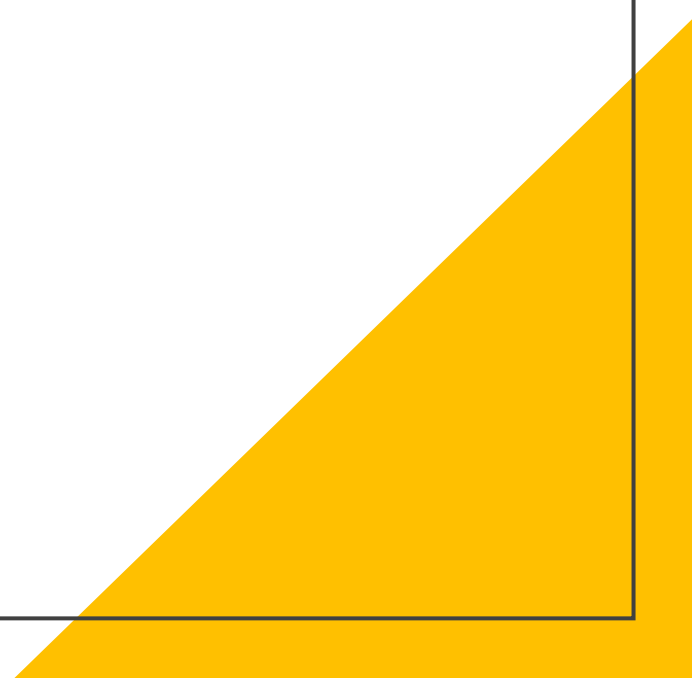


Learning from Adult L's life and experience

Understanding Multiple Disadvantage and what it means for safeguarding women in Gateshead?



Setting the Scene Why are we here?

- To hear about how the life and death of Adult L speaks to us about a better way of working together.
 - How the way we work is key to supporting women
 - To hear about the process of the learning review
- 
- A large yellow triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

Real work ! Expectations 5 minutes

- Flip charts x 10
- Take post its and in groups of 5 answer the following:
 - Introduce yourselves
 - If you knew that today was a great session what do you want to see?

Recap

What was
that like?

Did you all
get a turn?



A letter from Adult L

- This review tells my story- not just the pain I've endured, but also the reasons I still hold onto hope. I know my life has been chaotic, heartbreaking, and sometimes hard for others to understand, but every moment I've lived carries a reason for how I got here. I had two children at 21. At the time, I was in a relationship filled with violence and addiction. My partner used drugs, and I began drinking more heavily to cope. He took our children from me. I was desperate to get them back, and I self-harmed — cutting my legs just to try and feel something other than grief and fear.
- When my third and fourth babies were born, I struggled so much. I was housed near one of their foster carers, but I couldn't cope. My mental health deteriorated. There were ambulance callouts every day. I was falling out of windows, cutting my arms, and barely surviving. People began talking about an eating disorder. My children were taken from me.
- When my fifth baby came, I tried to follow a plan with children's services, but I was found by an ex, and everything spiralled again. I tried to talk about the sexual abuse I suffered as a child, and the domestic violence I saw growing up. I spoke about this a lot to some of the workers. I was told that I had Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD) and possibly PTSD. These diagnoses crushed me. The drinking increased, and I was still using drugs. I moved between temporary accommodations and refuges, but once I left one to be with someone who was violent — because strangely, it felt safer.
- I've lived on the streets. I've been evicted for rent arrears. I've been taken advantage of financially and sexually by other residents in refuges. I've woken up in pain with missing memories. I believe I've been raped, but I carry so much shame I don't want anyone to know. I have five children. I'm still a Mam. I carry their photos with me. When I'm not drinking, I talk about seeing them again and having a home. I lost contact with my youngest in 2016. It broke me.
- In 2019, I stopped drinking for six months. I began the 12-step program. But anniversaries — birthdays, adoption dates — triggered flashbacks and I started drinking again. I was hit by cars and had a head injury. I tried to end my life several times. I reported a rape by an ex-partner. I wanted help. But I was told I had to be sober for six months before receiving mental health support. I tried detoxing at my mum's house, but I had seizures. I've been in and out of A&E. My body and spirit are exhausted. I am not asking for pity. I'm asking to be seen. For someone to recognise the strength it takes just to wake up each day. For compassion. For a chance to heal with the right support.
- I want to rebuild. I want to reconnect with my children. I want to find safety. I want my story to matter. Thank you for reading this and for taking the time to understand me a little more.

