

Vamp – Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review

Summary

July 2024 (*Vamp was also referred to as Child M*)



Vamp was a white British teenage girl who tragically died following an episode of drug use in July 2022

- Vamp's mother described her as 'Artistic, sporty, so talented at gymnastics. She was a popular girl who is remembered by her friends'
- Vamp was subject to a child protection plan under the category of neglect since March 2022, at the time of her death by misadventure. Vamp increasingly came to the attention of services during 2022 – for missing episodes, self-harm, allegations of rape.
- Vamp was seen as hard to reach. There were numerous accounts of her being described as 'not engaging'.
- Vamp told a professional that 'talking makes things worse' and she felt overwhelmed by the number of professionals involved. She indicated during return home interviews that she was unhappy at home.

What worked well

- Agencies reflected that, although Vamp was hard to reach, they managed to work well with the family. Vamp's mother was positive about agencies.
- Considerable efforts were made to reach Vamp before she died. Vamp's social worker persevered, and just days before Vamp's death had managed to get her to agree to do a joint activity.
- Vamp was referred to CAMHS following reports of self-harm, but it was reported she made it clear she did not want engagement with any services. Positively, she remained open to CAMHS, with work targeted at supporting her family network.
- Although school attendance was a concern, Vamp's school made persistent efforts to support her. At the time of her death, there were plans in place for the Children Missing Education panel to consider a PRU placement and allocate a mentor. Concerns were also shared between Vamp's primary and secondary school at transition.

What could have worked better

- Although Vamp was well known to services, there was limited understanding of her lived experience.
- Vamp's adult sibling gave a different perspective to agencies & Vamp's mother - requests for urgent help were not acted on in time. There needed to be more awareness of Vamp's experience, and her mother's needs due to her own health issues.
- Vamp's age was incorrectly recorded as 2-3 years older than her actual age at one point in records, indicating potential adultification.
- During the Covid-19 pandemic, Vamp's mother had a period of severe mental illness, from which point Vamp may have become a young carer. Agencies did not appear to have assessed this part of Vamp's experience.
- Vamp lived in Merton, but Sutton provided some services, and her peer support network was also based in other boroughs. This made accessing services initially complicated and caused some delays in responding to her self-harming behaviour.
- Vamp's peer group were not immediately identified. A mapping of intelligence from her missing episodes might have provided more information about risks at an earlier stage.



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1) Lived experience of adolescents e.g. risk-taking behaviour, missing, potential exploitation, young carers

- Gaining the pupil voice in schools needs to be more frequent and then with clear outcomes based on the feedback.
- Schools are not always aware of young carers. What else can be done?
- There needs to be more engagement and information gathering from siblings to understand the impact of the wider family and what support can be made available to them.
- Strengthen use of trusted adults for children who are not consenting to a service. Consider how child is heard in child protection plans, beyond getting parent to increase their capacity to safeguard.
- Promote preventative, and personalised, approach to supporting students with social, emotional and behaviour issues in schools, alongside intensive interventions for the highest risk.

2) How can services adapt to be more accessible to adolescents? What can services do differently in response to children who feel unable to engage with practitioners?

- Some children are not ready to engage – how do we consider their needs?
- Do not give up at the first sign of non-engagement – show them that we are committed. What is stopping them from engaging?
- Try and use their interests to engage them – also reach out to close family members to better understand the young person.
- Flexible ways of meeting/engaging – social media platforms, virtual, face to face.
- Time/location to suit the young person and where they feel comfortable.
- Review interactions and adapt accordingly – if something is not working, we need to change it. Respond to feedback.
- A key consideration must be regarding who responds to adolescents between the hours of 5pm and 9am, and how those responding to young people are able to engage them in interventions that lead to safe decision-making.
- There is a need to respond to the increase in mental health difficulties in adolescents. There is a wider unprecedented increase in the use of DoLs and Section 2 nationally.
- A wider consideration of outreach services that are both trauma-informed and aware of risks associated with substance use is needed. To support access to young people that services are struggling to engage, via full range of street based and out of hours services.



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3) How cross borough working can be strengthened, and bureaucracy reduced for education and CAMHS.

- More consistency needed in cross borough representation at meetings.
- Regular review meetings and information sharing with ALL agencies involved with the young person.
- Whole family approach to support and intervention needs to be considered when deciding on next steps.
- Services available in some areas but not others – need to find a way of ‘bridging the gap.’
- Promote what services are available in each area.
- Resources should be child centred and not dependent on which borough the school is in or which borough the child resides in.
- The different Police Borough Command Units need to strengthen their information sharing regarding the contextual safeguarding risks in neighbouring boroughs.



Recommendations

1. MSCP to gain assurance as to how partners are strengthening the working together approach to safeguard children from extra familial harm.
2. MSCP to consider how children and young people can be supported to navigate services more easily.
3. MSCP to work with neighbouring safeguarding Children Partnerships to influence stronger commissioning arrangements across boroughs.

3. The Metropolitan Police need to ensure all avenues are explored to determine the age for children and young people under the age of 18.
4. MSCP to liaise with other Southwest London Safeguarding Partnerships to push for a consistent approach to Detached Youth Work services, using this review.
5. MSCP should seek to understand the experience of young carers and agency responses to them.

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Vamp

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review

What are the key take-aways to consider for your own practice?



1. Are we persistent in reaching the child and building trusting relationships? How can we adapt our offer to ensure a child is never viewed as “non-engaging”? (see [Why Language Matters](#) guide)
2. Are we ensuring that when working in a network of professionals, those seen as trusted by the child are the ones utilised the most?
3. Where child protection category of need is neglect, have we given enough consideration to protecting the child in the community as well as at home?
4. Are we utilising a trauma-informed approach to effectively identify and support children vulnerable to exploitation? (see [Appropriate Language in Relation to Child Exploitation](#) guide)
5. Do we feel confident having discussions with young people about substance misuse?
6. Can we do more to make young people feel safer where they spend time, and empower communities to share risks with relevant agencies?
7. How are we ensuring that we accurately identify the age of victims who are under 18 years old?
8. Do we feel confident in identifying and supporting young carers? Have we appropriately considered the potential impacts on their mental health and education?
9. Do we, or our colleagues, require further training or guidance around any of these themes?



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