

# NEVER ASSUME

**Working with Substance Misusing Parents**

# Webinar Programme

- 10:00 Welcome & Introduction – Jane Armstrong and Graham Tilby, Co-Chairs BSCP Serious Case Sub-Group
- 10:10 Case Overview and Key Learning – Joanna Nicolas, Lead Reviewer
- 10:40 Quick Comfort Break
- 10:45 Change Grow Live – Kerry Clifford, Quality and Governance Manager, and Deborah O’Neill, Senior Social Worker and Practice Educator
- 11:15 Question Time Panel – Penny Thompson CBE, BSCP Independent Chair, and Graham Tilby
- 11:30 Finish



# Case Overview and Key Learning

Joanna Nicolas, Lead Reviewer

# Background

- Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review was commissioned in July 2019 following the death of a three-month-old baby.
- The family - mother, father and two older siblings, aged seven and two. They were white/British.
- The family was known to agencies in Birmingham, particularly the father, who had a long history of drug & alcohol misuse and criminal behaviour.
- The family and extended family lived in Birmingham and the maternal grandparents helped care for the children, including taking the oldest child to school.

# Summary of the Case

- In May 2019, an ambulance was called to the family home. The baby was found deceased, and it was apparent that death had occurred significantly earlier. Both parents were arrested on suspicion of neglect. The mother tested positive for heroin and cocaine and admitted using three bags of heroin a day whilst pregnant. The father declined testing.
- Both parents were found guilty of exposing Child One and Child Two to Class A drugs. The mother was found guilty of wilful neglect of the baby in October 2021. The cause of death of the baby was unascertained.

# Eight Key Themes Identified

- Effectiveness of multi-agency working
- Professional curiosity
- Disguised compliance
- Understanding the risks to children when parents are misusing substances
- Effectiveness of the in-year admissions process for education
- Recognising what constitutes neglect and that neglect is a form of abuse
- Children hidden from sight
- Appropriate temporary accommodation for families



**Joanna  
Nicolas  
Ltd**



# The Children's Lived Experience



**Joanna  
Nicolas  
Ltd**



# Summary of Information known about the Family at the time





**Joanna  
Nicolas  
Ltd**



# Brief Chronology



# Key Themes and Learning

# Effectiveness of Multi-agency Working

Learning Point One: Effective multi-agency working is key to protecting children.

# Effectiveness of Multi-agency Working

Learning Point Two: The Early Help and Support arrangements should highlight the importance of the lead professional role in coordinating the work of agencies involved with the child and the family.

# Professional Curiosity & Disguised Compliance



Learning Point Three: The importance of professionals being curious is essential. This requires demonstrating respectful uncertainty and triangulating information to enable professionals to maintain a focus on the safety and welfare of children.

# Understanding the Risks to Children when Parents are Misusing Substances

Learning Point Four: All professionals working with children and their families need to have some understanding of substance misuse and the barriers for parents/carers being honest about their drug use, and seek expert advice and input where necessary.

# Effectiveness of the In-year Admissions Process for Education



Learning Point Five: The Local Authority must ensure effectiveness of local arrangements, and adherence to the 2014 Admissions Code, providing advice and challenge to schools and assurance to the School's Adjudicator.

# Recognising what constitutes Neglect and that Neglect is a Form of Abuse

Learning Point Six: Professionals need to recognise and understand what constitutes neglect to inform how they work with families in providing early help and sustained support.



# Children Hidden from Sight

Learning Point Seven: All professionals working with children and their families need to keep the child at the centre of everything they do.

# Appropriate Temporary Accommodation for Children

Learning Point Eight: Children and their families must be a priority for housing providers.

# Summary

What this case has shown is how very difficult it is working with drug users and identifying neglect when there are few of the outward signs often associated with parents who are on a low income and using Class A drugs, even when there is a considerable amount of other evidence.

This case highlights how vital multi-agency working is. How vital it is to understand family history, context and children's lived experience. Each agency held a piece of the puzzle, but they were not put together to form a holistic picture of the children's day-to-day lives. If that had been done, and professionals had had a comprehensive understanding of the children's day-to-day lives, professionals should have been able to recognise how vulnerable these children were.