How we have
walked through
Adult L's life

The Journey of
Appreciative
Inquiry and The
Thinking
Environment

This review has been part of a journey of discovery using the intertwining principles of an Appreciative Inquiry approach and the Thinking Environment to understand what really happens in a system.

There has been a willingness and a passion to engage and take time out to think and listen

What we will hear about Adult L

- How Adult L's life has shown us the need to Think Family in a real sense
- How there is little support for women who have children removed
- How Adult L's life reinforces the fact that it is the system that is complex and not women
- How Adult L managed to fall through the gap of services even though many professionals had contact with her and previously her children
- How we must not forget about human connection



What we will cover

- The Process –Testing it out in real time
 - The Thinking Environment - the 10 Components
 - Appreciative Inquiry
- Adult L's life and experience
- Learning and Themes
- What does it mean for Gateshead and how we work
- ***An opportunity to think through a challenge/case?***

The Question

- The review wanted to answer a fundamental question: *What would be different for Adult L and other women with similar circumstances now?*





First of all The Thinking Environment

- *The Thinking Environment is not a set of techniques. It is a way of being in the world.*
- —Shirley Edwards

Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

1. Attention: listening with palpable respect and genuine interest, and without interruption
2. Equality: treating each other as thinking peers; giving equal turns and attention; keeping boundaries and agreements
3. Ease: offering freedom from internal rush or urgency
4. **Appreciation: practising a 5:1 ratio of appreciation to challenge**
5. Encouragement: giving courage to go to the cutting edge of ideas by moving beyond internal competition
6. Feelings: allowing sufficient emotional release to restore thinking
7. Information: supplying the facts; recognising social context; dismantling denial
8. Difference: welcoming diverse group identities and diversity of thinking
9. Incisive Questions: removing untrue assumptions that limit our ability to think for ourselves well
10. Place: creating a physical environment that says back to people, 'You matter'





Nancy Kline Founding Director

- *The quality of everything we do depends on the quality of the thinking we do first. The quality of our thinking depends on the way we treat each other while we are thinking.*
- Time To Think has identified ten behaviours that generate the finest independent thinking. We call them the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment

Asking questions

... what builds a relationship, what solves problems, what moves things forwards is asking the right questions (Schein, 2013: 4)



Real work - The Power of Rounds

Groups of 5

- No interruptions- take turns

Start with :

- A round of introductions – whoever starts move to the right .
My name is – what has inspired me to come today is...

The Question

- What are your thoughts about what you have heard?
- What are your current meetings like?

Ending

- Round of appreciation – What I have appreciated is:

Principles underpinning AI

- In every society, organisation or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality.
- Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.
- The art of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) if they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality

(Sue Hammond 2013:14-15)



Supports
the journey
to trauma
informed
and aware

At its heart, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is about the search for the best in people, their organizations, and the strengths-filled, opportunity-rich world around them. . . . AI is a fundamental shift in the overall perspective taken throughout the entire change process to ‘see’ the wholeness of the human system and to “inquire” into that system’s strengths, possibilities, and successes.”

Practice in TIP Organization Development: A guide to leading change and transformation (4th Edition), William Rothwell, Roland Sullivan, and Jacqueline Stavros (Eds). Wiley 2015

Appreciative approach

Relationships come alive where there is an appreciative eye, when we take the time to see the true, the good, the better and the possible in each other... and build mutual regard and positive power – not 'power over' but 'power to'. (Stavros and Torres, 2018).

Using AI and strength based approach

- Creates space for courageous conversations to take place.
- Focus on improving practice and ways of working with children, young people and families.
- Encourages reflection and using the learning to drive change.
- Engages staff in personally relevant way and provides a safe debrief/reflection space
- Takes people a while to get into it!!
- They expect conflict and criticism !!

Supports a trauma informed approach

AI and Time to Think Questions we used

If you knew that in 5 years all was working well what would be different? What would you think?

