

Reframing safeguarding: A situated response for East Central Bristol

June 19th, 2019

This conference was held at Felix Road Adventure Playground and curated by Eddie Nuttall (EN).

Eddie had felt that for some time that a conversation was needed around safeguarding in relation to the shifting environment that both statutory and voluntary sector providers find themselves in. His premise was that by initiating this conversation that a better, more germane methodology could begin to unfold that also helped to develop a more effective partnership between city council departments and the various organisations that provided open access, free-at-the-point-of-delivery community space for children and families.

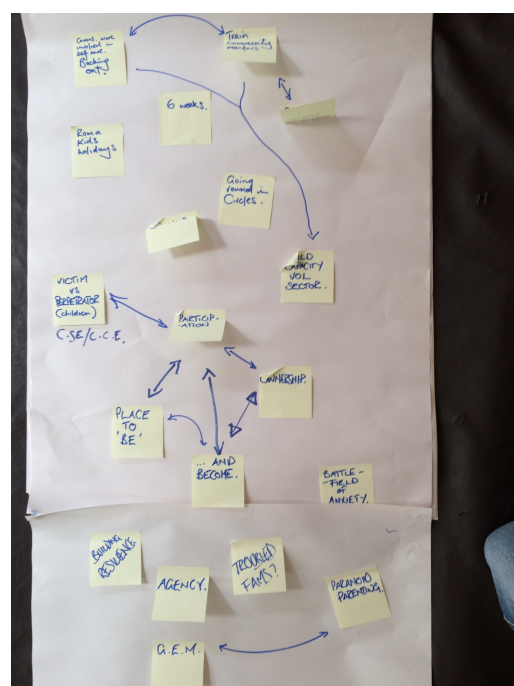
The event was exceptionally lively and well attended, with a broad representation of organisations present. This was the spreadsheet two days before the event there were a couple of cancelations, but around five additional attendees:

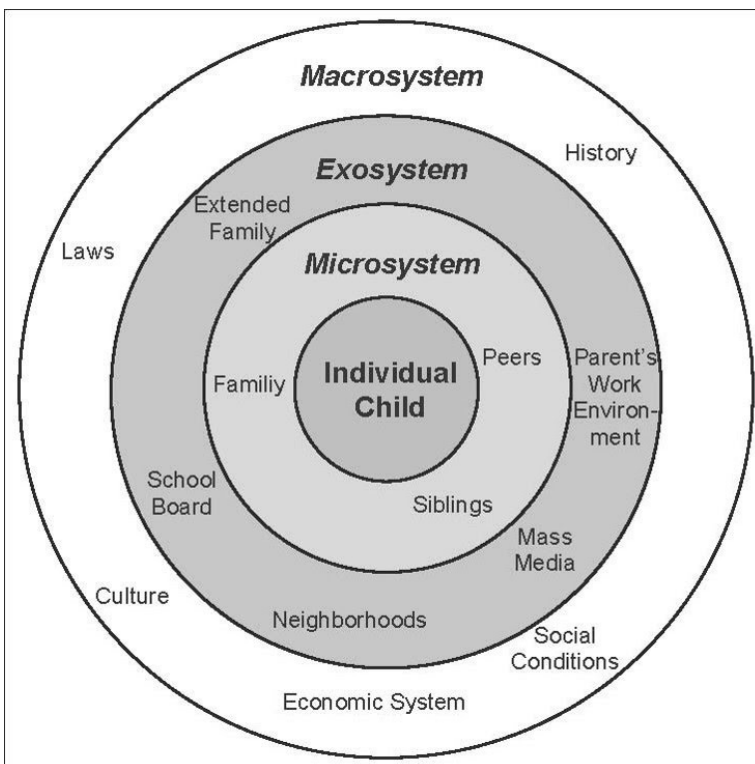
Number	Name	Organisation	Email	Notes
1	Marlene McAllister	Families in Focus BCC	marlene.macallister@bristol.gov.uk	
2	Bev Headman-Fearon	Families in Focus BCC		
3	Lucy Gilbert	Quartet Community Foundation	lucy.gilbert@quartetcf.org.uk	
4	Charlotte	OTR		afternoon
5	John	OTR		morning
6	Annie Oliver	Barton Hill Settlement		
7	Name TBC	Barton Hill Settlement		
8	James Creed	Southmead Delopment Trust		
10	Rach Davies	APE project		TBC
11	Someone	VOSCUR		
12	Helen Godwin	Councillor		
13	Mandy Watson	FRAP		
14	Alice Ballantine Dykes	FRAP		
15	Iris Partridge	Easton Community Centre		
16	Fiona Castle	Imayla		
17	Clare Daley	VOSCUR		morning
18	Mark Hubbard	VOSCUR		afternoon
19	Esther Passingham	VOSCUR		afternoon
20	Emma Tovey	Barton Hill Academy		
21	Gayle Myring	Barton Hill Academy		

The first part of the morning was spent discussing theories of attachment and attachment disorder, particularly in relation to the playing child.