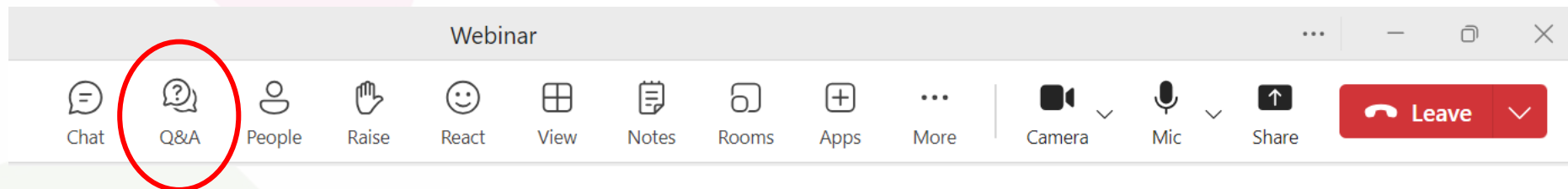
# Comfort Break - Back in 5 minutes!



## If you have a question for the Q&A session

You can submit a question by clicking on the Q&A button on the top toolbar and typing your question.

We will then answer your question during the Q&A session after the second presentation.





**Change Grow Live Birmingham**  
Webinar 2024



**Change  
Grow  
Live**

# Service Overview

- Change Grow Live Birmingham is a free and confidential drug and alcohol service for adults.
- We offer treatment and recovery services to support anyone experiencing difficulties with substance misuse in a range of local community and clinical settings.
- Our recovery teams include doctors, non-medical prescribers, recovery coordinators, nurses, recovery motivators, service user representatives, and volunteers.



# What we offer

- Confidential advice and information about drugs and alcohol
- A tailored package of care
- Healthcare clinics and blood-borne virus testing
- Residential detoxification and rehabilitation options
- Ambulatory detox in our hubs
- Throughcare (group sessions from our recovery motivators and partners)
- Harm minimisation
- Needle Exchange, naloxone and safe storage
- Shared Care (1-2-1 sessions in your local GP surgery)

## How to access our service:

We offer services to support anyone experiencing difficulties with drugs/or alcohol. We take self-referrals and referrals from partner agencies.

All referrals can be made quickly and easily via our website:

**<https://www.changegrowlive.org/drug-alcohol-service-birmingham/referrals>**

You can also contact us via our single point of contact **0121 227 5890** or **[Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk](mailto:Birmingham.info@cgl.org.uk)**

If someone is not sure if their drug/alcohol use is problematic, we have an **online self assessment** that anyone can access anytime.



# **We've got specialist teams...**

1. Homeless and Rough Sleeper team
2. Criminal Justice team
3. Women's team
4. IPS (Employment) team
5. Through Care (group and recovery sessions)
6. LGBTQ+ Group
7. Veterans' group
8. Service user representative group
9. Prison Leavers/Buvidal project
10. Tele-triage team
11. Hep C team
12. Hospitals team

Let's not forget our large cohort of volunteers trained in BBV testing, screening and motivational coaching.

# Multi Agency Working

## Key agencies:

- Birmingham Children's Trust
- Specialist midwives : Women's Hospital, Heartlands, Good Hope and Sandwell and City
- Criminal Justice
- Housing
- Adult Social Care
- DA agencies

# Multi Agency Working continued

- Family Drug and Alcohol Court Team
- Family Hubs
- Aquarius
- Acute Hospitals
- Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust

# Engaging those with parental substance misuse

- Engagement stage
- Challenging stigma
- Reducing barriers
- Service User led risk assessments
- Specialist teams

# Working with our service users

- Service user involvement lead
- Lived experience and volunteers
- Staff training and development
- Involving others : family, involved others, professionals
- Treatment offers

# Recovery focused treatment

- Building on engagement
- Visible recovery
- Engaging other professionals
- Consistency
- Non-judgmental

# Professional curiosity

- Challenges for staff
- Engaging other professionals
- Information sharing
- Learning from cases and how to embed best practice
- Ongoing development and reviews

# Recognising neglect as a form of abuse-being child focussed

CGL offer training and workshops to clients to empower and improve knowledge around the impact of substance misuse, hidden harm and the links between neglect and emotional abuse for children when parents are misusing substances.