If we are really bold what would we be doing?

What do we really think about the women we see like Adult L?

What does good look like?

What is working really well?

What assumptions might we be making about?


What story should we be telling to leaders and colleagues? *hen you think about how things to be now, what might need to happen to get a little closer to that?*

When you think about how you'd like things to be now, what might need to happen to get a little closer to that?

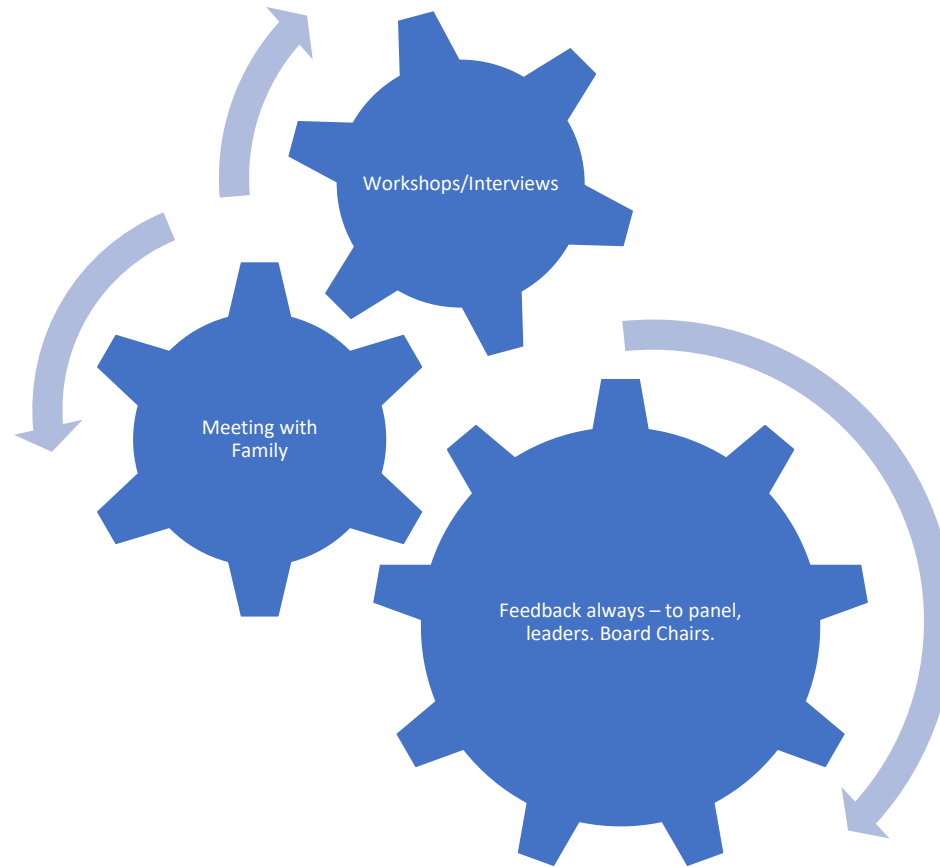
Why do we
need a
different
way?

- Safeguarding is a complex system – there are no quick fixes or easy answers
- Repeating more of the same will not create safety
- A human system: the emotional experience is important
- Learning through the process
- The front line and families generally know what does and doesn't work

1. What did we do?

- Agreed a Multi-Agency Panel to work together - met frequently
 - Explored AI and time to Think
 - Used this to think about our lines of inquiry
 - Tried to think about system learning as well as operational
 - Planned and facilitated workshops on the lines of inquiry
 - Pushed the boundaries to think radically
 - Listening to what works well here and nationally
 - Interviews
 - Feeding back to the panel
- 

