Summary of Safeguarding Learning Review
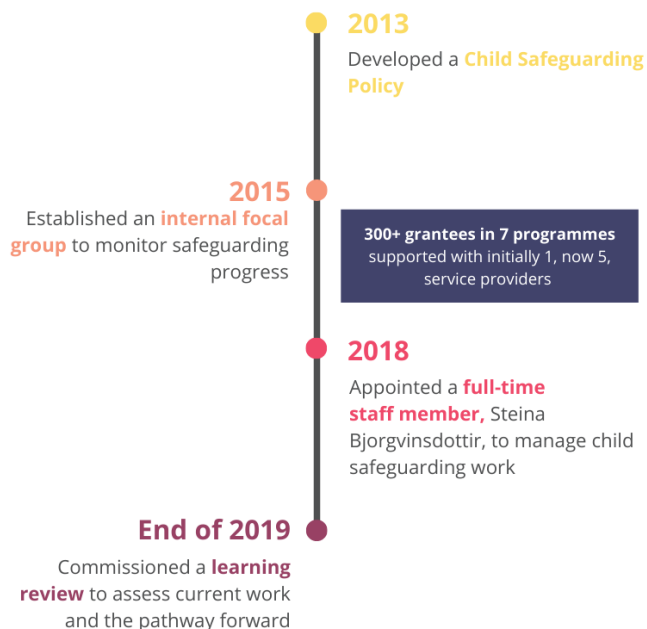
July 2020
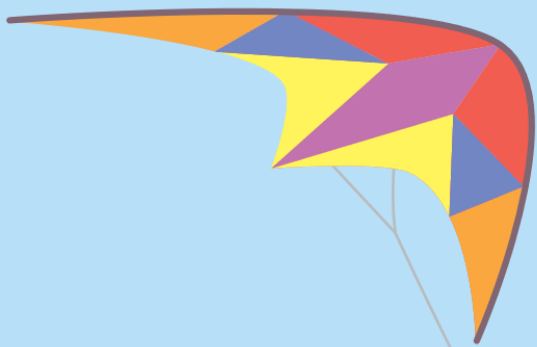
Introduction

In 2013, Oak developed a Child Safeguarding Policy, stemming from its commitment to help build a world where every child is protected from all forms of abuse. To this end, Oak established an internal focal group in 2015 to monitor its safeguarding progress. Since then, Oak has supported over 300 grantees across seven programmes to develop child safeguarding measures, initially with the help of one external safeguarding service provider and now through another five. In 2018, Oak appointed full-time staff member Steina Bjorgvinsdottir for a period of three years to review, develop, scale up and manage this work.

2013
Developed a **Child Safeguarding Policy**

2015
Established an **internal focal group** to monitor safeguarding progress

300+ grantees in 7 programmes supported with initially 1, now 5, service providers

2018
Appointed a **full-time staff member,** Steina Bjorgvinsdottir, to manage child safeguarding work

End of 2019
Commissioned a **learning review** to assess current work and the pathway forward

At the end of 2019, Oak commissioned an external learning review to take stock of its work to date in child safeguarding and develop a clear evidence-based pathway for moving forward. This document is a summary of the outcomes presented in the safeguarding learning review report.

A consultant, Cathy James, was appointed to carry out the review, which explored the following questions:

- *What does 'success' look like for Oak, grantees and the children linked to them?*
- *What works best to embed child safeguarding in grantee organisations?*
- *What internal and external issues will affect safeguarding going forward?*

The review process included:

Desk review	**Survey of grantee's experience** 18/50 responses
Key informant interviews Grantees (8) Service providers (6) Oak staff (7)	**Face-to-face convening to deepen learning and discuss a way forward** Oak staff & service providers (19)

A shared understanding of "success"

There have already been some positive outcomes from our child safeguarding work, according to feedback from grantee surveys and qualitative information from the review contributors. This section captures how we understand success, based on the progress already made. **However, as many of the grantees are still in the early stages of safeguarding support, this data does not assess grantees' progress in general.**

○ **Success for all** is when a safeguarding system protects children from harm and abuse, and provides them, their caregivers, communities and duty-bearers with the information they need to act, when necessary.

○ **Success for Oak grantees** means **short-, medium- and long-term changes** in the culture, systems, processes, capacity and knowledge of grantee organisations. This includes the implementation of a functioning safeguarding system comprised of policies and procedures that are reviewed and revised regularly.

○ **Success for Oak Foundation** means a **sustainable model and a shared vision** for supporting grantees to safeguard children. This includes: a strong referral system to relevant, quality, local service providers; appropriate training that is not too technical and which is adaptable to different types of grantees; clearly defined stages of success; and integration into Oak's grant-making systems.

