

Safeguarding Children: Case Study-Jenny and Anne Arbroath

Q1: What concerns do you have about Jenny and Anne?

The flat is cold, no central heating and no washing machine, this would make living more difficult for the family and may increase the risk of colds, flu and even hypothermia if the flat is too cold.

Jenny has never had contact with her biological father; this absence could leave Jenny feeling unwanted and maybe slightly withdrawn from Len if he has not been a replacement father figure. It could also have a slight impact on her social development, however this is not always so because so many children are left without their biological father.

Sarah and Len's level of parental knowledge is lacking and there is small levels of support services available to them. It is more obvious in Len's approach rather than Sarah's.

The Health Visitor described Jenny as "rather placid and uncurious." This could be down to lack of stimulation from Len and Sarah, raises attachment issues.

Jenny and Anne may have witnessed domestic violence between Len and Sarah, this causes concern for the emotional impact this may have on them.

We would need to find out if Sarah is capable of protecting them from the risk of possible harm.

Jenny is six months behind with her speech development; her social and emotional needs have been neglected, down to a lack of stimulation from Sarah and Len again.

The incident of Len losing his temper and smacking brings up child protection issues and concern for the children's safety.

Q.2: How do you think Sarah and Len's social circumstances might be affecting the situation?

Unsuitable housing and poor living conditions, they are unable to afford some of the basic needs for the children such as warmth, this can then turn and be the cause of Len's bad temper and contribute to his drinking problem if he is under a lot of stress.

Low income, Sarah is unable to work due to childcare responsibilities, Len is currently unemployed, therefore making money very tight for the family.

Lack of support available from family and friends. Sarah has moved a large distance from her family and friends. Len's parents have also moved to Spain and he has a poor relationship with his sister.

Lack of support from the wider community. There is no mention of healthcare and childcare recourses available.

Family functioning-What was Len and Sarah's childhood like? What do they base their parenting skills on?

Q3: What should you do? Give reasons for your answer.

As I am only a student social worker, I am unable to act independently. I need supervision from the social worker I am shadowing or from my manager, if not both. However I do have a responsibility to safeguard the children and to promote the welfare of them. When I have made these referrals it is then the manager's duty to carry out the correct procedures for a child protection referral. I am expected to act professionally by ensuring all information concerning the family remains confidential and discussed only with the professionals involved working with the family. I shall inform the family that I am not liable to keep information to myself and that it has to be passed on to all concerned. It is also my responsibility to record all information concerning Jenny and Anne accurately and confidentially.

Q4: What powers and duties does the Children Act (1989) give to Social Services that would be relevant in this situation? Give reasons for your answer.

Once social services have received the referral there are procedures in which they need to follow. This is illustrated by a set of flow charts found in the Department of Health's summary: What to do if you are worried a Child is Being Abused. It sets out the process for safeguarding children and contains an appendix covering the legal issues affecting exchange of information. It is aimed at those who come into contact with children and families in their everyday work, including people who do not have a specific role in relation to child protection. Concerns have been raised about Jenny and Anne's wellbeing and they were referred to a statutory agency. After referral an initial assessment is required to be completed within seven working days of the referral. The evidence would have found Jenny and Anne to be 'children in need.'

Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 places a duty on the local authority to conduct an inquiry if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child ... in their area is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. It would then be down to the social worker's duty to lead a core assessment. In Jenny and Anne's case we would need to look at Len's acknowledged short term temper, he may feel that he would not behave like this again, but how can we be sure of this? We would need to gather more information from the assessment.

Once a decision has been made, preventative measures would have been put in place as directed by section 17 of the Children's Act (1989) which outlines the provision of services for children in need. " It is the general duty of every Local Authority to Safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their

area who are in need and so far as is consistent with that duty, to promote the upbringing of such children by their families by providing a range and level of services appropriate to those children's needs." (section 17, Children Act 1989, HMSO)

In order to undertake this task, the Local Authority will provide a range of services, which will also help children in need to continue to live with their families, and which are designed to help prevent abuse and neglect.

It is then the social worker who is responsible for working with the family and other agencies and professionals to agree a plan to ensure the safety of the children and their welfare.

Q5: What factors might impact on the capacity of the children's carers for them?

First of all I would need to address the question of whether Sarah and Len would be able to meet the children's physical, social and emotional needs, so far I have found that this is not so.

When assessing a parent's ability to care for their children it is useful to refer to the Department of Health's, "The Framework for the Assessment of Children and Families. This outlines the key parenting tasks and prerequisites for a child's well being and development" (Horwarth, J, 2001) These are the basic needs that Jenny and Anne need such as ensuring their safety, warmth, stimulation, guidelines and stability.

As I have mentioned Len is currently unemployed, leaving the family vulnerable to poor income and a lack of finances to supply these basic needs. He also needs to address his drinking and anger management problems. Both Sarah and Len have a lack of knowledge and awareness of what support services are available.

“Parents sometimes tell themselves that their drinking is their own problem. But, inevitably, parents' alcoholism is a problem for their children as well, the fact that a parent who is drinking is not available to take care of them, at least temporarily. In other cases, of course, the effects of parental alcoholism are much worse, including physical or emotional abuse, fights between the parents, and the loss of money that might be needed for food or other necessities.” (DrSpock.com, 2001)

Len needs to be an appropriate role model for the children; both he and Sarah need to model appropriate behaviour. They need to focus on the domestic abuse that is occurring in front of the children, if they are unable to provide such a safe environment then Sarah needs to think about a possible break from Len because it has become highly apparent that the children are suffering from the consequences of this relationship.

They lack family support, they are very isolated with not having anyone to share their thoughts with, and they've both suffered from a poor childhood experience. They need to look at these strains and focus on anger management for Len and dealing with his alcohol problems. They have a lot

of social stress to deal with so they need to join other members of social groups such as family centres to get involved with.

Q6: There are a number of different agencies who could be involved with the family, can you identify who they might be and what their roles would be in order to work effectively together and safeguard Jenny and Anne's welfare?

There are wide ranges of agencies that may work with the family. Each of these playing an important role is working effectively to safeguard and promote the welfare of Jenny and Anne. Anger management specialists for Len would involve Social Services, Education, Employment and Training agencies. Health care professionals for the whole family would involve the Health Visitor, Speech and Language Therapists, Paediatrician, Alcohol Misuse Team, Child Psychiatrists and a Family Therapist. The housing department would be able to introduced community based support such as Woman's Aid, Sure Start, Nurseries, Day Centres, Police, Probation Officers and family support teams.

It is important to introduce these support teams at the beginning of any assessment as it gives the family support that they so dearly need.

Good practice is essential when working with families, it is important to apply this from the first point of contact with the family and continued throughout the referral. Interagency working promotes the importance of communication, information sharing and awareness of roles and responsibilities of all agencies and professionals involved in working with the children and family.