2. Feedback: The Power of the Theory in Action Model (Donald Schon and Argyris)



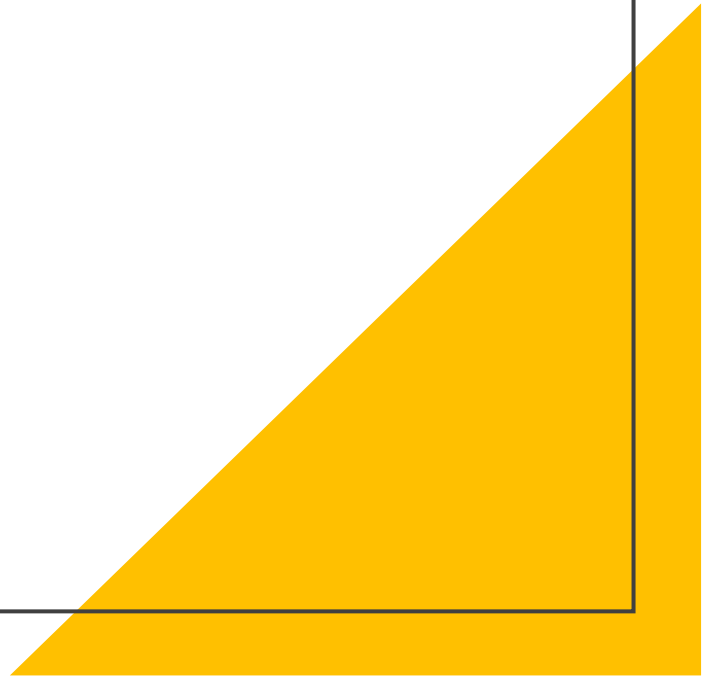
3. Challenge and Appreciate

- Workshops using the principles of AI and Time to Think
- Trying to see things from Adult L's perspective
- Pushed back gently with questions
- Challenging assumptions
- Encouraged space to think



4. Analysis and more feedback

- Meeting with Senior leaders to test out the boundaries and feedback
- Trying to be real and using simple language
- Presentation Report
- Encouraging the process to continue



Overview – Adult L's life

- Impact of childhood trauma into adulthood—domestic abuse and sexual abuse
- Domestic Abuse
- Drug and alcohol
- The vital role of housing and having a safe home free from exploitation
- *The impact of the loss of 5 children*
- Involvement of family – how do services work with family
- Impact of unconscious bias
- 23 moves in 17 years
- Multiple safeguarding concerns -self neglect , alcohol




What else do we know?

- Eating Disorder perhaps from teenage years?
 - Self harm – lacerations needing medical intervention
 - 2019 - Hanging ,Head injury, stabbings on legs, hanging from stairs , ‘falling out of windows . Frequent ambulance call outs .
 - Alcohol use fluctuated
 - Mental health described as ‘psychosis by family’
 - Final housing was in a terrible neglected state (family have photos)
-
- Adult L kept diaries with the names of her children and reminders of them
 - Her last entries spoke about still having hope
 - Adult L kept photos of her children arranged in certain orders
 - She would spend time with her Mum to detox and withdraw
 - Spent many years being moved due to ex partners
 - Adult L liked consistency with workers

Adult L's view
while in supported
accommodation
2023/2024.....

- Wanted her own home
- Could not understand why she couldn't access mental health support until completely withdrawn from alcohol
- When evicted – was not able to take part as easily in the safeguarding discussions (previously took place on teams)
- Final accommodation deteriorated as her mental health and physical health deteriorated
- Not able to care for herself

Thinking Circle 15 minutes

- Presenter explains issue – 2-3 mins
 - Each member of the group asks questions for clarification– taking turns/no interruptions
 - Presenter in turn then may ask questions
 - Presenter decides on actions
 - Group members offer a brief appreciation of a quality demonstrated by the presenter
- 
- A large yellow triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

Multiple Disadvantage and Women

A stark and devastating reality

The average age of death for a woman experiencing homelessness is 43 compared to 83 for women not experiencing homelessness

In the North East it is 37

Remember - homelessness sits alongside domestic abuse, sexual abuse, poor mental health alcohol and substance use

Evidence

- Evidence from evaluations of projects such as Tinas Haven and Pause point to the higher risk of death for women with multiple disadvantage.
- Women with multiple disadvantages in the Northeast were found to be 1.7 times as likely to die early than in England and Wales as a whole; and the average age at death falling by ten years, from 47 to 37 (Agenda Alliance and Changing Lives 2023)
- Over the last few years, in Gateshead and across the North East, there has been an increase of female suicides, drug-related deaths and domestic homicides.
- In 2023, Changing Lives and Agenda Alliance released a report called Dismantling Disadvantage, highlighting the disproportionate number of female deaths in the North East. The report advocated for system change, and the need for a shift towards prevention and early intervention, and integrated services delivering gender and trauma-informed support.
- [TinasHavenMay2024InLoveandAnger](#)

