Centre of expertise on child sexual abuse

Case study: Mary-Erin.

Referral:

Mary-Erin is 12 years old, in Year 8 at school and is recorded on social care systems as White British. She is the youngest of 7 children, to Mary (age 55 years), and Barry (age 67 years).

Mary-Erin has been referred into children's social care, after Mary said they had chosen elective home education for their daughter. This request came about, after Mary-Erin was involved in a fight at school after another girl made a 'negative' comment toward her. Mary-Erin's brother, Liam (age 15 years), is attending school regularly.

Background:

Liam and Mary-Erin's eldest brothers have all been involved with police / youth justice, for a variety of offences. Barry served a custodial sentence for Grievous Bodily Harm, with intent, after seeking out a male whom he had previously worked with, through his building company. Barry said the male owed him money and took a knife to 'threaten' him. A fight took place and the male received multiple stabs wounds. Barry served an 8-year sentence and during this time, Mary relied on her parents to help in the care of the older boys. Whilst Barry was in prison, Mary told an Early Help worker, Barry had been violent toward her throughout their marriage and had repeatedly raped her in front of the older children. After Barry was released from prison, they had their two youngest children, Liam and Mary-Erin. Whilst pregnant with Liam, Mary did not repeat her disclosure of domestic abuse, when asked by the midwife about her history. No referral took place to social care or Early Help support services. There has been a long history of the family through the 'revolving door' of social care. Assessments taking place, where parenting was deemed 'good-enough,' a step-down to Early Help or youth justice involvement would monitor before closure.

Current information known:

Mary-Erin's secondary school have referred into social care, after Mary said they are electing to have her home educated. This came about after Mary-Erin was facing an exclusion for fighting with a peer.

In their referral to social care, the school reported Mary-Erin's attendance at primary school was sporadic, which had continued into secondary school, but they had never seen any violence from her before. They added Mary-Erin had become particularly 'anxious' at times, frequently checking her mobile and arguing back with teachers, when she was told it would be confiscated. Prior to this, the school reported Mary-Erin as '*exceptionally compliant*,' often wanting to help teachers and seeking praise from the adults around her. The school said Mary-Erin had become more and more withdrawn from her education and those around her, over the last six-months and the Family

Liaison worker had built a good relationship with Mary and Mary-Erin, trying to get to the bottom of Mary-Erin's change in behaviour.

On Monday, Mary-Erin came into school and when a girl in her class said she '*looked like shit*,' (Mary-Erin who was normally immaculate, appeared dishevelled, with old make-up on her face and matted hair), Mary-Erin punched the girl in the face and kept hitting and kicking at her.

When called into school, Mary broke down and started crying with the Family Liaison worker, saying she was really struggling at home with Barry and his multiple health needs. Mary said her older sons were no practical help, all leaving home at a young age and having their own families. She said Barry used to hurt her, but the violence stopped when Barry came out of prison as he was so unwell. Mary said Barry had Cirrhosis of the liver, Type 2 Diabetes, was excessively overweight and had been prescribed anti-depressants for low mood.

Mary said Barry's moods were not too bad when he first came out of prison and she was relieved his behaviour had softened. However, the last two-years had been very difficult, he was always low and '*snappy'* with her. Mary put this down to her caring duties for her parents, sharing these had increased as her father had terminal cancer and her mother had Alzheimer's and she was their main carer. Mary said Mary-Erin was '*her rock'* at home and Mary-Erin was Barry's '*special girl,*' he had always favoured her and they could always be found '*huddled*' together. Mary said she often feels the '*outsider*' as Liam is in his room doing homework, or out with friends and Mary-Erin and Barry are '*thick as thieves*,' Mary-Erin doing everything for Barry, including helping wash and dress him.

Mary went on to say Mary-Erin wouldn't really need a formal education, as it was traditional in her family for all of the girls to marry young and have children. Her older boys were '*good boys*,' and had provided her with lots of grandchildren, although Barry-Junior's wife had lied about him being violent and took his children away. Mary said Colin's ex-girlfriend also lied about him, saying he raped her and he would never, ever hurt anyone. Mary said women can be cruel and manipulative and she knows Mary-Erin would never be that kind of girl.

Mary said Liam was exceptionally clever and this is why he had achieved so well in school (Liam was an A* student) and they were proud of him. Mary said Liam wants to go to university and she wanted him to do this. Mary said Mary-Erin was needed at home to help her and she would educate her. Mary was unable to tell the school how she would be able to educate Mary-Erin and when asked about her own education history, Mary said she left school when she was Mary-Erin's age and could only do *'the basics*,' when it came to reading and writing.

Conclusion

During direct work with Mary-Erin, it was found that Barry had been encouraging his daughter over a period of years, to provide intimate-care to him. He gave her latex gloves to wear and would show her how to wash his penis, which she later learned was masturbation. Barry would ejaculate and tell her that meant she had done a good job as it showed everything was clean – suggesting to her this had to come out to be '*properly*' clean.

Around 3 months ago, Barry started filming Mary-Erin doing this on his mobile, saying other children needed to learn as it meant they were good daughters. Barry said Mary was always too

busy to look after any of them and that meant she didn't care. Barry said if Mary-Erin told her mum, she would get jealous that Mary-Erin was doing the things she should be doing and would throw Mary-Erin out. Mary-Erin had been seeing less and less of her mum, who was spending all of her time at her granny and granddad's home and when she did see her, Mary was tired and irritable, telling her to go and speak to Barry and not bother her.

Around a month after Barry started filming, Mary-Erin received a message from someone she did not know on What's App, saying they had seen the video of her washing her dad and if she didn't send a photograph of her naked breasts, they would send the video to everyone in the school. The person then named her school and her year group and said they knew where she lived.

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