The participants also introduced themselves and their organisation, giving a little about what their concerns were for the children and families that they work with. EN displayed these (below) and drew some connection between related themes (fig.1)

A key emergent theme was that universal provision for children in Bristol was a vital ‘first line’ service that enabled safeguarding to happen in context with the ‘nested’ and natural environment of child, friends and siblings, extended family and the wider interdependent context beyond this. We listed organisations - both present and not - that we felt played a vital role in this system in East Central. The list we came up with was: Felix Road A.P., St Paul’s A.P and APE CiC, Barton Hill Settlement, Babassa, the children’s centres, Families In





Focus, VOSCUR, CAHMS, SCENT, East community Centre, Invisible Youth, LPW, Playbus, 16-25 Youth, Full Circle, Southmead Development Trust, Up Our Street, Black Lives Matter, Safer Options, Young Bristol, Barnardo's and SARI.

EN used the following model to highlight this layered and interdependent context:

It was felt very keenly that this kind of interconnected safeguarding had been damaged by continuing austerity measures and the impact this was having on providers capacity to forge and maintain connections with other key organisations in the outer two circles pictured here. A particular area of damage that EN wanted to emphasise was that of universal play provision (that which runs to the premise of the t'three

FIG. 2: Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological development

frees' - free at point of access, free to come-and-go, freely chosen play experience. This was due to a combination of factors, chiefly among them being the CAT transfers and the financial responsibility of maintaining these projects on small, voluntary sector organisations, the previous commission's lack of 'legacy' planning (particularly at St Paul's and Southmead APs) and to step can further the pressure on the LA to make savings in play and youth service and how play was cut significantly further than youth provision funding. This of course is a story that to some extent is replicated with non-play organisations.

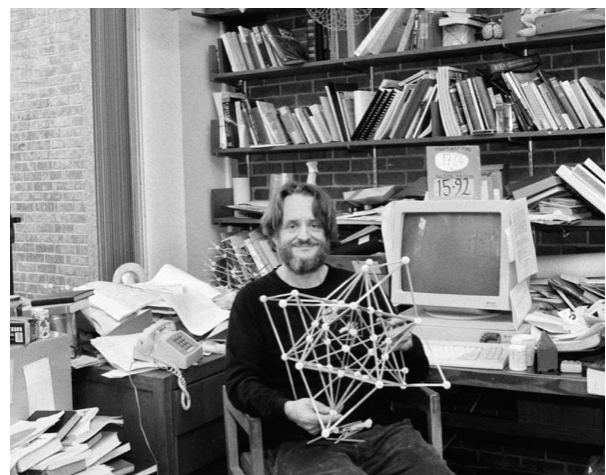
We all felt as a collective of contributors that finding a methodology and resources to bring this provision back up to capacity was a priority, and that this was a key aim for this group.

But prior to this we felt that we needed to clearly define our a s a steering group: our commonalities, **the people** we are representing (communities, where we operate, volunteers etc)

AFTERNOON

Brian Eno: Mathematician John Conway's Game Of Life¹

"I have a little group of live squares up there. When I hit go I hope they are going to start behaving according to those rules. There they go. I'm sure a lot of you have seen this before. What's interesting about this is that so much happens. The rules are very, very simple, but this little population here will reconfigure itself, form beautiful patterns, collapse, open up again, do all sorts of things. It will have little pieces that wander around, like this one over here. Little things that never stop



¹ A Life In Games: The Playful Genius of John Conway. Weird Magazine: October 2015

blinking, like these ones. What is very interesting is that this is extremely sensitive to the conditions in which you started."

A clip of Musician Brian Eno talking about The Game of Life was used to introduce the afternoon. The point I was making here to prime the pump was that if you make the correct 'nudges' with complex systems, they will self-sustain for long periods of time. By being sensitive to the needs of any given community - by working very closely with it, and being adaptive to changing needs - we can help sustain health in that community for multiple generations to come.

I also made the personal argument that the current and previous play and youth commissions had not done this; there was little legacy to speak of after LPW, and the examples of St Paul's adventure playground and Southmead AP were stark examples of an absence of legacy to build upon. FRAPA could argue that they are an example of a successful re-generating system: the ecology of children and families is highly diverse, there is multigenerational attendance, new families are coming all the time, the children's play is healthy and also diverse. We are beginning to see this re-emerging on the other playgrounds as well. We have to safeguard it.