Evidence

- In 2024, “the Northeast continues to record the highest overall care rates” (Health Equity North 2024:9). The Northeast, having 113 per 10K children in the care system in March 2023, 1.6 times the national average of 71; with six out of twelve North East local authorities in the highest 10%, including Gateshead.
- Research by Pause suggests that women who have experienced the repeat removal of children from their care are 14 times more likely to die prematurely. It is important to note that there is no statutory duty for local authorities to help women who have children removed. Pause have submitted an amendment to the Children’s Wellbeing and School Bill to call for compulsory support following child removal.
- ***Gateshead is seeing the impact of what happens following child removal and how this compounds existing disadvantage and trauma.***

[Child Abuse Review - 2024 - Devaney -
Early maternal death following child removal A short report using observational data.pdf](#)

<https://www.pause.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Post-removal-support-briefing-Amendment-to-Childrens-Wellbeing-and-Schools-Bill-1.pdf>

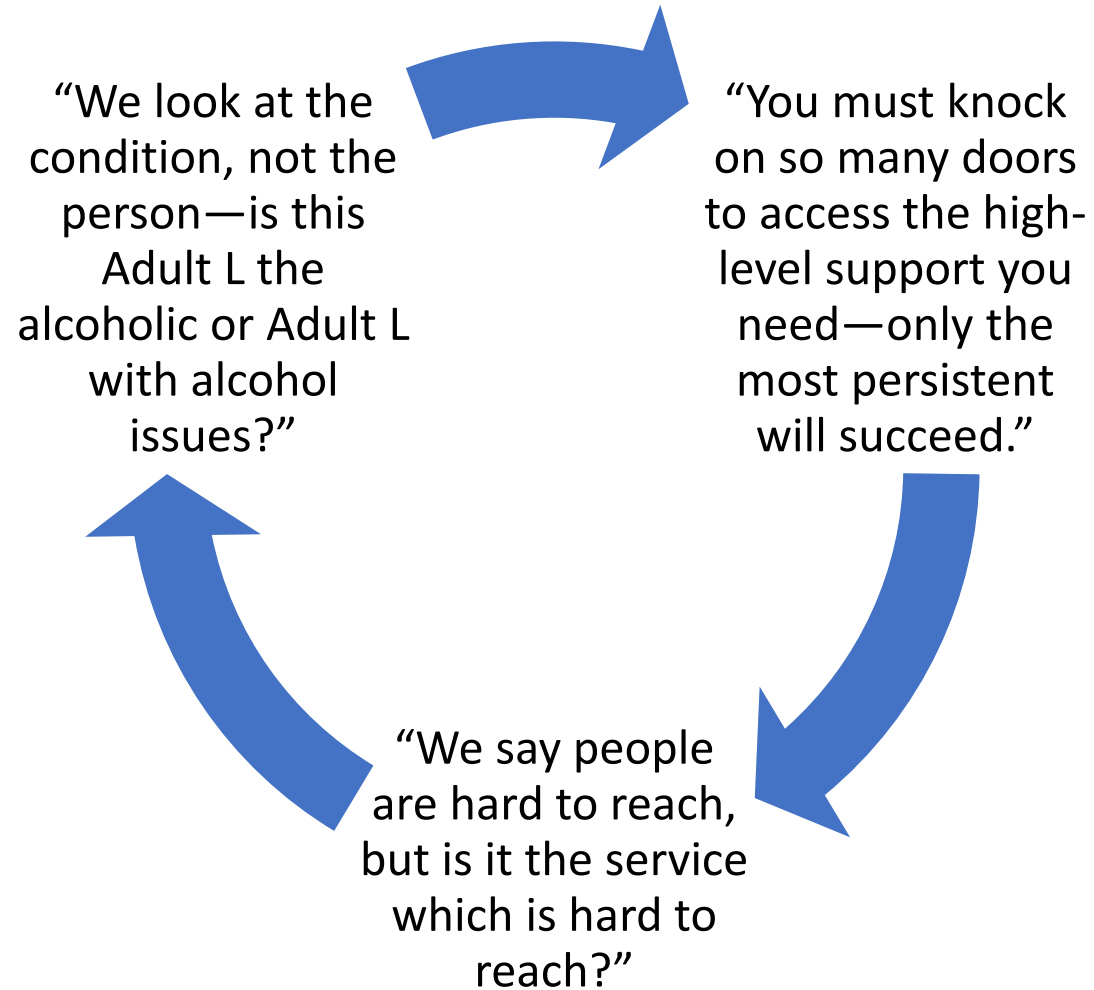
At a Glance

Issue	National Avg	North East	Gateshead Impact
Children in care (per 10k)	71	113	Among highest in UK
Avg age of death (women homeless)	43	37	Severe local disparity
