Peterson case study: a multi-agency response to complex and serious abuse

west sussex county council

Children first

www.westsussex.gov.uk

Peterson case study

The LADO received a referral on 9th November 2020:

Peterson was the nanny for family 1, looking after 4 children aged from 2 to 9 years old from April to May 2020. On 6.11.20 child 1, aged 9 told his parents that Peterson had rubbed his penis and massaged it and that this had happened over twenty times at home in the kitchen and in the garden.

Peterson was employed as a nanny and was also a student teacher, in his 2nd year at University.

Timeline

8.11.20

Family 1, 4 children. Disclosure made and Peterson is arrested

9.11.20

Family 2, 1 child identified.

LADO allegations process commenced

20.11.20

Family 3, 1 child identified

7.12.20

Police identify videos on Peterson's phone of child abuse including oral sex on a boy aged 2/3 years of age

8.12.20

Children from family 1 are identified in 1st generation videos made by Peterson

11.12.20

Peterson charged 19 offences: penetrative sexual activity, voyeurism, taking IIOC. He is remanded

14.12.20

Family 4, 4 children identified

17.12.20

Family 5, 1 child identified

04.01.21

Family 6, 1 child identified.

LADO allegation concluded

Additional information

Peterson worked as a nanny and childcare assistant including for children with SEN and disabilities; it is known that Peterson sexually abused eleven children in six different families across two local authorities.

Peterson also worked in nursery settings and after school clubs and as a trainee teacher he had placements in several schools. These settings were across three local authorities. Concerns were raised about Peterson's strange behaviour but no allegations were logged.

Professional network

Head of Safeguarding
LADOs for three LAs
Police, complex abuse unit
Social workers from two LAs
Education
Early Years
Further education
University
Health
Police and Comms teams

What Ifs…

What if Peterson experienced trauma or abuse as a child?

What if Peterson was sexually abused by a nanny, baby-sitter, family friend or family member?

What if Peterson's parents were not able to keep him safe?

What if Peterson struggled with feelings of injustice and being a victim?

Peterson's presentation

Presenting himself as victim - contacting support agencies

Playing games – "Find the evidence and I will talk"

Retaining right to silence whilst disclosing outside of police.

Minimising - "I am a male nanny I will get allegations"

Normalising – "I am gentle with the children"

What went well

Cross border working - with lead LADO co-ordinating the professional group

Timeliness - from all agencies resulting in charges for 19 offences within one month

Complex strategy discussion – pulling together information, professionals and actions

Learning – sharing this case study within the partnership forum has led to identified learning points being taken forward across agencies, such as SPOC for student placements within health, education and social care settings.

Practice dilemmas

Information sharing
- process driven
- silo working with new referrals

Voice of the child vs Voice of the parent
- SARC engagement

Lack of professional curiosity:
Learning identified – occasions when professional curiosity could have led to earlier interventions

Professional challenge:
Does not meet criminal threshold - more discussion over drugging of children with hot chocolate- police stating cannot prove so no investigation.

Sentencing

Peterson pleaded guilty to twenty offences, which were all of a sexual nature and received a very lengthy custodial sentence.

He will be a registered sex offender for life and was given a Sexual Harm Prevention Order (SHPO) to last until further court notice, severely restricting his access to children and digital devices.

It was noted that Peterson’s offences were horrendous breaches of trust, and every parent's worst nightmare. He had no previous convictions or any other DBS-related record, and the parents had all found him through reputable child care agencies.

Statistics to get your brain cells buzzing

In the financial year 2020-21 the LADO received 32 allegations regarding sexual abuse; of these, 26 led to a police investigation.

Of these police investigations, 3 were concluded within 1 month, 8 within 3 months, 6 within 12 months and 15 are still open.

In the financial year 2020-21 the LADO received 118 contacts linked to Early Years settings. Of these, 4 enquiries were of a sexual nature – 2 of these were risk by association – the remainder being rough handling or management issues .

At least 32 professionals were involved in the allegation relating to Peterson, including: 1 Service lead ; 3 LADOs; 2 Police officers; 12 Social Workers; 8 workers from Education - EY to University and 1 NHS worker, 2 Media comms colleagues and police and 3 colleagues from the safeguarding in education team. Additional professionals attended the numerous strategy discussions.

learning

How could things have been done differently?

Let’s discuss