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# Developing safeguarding resources for the voluntary sector:

# Summary findings from a survey of Staff

Introduction

This report forms part of the Safer Social Sector Partnership[[1]](#footnote-1) Project and focuses specifically on ascertaining safeguarding resourcing needs within the voluntary sector, as perceived by service users themselves and those who support them. This report summarises the findings from an on-line survey conducted during April and May 2019 which encouraged service users to contribute to the development of safeguarding resources by telling us about their understandings of safeguarding, how they approach the issue of keeping themselves and others safe, whether they have received training to do so and what more could be done to support them to safeguard themselves and others.

In total 446 people who support service users in varying capacities engaged with a 16-question survey, comprising a mix of open and closed questions.

# What is your job role?

The staff-members responding to the survey came from a variety of roles, ranging from those directly supporting service users to those who headed up, or were trustees of supporting organisations. Respondents were asked an open question about their job role and so self-identified with a particular role title. It was possible to cluster these around particular job types. Most responses (circa 45%) were received from managers and professionals in various management roles and support workers represented a further 34% of those responding. The diversity of the remaining groups who responded: trainers, advocates; community and youth workers; as well as CEOs, organisation directors and administrators greatly demonstrates the spread of interest and engagement with safeguarding that prevails and which will provide a ‘fertile’ environment for the dissemination of any upcoming resources.

It was encouraging that there were some very specific job roles represented too, such as roles associated with debt management, substance misuse, sexual health, anti-trafficking, mental health, general well-being, housing and employability. Moreover, the various sectors from where interest is emanating; for example, business and leisure as well as the care sector supports the idea that there is a demand for more resources and guidance that needs to cater for audiences wider than the care sector.

# How big is the organisation you work for?

Small (1 - 5 employees)

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Medium (6 - 15 employees)

Large (15+ employees)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Small (1 - 5 employees)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 6.05% | 27 |
| 10.76% | 48 |
| 83.18% | 371 |
|  | 446 |

Medium (6 - 15 employees)

Large (15+ employees)

TOTAL

Notably the majority (83%) of people engaging with the survey worked in organisations with at least 15 employees and just 6% in organisations of 5 employees and less. This highlights a need to ensure that smaller organisations engage with safeguarding issues and that they do not somehow feel disenfranchised from the debates on the basis that they are too small to engage. Resources will need to reflect this and will need to encourage the engagement of organisations of all sizes, since we know that safeguarding policy and processes need to be present in all types of organisations.

# What does the word "safeguarding" mean to you?

When asked about what the word safeguarding meant to them, many staff described this in terms of keeping people safe and protecting them from varying types of harm, abuse and neglect. For example, “It means being proactive in working hard to ensure that people do not experience abuse or neglect by providing high quality person-centred care. It is also about zero tolerance to abuse/poor practice and reporting any concerns”.

As well as acknowledging the key aspects of protecting people and keeping them safe staff also saw safeguarding as “Both the immediate protection of vulnerable adults and children at risk but also everything to shore up the rights of others and prevent harm from occurring – our practices, policies, multi-agency working etc.” Throughout the responses there were several mentions of not simply protecting however, but also of allowing people choice and empowering them to take (calculable) risks if they so wish and have the capacity to ascertain. For example, “it also means keeping people safe, balanced against the individual’s capacity and their ability to understand reasonable risk. It does not mean wrapping them in cotton wool or stopping people from taking unwise decisions when they have the understanding to do so”. Many respondents oriented to the fact that safeguarding was about “Balancing the right to take risks and the duty to safeguard.”, very much recognising their duty of care to protect whilst empowering people they support to live lives of their choosing.

Whilst some people reported very practical safeguarding steps about protecting people from various types of harm and reporting and ‘whistleblowing’ if necessary, some described safeguarding in terms of policy and procedure, one as a “a body we can go to, to protect the people we support from harm or further harm” and one respondent simply said “The definition is in our policy. I don’t have time to look it up right now”. There is a suggestion by some therefore that safeguarding is a ‘something’ that has to be done, is there but is to be drawn on only when necessary, rather than more desirably that it is something that is embedded into everyday practice. One respondent suggested that sometimes safeguarding is not seen proactively saying that safeguarding is about:

“Protecting vulnerable people from abuse, neglect and other risks. (Although in reality it is not proactive and for me, means making safeguarding referrals after someone has been injured or abused).”