Repeat child removal	—	14× higher risk	No statutory support


Acquired Brain Injury

- *For people experiencing or having survived domestic abuse, understanding their risk of ABI following head, neck, and face (HNF) injuries or non-fatal strangulation is central to them being able to advocate for themselves and access the correct care and support. (BrainKind Too Many to Count)*
- There is limited awareness of ABI and therefore it maybe many years before it is recognised. Workers said that they did not automatically refer women. There is no routine screening for ABI.
- There is now a plethora of research looking at acquired brain injury amongst homeless people, alcohol use, and survivors of domestic abuse. More is now known about non-fatal strangulation for example. Brainkind have highlighted this in their recent report. In addition, Adult L for example was hit by cars and was reported as having a head injury after one such occasion. There was no discussion with her nor a referral to the acquired brain injury service for screening.
- [brainkind too-many-to-count](#)

Quotes

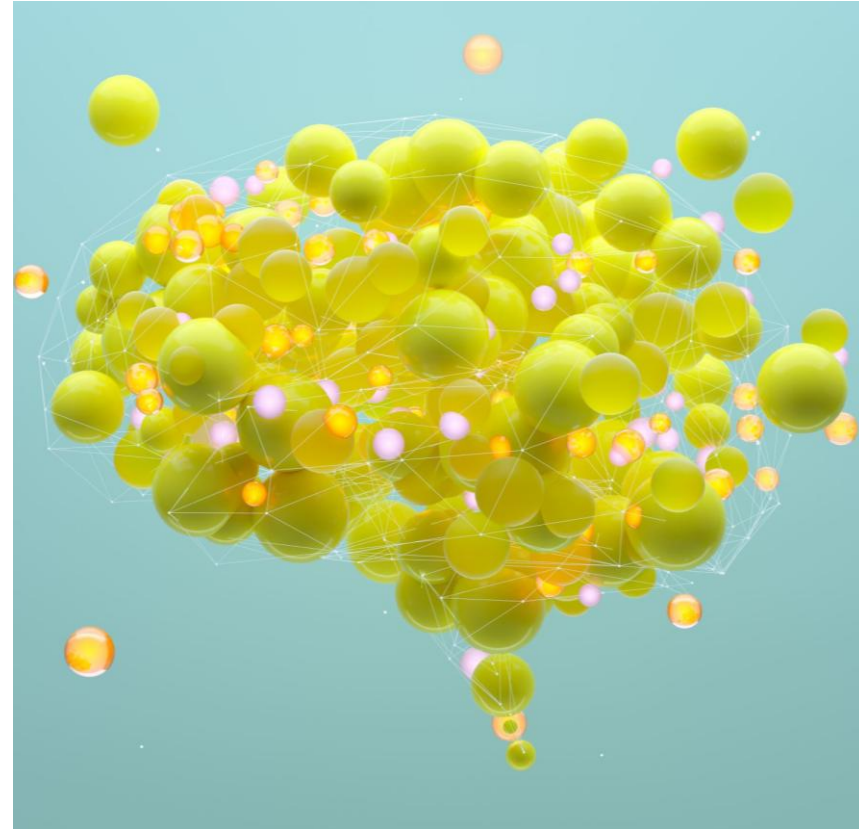


What did we learn?

- That there is wonderful practice in Gateshead and North East
 - That this practice is seen outside mainstream
 - That we expect women to 'comply' into the way services work
 - That there is a need to test out ways of working
- 

What about Unconscious Bias – a reminder?

