

SAR Rita Learning for Professionals



Safeguarding Adults Review

Rita was a young woman with two school age children. She had parents who supported her and would sometimes collect the children from school, and tried to help her in the house. Rita kept them 'at arms length' but they tried to keep in contact to see the children. Rita did not want the children to see their father. He tried to maintain contact with them and with their school. Rita had physical and mental health issues which affected her daily life. The home conditions were deteriorating and there was evidence of self neglect. Rita died in the summer of 2024. You can read the full SAR [here](#).

Key messages for professionals

Good practice identified



Building Trust

There were good attempts to build trust in working relationships with Rita



Multi-agency work

Professionals worked well together at the point of crisis



Referrals

Referrals were made about Rita and her children by multiple organisations

What were the worries?



Full picture

The extent of Rita's circumstances were not known by any professionals



Information Sharing

Information was not always shared, and some was only known by one organisation



Whole Family

"I wish someone had asked us" Rita's family



Consent

Non-engagement must trigger deeper exploration, not withdrawal

- Rita's complex needs and deteriorating home conditions were known to different professionals, but no one had the full picture.
- Safeguarding responses were delayed and only coordinated at the point of crisis
- The children's lived experiences were not visible in real-time safeguarding assessments.
- Rita's non-engagement and refusal of consent led to withdrawal of support rather than deeper exploration.
- Professionals often accepted Rita's statements at face value, missing signs of mental health issues, possible coercion, and possible fabricated illness.
- Despite multiple contacts with services, early intervention was absent.
- Rita's life reflected complex trauma, survival behaviours, and disconnection - work with adults and children should always be trauma informed
- The review highlights the failure to embed Think Family as a working practice.
- Adult and children's services must converge at the point of risk, not operate separately.
- The children's father and extended family had valuable insights but were excluded from safeguarding processes.
- Their voices could have helped build a fuller picture and support plan.

What can we do differently?



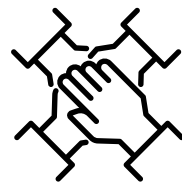
Whole Family Work

Always think about the family as a whole. Consider caring responsibilities and support available from the family



Assumptions

Assumptions were made about the father, Rita's explanations and home environment. Be curious and triangulate information



Work Together

Share information with others who are working with the family. Be collaborative to establish the whole picture

Resources you can use

Working with Fathers:

The voice of fathers is often not included in child protection work. We heard from family that vital information and context from earlier years was missed by not seeking out the children's father. South Gloucestershire Children's Partnership have developed a self assessment and planning tool to help practitioners to be more inclusive of fathers. [See the tool here.](#)

Perplexing Presentations: [See guidance here](#)

Curiosity

[Professional Curiosity Guidance](#)
[Professional Curiosity Training](#)

"I wish someone had asked us"

Always talk to families, Rita's family wanted to tell someone what was happening.