This rather poignant perspective is sadly quite often true and so any resources to assist in understanding the meaning of safeguarding need to promote some of the embeddedness and proactivity that is required to be built in to safeguarding policies and the enactment of them.

A further set of responses related to reporting/’whistleblowing’ processes and highlighted in particular that safeguarding is about being prepared to report abuse/poor practice but also that there is an expectation that people should be supported to do so and should be able to be confident that their concerns will be listened to and acted upon. The fact that in the asking of a simple question about the meaning of safeguarding, some people expressed some serious matters about reporting and so on, suggests that there is some dissatisfaction among staff with ‘safeguarding’ as it is currently understood and that there may be a need (as part of any resourcing/guidance) to constantly review, refine and remind what safeguarding is about in the first instance in order to promote a consistent understanding around which policies, procedures and practices can be developed.

# Which of these terms do you think are likely to be used when talking about people who are at risk of being harmed?

(respondents selected as many as they wished)

Safety

Keeping people

safe

Safeguarding

Bullying

Being harmed

Risk

Abuse

Exploitation

Other (please

specify)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

**RESPONSES**

Safety

Keeping people safe Safeguarding Bullying

Being harmed Risk

Abuse Exploitation

Other (please specify)

82.33% 368

Total Respondents: 447

Where staff respondents have made their own suggestions for language in respect of talking about people who are at risk of harm, *vulnerable, vulnerability* and other derivatives and *protection, protecting* and other derivatives were cited by many people. Several respondents also cited the various types of harm of which people might be at risk.

89.71% 401

90.16% 403

80.31% 359

88.59% 396

91.50% 409

94.63% 423

84.34% 377

12.08% 54

# Does your organisation have a safeguarding adults policy?

Yes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | | | | | | | | |

No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

TOTAL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 97.09% | 433 |
| 2.91% | 13 |
|  | 446 |

Of the 446 respondents asked if their organisation has a safeguarding adults policy, 97% (433) confirmed that they did and 3% (13) that they did not.

Whilst these figures are very encouraging, as suggested above, it is paramount that all organisations are aware that they should have policies and processes and will require tools and guidance to support them to do so; any resources will need to be applicable to small, medium and large organisations and should not be such that they appear to only apply to a particular type or size of organisation.

# Does your organisation have a person responsible for safeguarding?

Yes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | | | | | | | | |

No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

TOTAL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 93.95% | 419 |
| 6.05% | 27 |
|  | 446 |

When asked if their organisation had someone responsible for safeguarding, 94% answered affirmatively and just 6% reported that they did not. Again, whilst encouraging, it is of concern that 27 organisations were reported to not have anyone. Though there is always the possibility that there is someone with safeguarding responsibilities and the respondent simply does not know that, that could be significant in itself and emphasises the need to include the publicising of safeguarding roles in policies and processes. Moreover, any resources and guidance to support the development of safeguarding policies and processes will need to emphasise this.

# Have you ever received training on safeguarding adults?

Yes

No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

TOTAL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 88.20% | 396 |
| 11.80% | 53 |
|  | 449 |

Over 88% of respondents had received some sort of safeguarding training and almost 12% had not.

# If you answered "yes" to the previous question, can you tell us more about the safeguarding training you received?

The nature of training received ranged from “A short session (2 hours) …. some years ago” with the respondent expressing a need for more, to very “Thorough training looking at the various types of risk that an adult who accesses our services could face”.

Variety of training formats

Respondents reported receiving training in a variety of formats, some attending face to face courses and workshops, whilst others had undertaken e-learning courses. Some had received training from the local authority safeguarding board, others from other external organisations and some via in-house training.