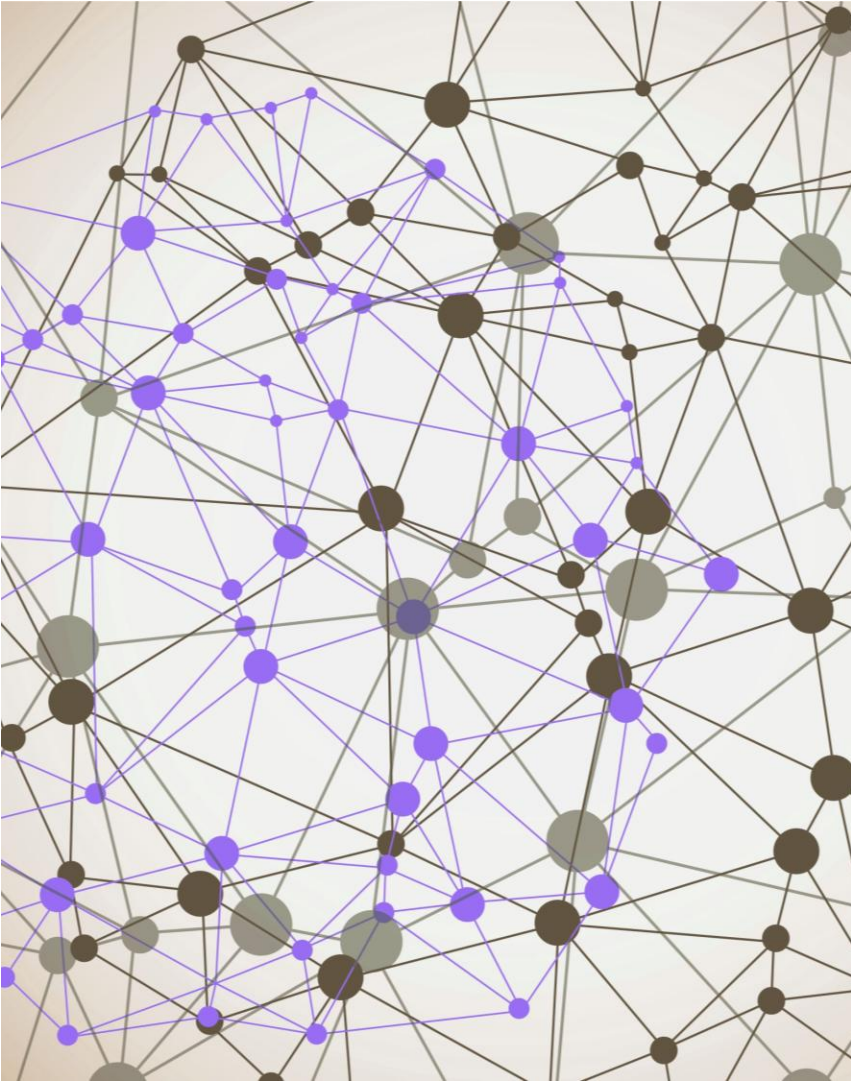
- *Unconscious bias refers to a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment, and personal experiences.*
- A major finding for the system is the need to further explore the impact of unconscious bias in practice. Previous SARs such as SAR Issy have documented the impact of bias on delivery of person centred and compassionate care. SAR Issy found that practitioners developed 'tunnel vision' in pressured environments which prevented them from fully 'seeing' the person and family in front of them. (SAR Anna Southampton) *'Professionals who are perfectly sensitive and compassionate in other settings, failed to respond with compassion'.*(SAR Issy Southampton)



A row of five wooden figures, one red and four white, on a light blue surface. The red figure is in the center, and the white figures are on either side. The background is a light blue gradient.

The Challenge

-
- How far are you prepared to go?