These workshops address:

- Positive role modelling
- Funding addiction – the implications
- Stability - what this looks like and how it makes a difference for a child
- Keeping your children safe; physically and emotionally
- Health risks; to client and child
- What you can do to help - motivation to change, support networks

These workshops provide an opportunity for clients to rate their parenting before and after the session/treatment. This empowers clients to address their substance misuse and see positive changes as they progress through their treatment.



# Hidden Harm forms of abuse

## **Neglect**

- Lack of consistent support, recognising and responding to their own and child's physical needs, financial implications leading to debt, lack of provision due to spending money on drugs and alcohol. Risk of harmful substances in reach of children.

## **Emotional**

- Parents are less responsive to their babies
- Less willing to engage in play
- Less able to respond encouragingly to further interaction

## **Psychological**

- A child can be preoccupied with their parent's substance misuse
- A child can blame themselves for their parent's behaviour
- A child can find it difficult to engage in education
- A child can find it difficult to establish and maintain healthy relationships
- A child can develop behavioural, emotional or cognitive problems

# Hidden Harm

## Research

Kearney, P. Levin, E. Rosen, G et al (2003) suggested; Interagency working and good cross-sector working relationships is imperative. Services aimed at adults usually do not have the expertise to deal with children's problems and vice versa. Effective service provision can be achieved by effective collaboration between children's and adult services. Falkov (1995) agreed that one of the main risks to children is when adult services and child protection services do not understand each other or communicate adequately.

This was over 20 years ago and unfortunately, as we can see in the review, multi agency working is still not where it needs to be to safeguard children effectively.

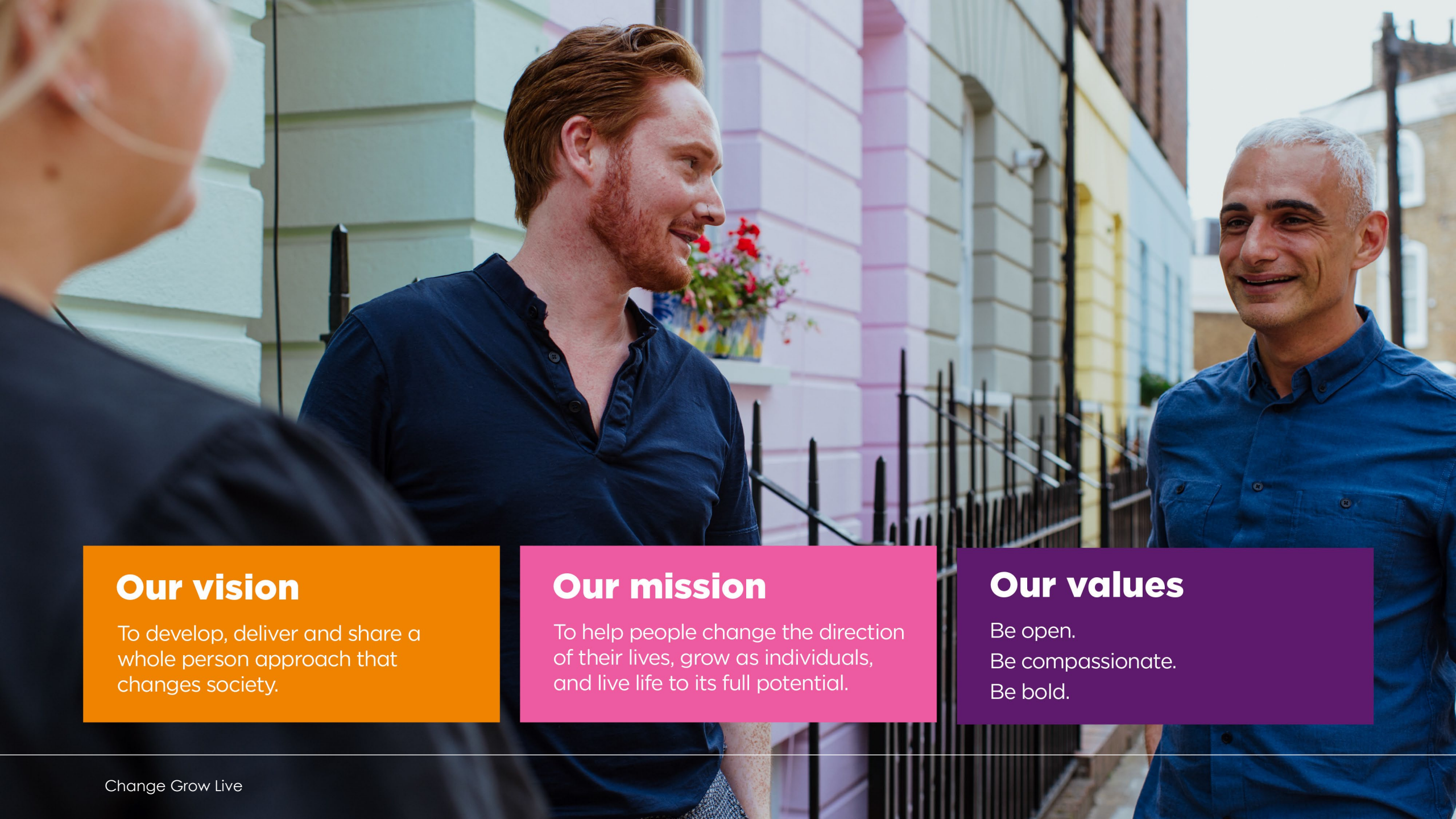
More recently Dame Black's review recommended an increase in numbers of psychologists, nurses and social workers within drug and alcohol services therefore, CGL have embedded allied professionals into the service to provide an all-round holistic assessment of need with expertise in safeguarding and the impact of substance misuse.