One respondent whose organisation used both face to face and e-learning courses felt that “the safeguarding course provided by the local authority was far superior and [I] would like to attend face to face courses by them in the future”. Similarly, another reported “E-learning is not as useful due to learning style. Face to face training is useful but not often enough but staff can be put on this if [a] manager believes there is a gap in [a] person’s knowledge. Staff also get confused by roles and responsibilities of handling safeguarding matters and risk involving themselves too much. Training needs to highlight this.” (This latter account of safeguarding training highlights style, timing and content of the training; timing and content issues are discussed further below).

Variation in timescales, continuity and relevance

This is perhaps one of the areas that is important in the context of keeping safeguarding training up to date. The example above of someone receiving two hours training and then nothing for several years is concerning. Other respondents reported however that they received annual training and some even more frequently. It was also encouraging that many people reported that there were ongoing discussions amongst colleagues, at meetings and such like about safeguarding, so training was also very much on-the-job in those settings.

Perhaps most concerning however is when people reported not being able to locate suitable training at all. This appeared to be as a result of not being able to locate training that felt right for their sector, for example: “I went looking for it, as we don’t have any in our sector. Wasn’t helpful, was aimed at care staff working with the elderly, we work with all ages in a voluntary sport context”. Similarly another respondent told us: “training for safeguarding adults is limited to stereotypical elderly vulnerable people in residential establishments which was not useful for the organisation I work in”. These are possibly mis-perceptions as there are core commonalities in safeguarding training, but it is important to recognise that these mis-perceptions exist if organisations are not to be deterred from engaging in training because they think that there is nothing available that is relevant to them.

Varying quality

One respondent reported attending a “very intense, excellent course”, whilst another reported they attended a course that was “In house. Dull. Patronising. Basic”, so there was great variety in people’s experience of training. A further example was “Our training was thorough, interesting, lots of information and facts, informative with a very good trainer. Paperwork given to back up”. It thus seems that the quality of a trainer is also important and that people do like to have something on paper to bring away from training. Another respondent highlighted such a need in the context of rolling this out more widely within their county. It was reported: “I have created my own handbook from the training I’ve received but other than referencing [Ann Craft Trust] website and government legislation as a link [there’s] not much else I can forward”. Whilst it may not be possible to please everyone, it is perhaps important to take on board that effective roll-out of safeguarding training is dependent upon having resources that are in such formats that people will engage with them rather than simply having a link that they never follow up.

Insights into content

From several of the responses it was possible to discern that people seem to prefer face to face training, with paperwork to back it up and perhaps the inclusion of example safeguarding scenarios including how they might be progressed and ‘solved’. Many people described in great depth the training they had received, suggesting that there are examples of good practice that can be drawn upon. For example, someone reported receiving:

“Thorough training looking at the various types of risk that an adult who accesses our services could face. Who is legally 'an adult' who is a 'vulnerable adult' what is our statutory obligation regarding safeguarding, distinguishing between risk an adult with capacity chooses to take, (eg drink, drugs, risks in sexual behaviour, etc) also specific risk to certain groups eg forced marriage /fgm[female genital mutilation], suicide, domestic abuse, mental capacity, mental health issues”.

Furthermore, whilst some people reported some perceived gaps for their sector others reported they had accessed relevant training and that it had been delivered widely across their organisation, even though they were in what might be considered by some as a niche sector. For example,

“Training delivered to the entire regional team of a charity I worked for. This included staff who had regular 1:1 contact with beneficiaries and those who had very infrequent contact.”

Thus people are finding relevant, quality safeguarding training though there may perhaps be a case for a comprehensive list to be compiled which includes some sector specific providers too, to ensure that people are not alienated on the basis that training appears of no relevance or is of poor quality and they do engage with the need for effective training and seek it out.

# How confident do you feel that you'd be able to recognise if someone was at risk of being harmed?

Extremely confident

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Not so confident

Not at all confident

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

**RESPONSES**

Extremely confident Very confident Somewhat confident Not so confident

Not at all confident

26.39% 114

49.54% 214

21.30% 92

2.08% 9

0.69% 3

TOTAL

432

Over 75% of staff reported feeling ‘extremely confident’ or ‘very confident’ in recognising if someone was at risk of being harmed, with a further 21% being ‘somewhat confident’. These are encouraging responses though it is important to pay heed to those who feel less confident and what can be done further to support them.

