

VCSE Safeguarding Conversation Part 3: Children's Safeguarding in Manchester

Report of Findings and
Recommendations

November 2025



VCSE Safeguarding Conversation

Part 3: Children's Safeguarding in Manchester

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Introduction and Context

This report consolidates insights from a series of sector-wide discussions on safeguarding in the VCSE sector, including the third event focused on children's safeguarding held on the 1st of September 2025 at the St Thomas Centre. The overarching goal for these conversations is to understand the barriers faced by VCSE organisations in safeguarding vulnerable children, young people and adults at risk, particularly in co-ordination with statutory services, and to identify strategic pathways to enhance safeguarding practices, relationships with statutory stakeholders, the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership and social care, as well as issues around capacity, effective resource allocation and where partnership working can address some of these gaps.

Manchester Community Central has facilitated ongoing conversations with the VCSE sector to explore the challenges and opportunities in safeguarding across Manchester. These discussions have aimed to foster better collaboration, improve communication between city-wide services and develop tailored support mechanisms aligned with the sector's needs to ensure VCSE organisations have the necessary tools in place to effectively support those in need who are vulnerable.

The most recent event was dedicated to children's safeguarding, featuring expert insights from Chris Jacob, Head of Service at 42nd Street and Susan Harrison, Manchester Safeguarding Partnership Manager. Attendees shared experiences, concerns and ideas for strengthening safeguarding relationships and practices.



Key Themes and Insights

Throughout the event, the below themes were identified as key feedback areas and insights on Manchester's current approach to children's safeguarding. These themes will be explored throughout the report.

- **Challenges Faced by Children and Young People**
- **Transition from Children to Young Adults**
- **Capacity, Resources and Knowledge Gaps**
- **Relationships Between VCSE and Statutory Services**
- **Training Needs and Accessibility**
- **Building Relationships and Collaboration**
- **Sector Capacity and Resource Constraints**



Key Themes and Insights

Challenges Faced by Children and Young People

- **Complexity of Issues:** Children face multifaceted challenges, including trauma from domestic violence and abuse, bullying, also from conflict zones, as well as neurodivergence and experiences of immigration. Building trusting relationships takes time, which is often constrained by limited resources.
- **Supporting Vulnerable Groups:** Difficulties include monitoring home-schooled children (due to lack of guidance), supporting neurodivergent children with communication barriers and safeguarding children with experience of immigration systems who may fear disclosure.
- **Impact of Social Media:** Exposure to violence, extremist rhetoric and harmful content online heightens safeguarding risks.

Transition from Children to Young Adults

- **Resource Gaps:** The transition phase often suffers from reduced support and fewer established links with adult services. Young people aging out of children's social care frequently encounter a lack of accessible pathways to ongoing support.
- **Knowledge Gaps:** Many VCSE organisations lack clarity on how to assist young people during this transition or where to refer them.

Capacity, Resources and Knowledge Gaps

- **Limited Capacity:** VCSE organisations report insufficient staffing and resources to build long-term relationships with children and young people, which are critical for effective safeguarding.
- **Training and Information Gaps:** Many organisations find current safeguarding training too jargon-heavy, generic and inaccessible, especially for volunteers and those with language barriers.
- **Bureaucratic Barriers:** Constantly being told that a case does not meet thresholds for support leaves organisations to undertake statutory roles without adequate support or resources.



Key Themes and Insights

Relationships Between VCSE and Statutory Services

- **Communication Barriers:** The language used by statutory services (e.g., social care jargon) creates disconnects with VCSE organisations and hampers effective collaboration.
- **Cultural Competency:** There is a notable lack of understanding of intersectionality, mental health and trauma-informed approaches within statutory services.
- **Mental Health and Waiting Lists:** Long CAMHS waiting times exacerbate mental health issues among children, with limited capacity in statutory services.
- **Awareness of Safeguarding Structures:** Many VCSE organisations are unaware of initiatives like MARAC or the work of the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership, hindering effective collaboration.