Gentrification and shifting city dynamic

This became an emerging theme in the afternoon. We talked about the changing nature of the community in Easton, St Paul's and Barton Hill, and the impact this was having on the families that had settled in these areas in previous generations. The exponential rise in house prices had pushed many families out of the area (including myself and other participants), and was shifting the cultural parameters of these areas. Expensive student accommodation was discussed, and how all these factors might serve to reinforce class barriers in the area. There is also the potential for a rise in crime as the student population and those moving into now expensive private rentals become targets for muggings, dealing and burglary. There is evidence of this happening in Easton and St Paul's with young people who used to attend the playground; with little prospects after school life criminal activity becomes enmeshed with both having and income and rising self esteem in a maladapted sense. How do we as experienced professionals/ volunteers respond to this?

Guarding and cultivating the balance of 'the thin blue line' of diverse urban community (class span, ethnically diverse)

EN brought up the analogy of the 'shifting thin blue line' of a diverse and vibrant community - the blue line being the habitable zone of the planet one can see from space and high altitude (Battram, 2016). When a community becomes either too gentrified or too degenerated (i.e. starved of resources and its residents pushed into cycles of poverty) it loses its 'atmosphere' or its 'edge' and becomes either static or chaotic (Battram, 2009).

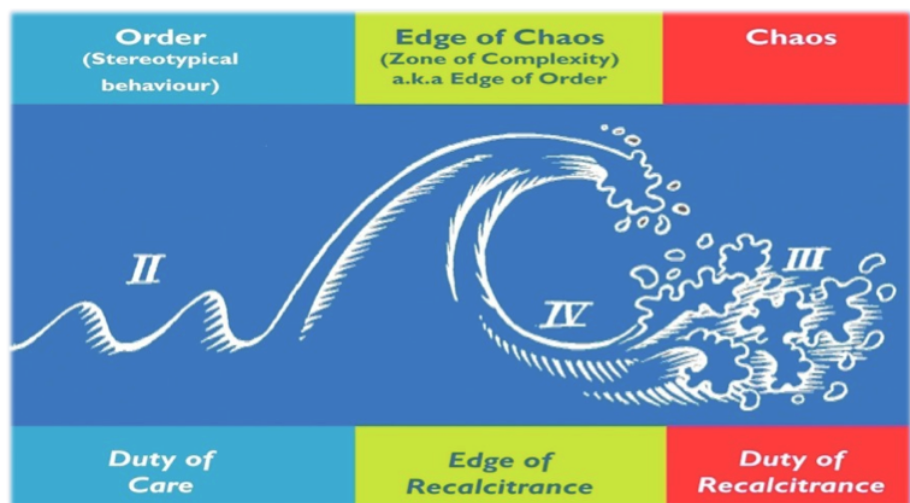


FIG. 3: Battram's Wave

Examples of the former might be parts of Notting Hill or Hackney, the latter can be evidence in Thatcherite Northern

communities of the 1980s in parts of Leeds, Manchester and Liverpool and can be seen in areas in Bristol like Knowle West, Hartcliffe, Lawrence Weston and parts of Southmead.

Community initiatives have a key role in safeguarding the balance of the community that they are situated within. Internally (the inner circles of Fig.1) they enable community events that are appealing to people from across the class and cultural spectrum in that area, and offer novel encounters designed to enrich the experience of people in attendance. Externally (circles three and four) they act as advocates for all individuals and their needs in that community: rights in a broad sense (UNCRC/ UNHRC), safeguarding and protection from abuse, the right to assembly, legal aid, political representation and so forth.

A key aspect of this representation for the future of the areas that we work within is to safeguard against 'pathological development' - the encroachment of commerce, business and excessive unaffordable housing into the area to the point where the spirit of the community is destroyed.

Funding for a collective response to safeguarding community and children

As a collective of organisations we have significant reservations over whether the youth and play commissioning strategy is reaching the most vulnerable youths in the city, for many complex reasons, one of them being the lack of place-based and contextual safeguarding expertise I describe above. In normal everyday language, the commissioning organisations are not delivering effectively in our areas because 1.) they are too far removed from the discrete communities in Bristol to understand the complex situational factors that make children and their parents, and the balance of the community itself vulnerable, and 2.) They are not centring the work within universal community provision, so it is limited in its long term impact on both the individual and the community they belong to.

This work requires a situated, long-term approach and planning. Bluntly, there has to be a third way to prevent further taxpayer's money being wasted on initiatives that are not reaching enough of the people that they are supposed to reach.

We as a collective aim to have a multi-organisational plan in place ready for the **Commissioner's Community Action Fund (CCAF)** annual round next July and to line up match funding to bring acquire the resources we will need to carry out the work once a plan of action is written and fully costed.

We will seek start-up funding for the Autumn (when the next meeting will be held) hopefully with the support and advice of VOSCUR and Quartet.

We believe that as an organisation we could pilot some cutting edge provision next summer and capture the essence of that work to further the argument for part of the match funding to come from the youth and play commission when that comes around again.

We will also work in the Autumn to develop a strategy for embedding this work in the Mayor's One City Plan so that the work unfolds over the next thirty years.

E.N. 02.07.2019