# If you don't feel confident that you'd be able to recognise someone at risk of being harmed, what sort of information do you think would help

you decide?

9 respondents reported the sort of information that would help them to decide if someone was at risk.

Responses included:

* A knowledge of common things to look out for or perhaps a quick reference sheet to clues or signs to look for. In particular, one respondent suggested it was information about the more subtle things to look out for that would be helpful, as it is possible that the “conspicuous stuff” would be picked up by most people.
* Knowing where to go for information within “a system that does not victimise whistle-blowers” was also highlighted as potentially useful. This raises a very important issue in that even if there was a whole plethora of information, it would still only be helpful if staff were encouraged and supported appropriately to raise concerns, without detriment to their person or role. Thus, any resources need to be embedded within processes or procedures that adequately support staff to bring their concerns into ‘safe’ spaces for further exploration and/or investigation.
* Respondents suggested that access to training would also be helpful; one suggesting on-line training as a favourable medium and another suggesting that they would like to see training include “explanation of the difference of types of potential harm in sport settings”. In the context of developing resources then, there may need to be sector specific referencing – perhaps this could be achieved through the use of sector-specific examples during training episodes.

# If you thought someone was at risk of being harmed, would you feel confident to raise your concern?

Yes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | | | | | | | | |

No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

TOTAL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 98.38% | 426 |
|  |  |
| 1.62% | 7 |
|  | 433 |

Of those responding 426 (over 98%) said they would feel confident and 7 (under 2%) said they would not feel confident.

# If you answered "No" to the previous question, could you tell us why you wouldn't feel confident to raise your concerns?

The reasons cited for not feeling confident were:

* Fear of overreacting and unsure where to go for advice outside of our organisation
* Small charities, particularly faith-based charities, often have an ethos where it can be difficult to accept that individuals are at risk as the ethos is that everyone is here to help and no-one would harm anyone
* I know more about safeguarding than our safeguarding lead. My charity is sexist and would blame the victim
* My company has an issue of ignoring such things. Staff confidence in the management structure is almost zero. As such we are way more likely to go directly to the CQC, social services or the police
* Nothing is kept confidential, when concerns have been raised I don’t feel like they are taken seriously

These very candid insights around being seen as overreacting, working within particular organisational cultures, sexism, confidence in management and confidentiality are concerning. This suggests that safeguarding information and resources in isolation are not going to solve all safeguarding issues, but that they may need to be accompanied by the review of wider organisational cultures and policies. Some organisations may need a fuller review of policies and procedures and a real step-change in a number of policy areas so that safeguarding policies and procedures can be embedded effectively; indeed, it is conceivable that introducing effective safeguarding resources/policies/processes may provide the catalyst for some organisations to change for the better in a number of areas; not only safeguarding.

# If you thought someone was at risk of being harmed, would you know who to raise your concerns with?

Yes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | | | | | | | | |

No

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

TOTAL

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 97.69% | 422 |
| 2.31% | 10 |
|  | 432 |

Knowing who to raise concerns with is also paramount and almost 98% of respondents said they would know who to raise concerns with and just over 2% did not.

# If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, who in your organisation would you raise your concern with?

Your manager

Your organisation...

Your local authority

N/A

Other (please

specify)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

**RESPONSES**

Your manager

Your organisation's safeguarding lead Your local authority

N/A

Other (please specify)

57.59% 239

19.28% 80

17.35% 72

0.24% 1

5.54% 23

TOTAL

415

The majority (over 57%) of people would raise a concern with their manager and a further 19% with a safe-guarding lead in their organisation. So over 76% of people would look within their organisation to raise a concern, whilst around 23% of respondents might raise a concern more widely, for example with local safeguarding teams, national bodies with safeguarding expertise and even the Police Service. Some respondents would contact more than one person/body and possibly all of the above.

Thought needs to be given to the information/resource needs of organisations that might not fit a service-provider-type profile, as per the following particular response:

“As the organisation lead, I would be liaising with relevant authorities, but there is a big gap there, in terms of their ability to support us as a non service, particularly in relation to those adults at risk who are presenting a safeguarding risk, who need support, not criminalising”.