Training Needs and Accessibility

- **Lack of Tailored Training:** Existing safeguarding training is often too generic, jargon-heavy and not suited to volunteers or organisations working with diverse communities.
- **Inaccessibility for Certain Groups:** Training does not always accommodate BSL users or those with specific cultural needs. There's a call for bespoke, community-specific and in-house training models.
- **Training Co-Design:** The sector advocates for co-creating training content with organisations to ensure relevance and effectiveness. A 'train-the-trainer' approach could empower organisations to deliver their own tailored sessions.



Key Themes and Insights

Building Relationships and Collaboration

- **Creating a Collaborative Space:** Attendees emphasised the need for regular, in-person spaces facilitated by Macc, where VCSE organisations and statutory services can build trust, share success stories and discuss challenges.
- **Knowledge and Resource Sharing:** Developing signposting packs for transitional support, staff wellbeing resources and community engagement strategies are identified priorities.
- **Community Engagement:** Working with trusted community leaders and 'safe voices' is vital to overcoming cultural barriers and informing safeguarding resources.

Sector Capacity and Resource Constraints

- **Funding Barriers:** Limited funding restricts access to tailored training, long-term relationship-building, and community engagement activities.
- **Support for Staff and Volunteers:** Organisations are adopting innovative approaches like employing in-house therapists and creating debrief spaces but need additional resource support.



Recommendations and Next Steps

Strengthen Relationships and Communication

- **Establish regular, in-person collaboration forums hosted by Macc for inclusivity and accessibility to facilitate trust**, share best practices and maintain **ongoing dialogue** between VCSE organisations and statutory agencies. (Macc happy to support a VCSE organisation to chair the space, based on collective agreement if this action is taken forward)
- There was a suggestion to **develop two-way communication channels**, such as dedicated liaison roles, online platforms (e.g., WhatsApp groups) and feedback mechanisms, to **ensure accountability and transparency**.
- **Involve VCSE organisations in planning and delivering MSP's safeguarding training** and initiatives, ensuring **sector voices shape policies and programmes**, moving away from tokenistic engagement.

Increase Training and Capacity Building

- **Co-design bespoke, context-specific safeguarding training** tailored to **diverse communities and organisational needs**, including volunteers and trustees.
- Promote **'train-the-trainer' models to empower organisations** to deliver internal safeguarding training and reduce reliance on external providers.
- **Address accessibility concerns by developing inclusive training formats** (e.g., BSL, easy-read materials, in-person sessions).
- **Expand training offerings** to cover topics like **trauma-informed approaches**, cultural competence, communication skills and mental health awareness.



Recommendations and Next Steps

Develop Practical Resources and Support Mechanisms

- **Create signposting packs for transitional support**, mental health pathways and DBS processes **tailored to the needs of young people aged 18-25**.
- **Implement wellbeing initiatives** for staff and volunteers, such as supervision, debrief spaces and access to mental health support.
- **Develop community engagement strategies**, working with trusted leaders and community groups to **co-produce safeguarding resources**.

Address Systemic Barriers

- **Advocate for policy reforms** around home schooling guidelines and mental health service capacity (e.g., faster CAMHS access)
- **Improve understanding of safeguarding structures** like MARAC and the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership among VCSE practitioners
- **Promote cultural competency and intersectionality training within statutory services** to support more inclusive and effective safeguarding.

Pilot and Learn from Best Practices

- **Explore collaboration models** like the **Salford Safeguarding Partnership** to adapt successful approaches within Manchester
- **Share success stories and case studies** across sectors to demonstrate effective safeguarding practices
- **Evaluate pilot initiatives to inform sector-wide adoption** and continuous improvement.





Conclusion

Safeguarding children and young people in Manchester's diverse communities presents **complex challenges that require a co-ordinated, well-resourced and culturally competent approach**. Strengthening relationships between VCSE organisations, statutory services and, most importantly, engaging decision-makers as enablers of **genuine collaborative working**, is essential to build trust, share knowledge and deliver an effective safeguarding offer.

This conversation also contributed to another event (October 2025) we held specifically focusing on prevention and early help for children and young people in Manchester, where safeguarding was highlighted as a crucial component in prevention of harm and ill health. The notes from this event have been documented and will be shared with stakeholders.

Get in touch with us if you would like to know more about our work or about the findings in this report.





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