# Case Study

Last January I found out I was pregnant and from that day I got myself into recovery and stopped using drugs. My mental health took a turn for the worse and I was changed to be under the care of the women and families team at CGL. I stayed clean until I had a brief relapse in May 2023.

Thanks to recovery coordinator she got me into a treatment centre within a week where I could safely stabilise on a medication called methadone. I went there for 2 weeks, the place was called Park House and is also managed by CGL. The staff there were absolutely fantastic and I rediscovered my love for recovery whilst I was in there. I had my baby in August and my recovery coordinator put together a specific care plan that would work around me and my other appointments. This helped immensely as I already had lots of appointments to get to so this specific care plan meant I wouldn't get overwhelmed with appointments.

My little boy is 4 1/2 months old now and I have stayed clean ever since going into Park House in June 2023. CGL women and families team continue to be there for me and are now going to assist me in reducing my methadone. I can't praise them enough.



## Our vision

To develop, deliver and share a whole person approach that changes society.

## Our mission

To help people change the direction of their lives, grow as individuals, and live life to its full potential.

## Our values

Be open.  
Be compassionate.  
Be bold.

Make a difference

Thank you

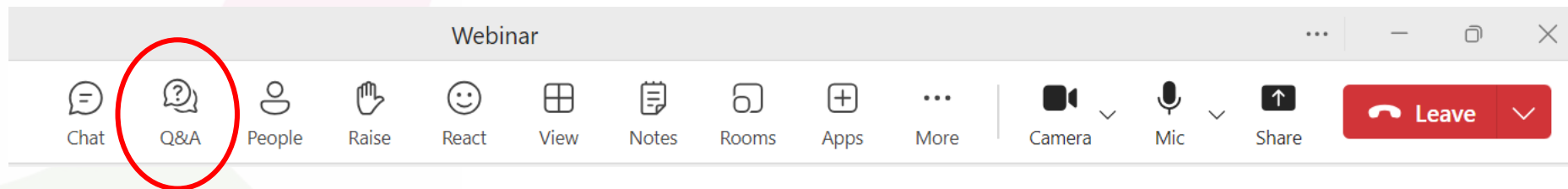
# Q&A session

You can ask a question by either:

Raising your hand and unmuting your microphone when prompted.

**OR**

Click on the Q&A button on the top toolbar and type your question.



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