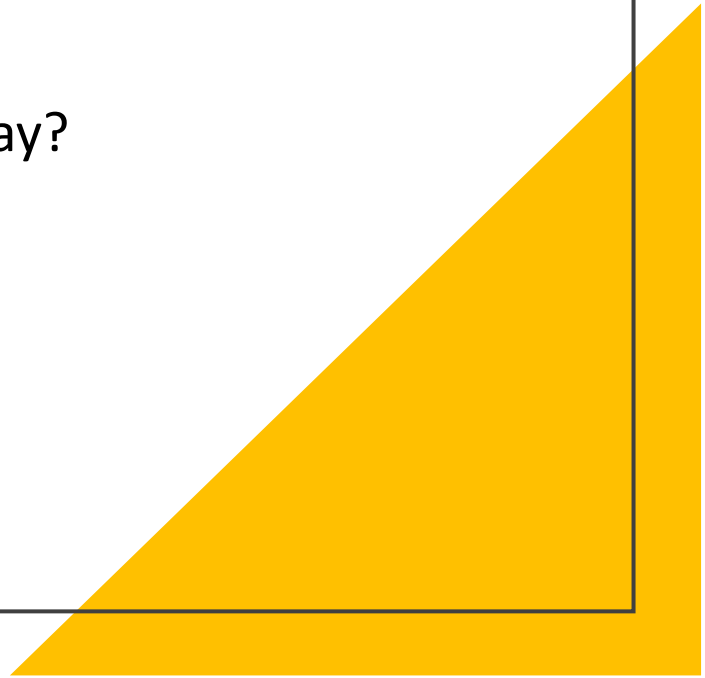


System Change Heart of the Art

- This means the real activity that encourages systems change is not analysis, or programme planning or project management. It is a relational activity that asks us to engage widely and openly, including with those who trouble us. It asks us to enquire into their motive and means. It means we must be ready to listen more than to tell, to connect and not to direct, to propagate and not to control.
- [systems-leadership/encouraging-systems-change/](#)

Time to Think – Thinking Partnership

- 5 minutes each way
- The question:
 - What are your thoughts now? And what will you take away?
- One person asks the question and then is quiet. Listening attentively





Review

- What are your thoughts now?
- What will you do to ensure that there is real time learning?
- What bold decisions might we make?
- What might we do more of to create space for reflection and encourage critical challenge?

Remember Myrons Maxims

People own what they help create

Real change happens in real work

Those who do the work, do the change

Connect the system to more of itself

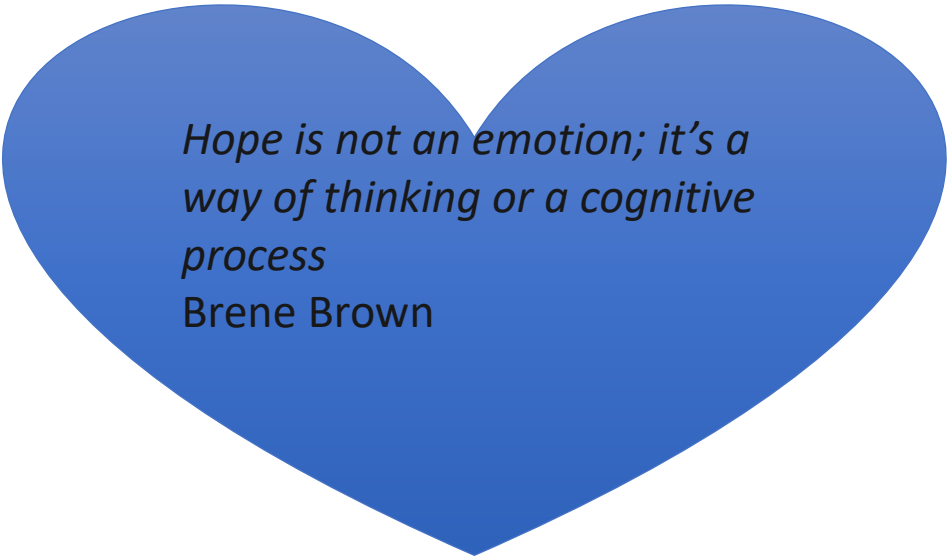
Start anywhere, follow everywhere

The process you use to get to the future is the future you get.

Finally – Answering our question

- What if Adult L was here today? What changed? Has enough changed to make a difference? Sadly, not enough despite the willingness of the workforce.

But – there is hope!



*Hope is not an emotion; it's a
way of thinking or a cognitive
process*
Brene Brown