Though the specific nature of ‘non service’ is not known here , what it is possible to ascertain is that specific guidance might be required to help organisations that attempt to safeguard vulnerable people who may in turn present a safeguarding risk to others; such situations add an extra layer of complexity to the recognising, reporting and processing of safeguarding matters.

# If a person attending your organisation felt unsafe, do you think they'd know who to raise their concerns with?

Yes

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | | | | | | |

No

Don't Know

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

Yes No

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **RESPONSES** |  |
| 65.40% | 276 |
| 5.21% | 22 |
| 29.38% | 124 |
|  | 422 |

Don't Know

Over 65% of staff confirmed that they think they would and over 5% that they would not. A further 29% were not sure. This is understandable given that we were asking them to speculate about what someone attending their organisation might do.

This does mean that almost 35% of respondents were suggesting that their organisation does not make it very clear for people visiting/attending what they should do if they feel unsafe for whatever reason, and this will need addressing, by way of information to assist them to raise such a concern.

TOTAL

# What sort of resources would help you to keep people safe, and make you feel confident enough to raise concerns if you have them?

Information and guidance

A clear safeguarding...

Safeguarding

training

Someone responsible ...

Helpful contact numbers

Someone to discuss your...

Other (please

specify)

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

**ANSWER CHOICES**

**RESPONSES**

Information and guidance

A clear safeguarding policy for your organisation Safeguarding training

Someone responsible for safeguarding in your organisation Helpful contact numbers

Someone to discuss your concerns with Other (please specify)

Total Respondents: 420

85.00% 357

Many of the offered options attracted high numbers of respondents. In particular information and guidance, as well as training attracted over 80% of responses, with helpful contact numbers and clear policies just under 80%. The variety of responses received in the ‘Other’ category provided a rich insight into some very practical things that might be done to aid organisations in their safeguarding endeavours. These are summarised in the table on the following page.

77.14% 324

81.43% 342

67.86% 285

79.52% 334

74.05% 311

13.10%

|  |
| --- |
| Information on clear view (crucially), including “impact posters” with relevant contact numbers |
| Clear flowchart of process to follow when a safeguarding alert is raised |
| Regular updates regarding legal requirements and best practice |
| A helpline or “whistleblowing line” to which people can report and receive immediate advice |
| On-line forums and e-learning resources |
| Guidance specifically for trustees (to know what questions to ask when safeguarding issues arise) |
| Guidance on roles/responsibilities (support to know when/how to be involved/when to pass on) |
| Access to safeguarding bodies offering advocacy and interpreting services |
| Information and guidance in languages other than English and in easy-read format |
| Leaflets/videos/games to support safety awareness among people with multiple/complex needs |
| Someone responsible across a sector to administer complaints/support correspondence for cases |
| Example scenarios and case studies detailing how you might progress through those situations |
| Networking opportunities as well as supervisions and ongoing discussion in local teams |
| Free safeguarding training, including interviewing skills and how to complete relevant paperwork |

In relation to this latter item the following comment was made with particular regard to the voluntary sector:

“We desperately need to access free safeguarding training for our volunteers. I also need a way to persuade my trustees to take this seriously. My volunteers are mostly retired and think safeguarding is ‘political correctness gone mad’”

This presents a very clear insight into the nature of challenges being faced by those trying to take the safeguarding agenda forward in their particular organisations and highlights key areas in which such individuals will require support and guidance.

Additionally, in relation to how organisations work with local authorities the following was ‘requested’:

“A better response from the LA Adult Safeguarding Team. They are usually VERY reluctant to respond when we contact them. This disincentivises us from making referrals.”

Not only did this set of responses give clear practical suggestions for what would be helpful by way of information and resources, but it also oriented to some very acute challenges that any resources will need to help address if those charged with promoting safeguarding are to be adequately supported in taking forward the safeguarding agenda.

1. The Safer Social Sector Partnership is coordinated by the [National Council of Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)](https://www.ncvo.org.uk/). It involves 13 national umbrella bodies and organisations. They share their skills, knowledge and experience so that all voluntary organisations can be a safe place for beneficiaries, volunteers and staff. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)