"We need to see a mind-shift in understanding that they deal with children somehow – a raised awareness that children are everywhere, and that we have to be aware of their vulnerability."—Oak staff

How change happens: Embedding good safeguarding practices in grantees

A clear model of how change happens when safeguarding is embedded in our partner organisations emerged from the review. It shows the outcomes that need to be achieved by grantees in the short-, medium- and long-term, in order to be impactful.

> *"In our desire to give grantees ownership over this process, when at least for some it should be mandatory, it comes across as ambiguity. One grantee said to me: 'I would prefer if you tell me what to do and what not to do'"*—Oak staff

It also shows the core approaches needed for grantees to be able to take ownership of the process. It highlights the key qualities of the service providers that enable grantees to bring about change, as well as the 'pre-conditions' that need to be in place for these service providers to be effective. Oak's role in supporting this whole change process is seen as a catalyst for this change.

The pre-conditions and approaches that are needed to achieve success in embedding child safeguarding in Oak's partner organisations, can be summarised into three key building blocks. These are motive, means & opportunity. These blocks are interlinked and together, can bring about change.

> *"It is better to be honest and say that it it's donor driven—it's time and persistence that lead to ownership...some things need to be mandatory, like protecting children and financial diligence"*—Grantee

GOAL

CHILDREN ARE SAFE
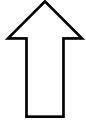
MOTIVE

Developing grantee ownership of safeguarding

The grantee genuinely owns the process and has a strong motivation to change, outside of any pressure from the donor to put in place policies. This means that focus on safeguarding permeates all levels of the organisation, from the leadership down.

MEANS

Providing the right support

The expert safeguarding service providers are high quality, strong collaborators that are locally embedded, build on strengths and existing measures and emphasise good communication. They provide bespoke support adapted to the operational realities of the grantee organisation.

OPPORTUNITY

Oak as a catalyst

Oak provides thoughtful and timely support to grantees, in the form of financial or technical support, that is agreed upon and monitored by programme staff. By fostering a relationship and system that are conducive to safeguarding, and where the importance of safeguarding is emphasised throughout the life of the grant, Oak acts as a catalyst for organisational change.

Mapping the way forward for Oak

External context and its implications for safeguarding

External factors and context also play a role in how safeguarding will continue to evolve over the next few years and can either contribute to or hinder organisational success on safeguarding. Oak, our expert service providers, and our grantees, do not operate in a vacuum, nor can the safeguarding support be separated from outside factors. The review therefore sought to highlight, through a brief review of external literature as well as inputs from review contributors, issues in the global context that could affect – or continue to affect – safeguarding practice over the next few years. These included the influence of key players such as national and local governments, community duty-bearers, funders, global/regional networks, and collaboratives.

While safeguarding is receiving more attention, particularly following a series of highly publicised scandals in the not-for-profit sector, this can have both positive and negative repercussions. It may bring greater understanding that more needs to be done and that it is not only a box ticking exercise but demands dialogue and thought. It may also create a flurry of action to respond in the short term, but that does not often lead to long-term implementation. Similarly, a shift to broader safeguarding from child protection is leading from a focus on sexual abuse only, towards getting the whole system to function better at the organisational level; but could also spread energies too thin and away from safeguarding children.

Oak's internal context and its implications for safeguarding

The review also highlighted several important internal factors within Oak that could affect decisions on the way forward. These include time constraints of programme staff; funding availability; support and buy-in of leadership; and continued support of expert staff. The recommendations of the learning review focused on these internal factors, as well as areas of debate brought up and unresolved, and suggestions on how best to move forward.

The setup in the Foundation means that the responsibility for safeguarding arrangements of grantee partners lies mainly with programme staff. They are supported by the safeguarding manager who provides oversight and technical support as well as managing the support to grantees. The learning review cited programme staff time constraints as one of the main issues blocking its full implementation, particularly linked to an internal decision to cap staff numbers at 100. Programme staff described being over-stretched, with an increase in internal requirements and processes, yet lacking time to deal with other issues and without help from increasing staff numbers.

> *"Oak's approach is not a box-ticking – it's a conversation they have with grantees, reminding us that it is important and working out what works best for each organisation."* —Grantee

Conclusion

The review highlights many positive changes that grantees of all kinds and across vastly different contexts have made in their safeguarding systems and practices. It demonstrates that the support that Oak has offered, both through service providers and its own actions, has helped grantees move forward to a level that, within this timeframe, they would otherwise not have achieved.

It is clear from an analysis of the external context as well as all the learning on what has worked to date, that some questions will never go away and new ones will emerge.

The review produced a clear theory for how change happens. This theory shows the outcomes that need to be achieved in the short-, medium- and long-term to achieve impact on children's lives.

The onus is now on Oak to move forward in a purposeful manner to further institutionalise changes within the foundation and communicate its expectations clearly to its grantees while continuing to accompany grantees on their safeguarding journey and offer support and resources.