all practitioners working with children